

## Foreword to *Shadows of the Sacred* by Frances Vaughn

Frances Vaughn is the wisest of the Wise Women I know. Such a wonderful concept: the woman who is wise, the woman who has more wisdom, perhaps, than you or I, the woman who brings a special knowledge, a graceful touch, a healing presence, to her every encounter, for whom beauty is also a mode of knowing and openness a special strength--a woman who sees so much more, and touches so much more, and reaches out with care, and tells us that it will be alright, this woman who is wise, this woman who sees more.

The woman from whom we all can learn. I suppose there are some in our society who object to distinguishing between male and female persons: the gender wars are intense nowadays, and any "differences" ascribed to men and women are looked upon suspiciously, as perhaps a prelude to some oppressive agenda. The "differences" between male and female are just so much propaganda, the argument goes, designed to keep women barefoot, pregnant, and in the kitchen. But if the differentiation between the male and female value sphere is an oppressive plot, it goes back to day one. From the earliest foraging cultures to the first horticultural societies, and from there to the great agrarian Empires that ran from the Aztecs and Incas to the Khans and Ottomans, Romans and Greeks, Egyptians and Chinese: in virtually all known societies to date, the male and female value spheres were indeed thought to be quite different. Some of these societies--such as the horticultural planting communities ruled by the Great Mother--valued the female sphere more or less equally with the male sphere (as did many earlier foraging societies). Other cultures--particularly the agrarian Empires and the cultures of horse and herding--placed an almost exclusive emphasis on the male value sphere: the deities were purely male and the values were those of the warrior or princely aristocrat (the "patriarchy").

Looking back on history, we moderns feel sadness, sometimes outrage, that some cultures so disproportionately championed the male sphere over the female sphere, but the point for

now is that, regardless of emphasis, in all of these cultures (foraging to horticultural to agrarian, matrifocal or patrifocal)--in all of these cultures, the male and female values spheres were crisply differentiated, and these differences show a surprising consistency--sometimes monotonously so--across cultures.

And indeed, in recent times, the radical feminists, the spiritual feminists, and the ecofeminists, in their own various ways, have all embraced the female value sphere as indeed embodying a universal sphere of values, a sphere significantly different from the male sphere, and a sphere that has been severely undervalued during the last several thousand years of agrarian/herding/patriarchal cultures. And there is much truth to this, I think.

But what, indeed, are these values, in both the male and female sphere? Perhaps the simplest way to summarize the evidence is in terms of the two major types of love--Eros and Agape--and the two major types of action--agency and communion. Eros is the love of the lower reaching up for the higher, always ascending, always yearning for more, always seeking, often recklessly, restlessly, for more; whereas Agape is the love of the higher reaching down to the lower, embracing it in compassion and acceptance, tenderness and care (thus Eros tends always to aim high for the Sky and Heaven, and Agape always reaches down and embraces gladly the body and the Earth). And agency is a type of action and being that stresses the individual, the separate and autonomous agent, the isolated, the singular; whereas communion stresses relationship, network, linking, joining.

It's not that one is better or nobler or more desirable than the other. It's more the primordial yin and yang: interpenetrating each other, relying on each other, generating each other, and--ideally--balancing each other.

Without in any way pigeon-holing men and women, or implying the distinctions are etched in concrete, the evidence strongly suggests that, across cultures and virtually from day one, the female value sphere has been pictured as emphasizing Agape and communion, whereas the male sphere has been seen as emphasizing agency and Eros.

And, indeed, these are the main differences in values that Carol Gilligan, for example, has detected in men and women's responses to moral dilemmas: males have a tendency to emphasize individual rights and legalistic justice (agency), whereas females tend to emphasize care and responsibilities (communion). Likewise, the theological ("theological") and spiritual feminists have tended to summarize the entire thrust of "feminine spirituality" as "the Divine embodied" (Agape incarnate!), bringing heavenly wisdom down and into relationships, into the Earthbody, into the day-to-day living of the Divine (whereas most forms of "male spirituality," from shamans to yogis to saints, have almost always sought "journeys" to the "other world," the upward yearning Eros looking for ways beyond the everyday Earthbody, for my kingdom is not of this world).

Every single major world religion (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and even later Taoism)--every single one of them arose during the time of the great agrarian Empires (and/or the horse and herding cultures). Which means that every single major world religion arose in a climate that highly valued the male sphere of Eros and agency (go off in cave, or in the desert, by yourself, and ascend!)--and thus they either indirectly devalued, or frankly oppressed, the female value sphere of Agape, of Earthbody, of communion with nature and with others, of embodiment, and most of all: of being-in-relationship.

This, of course, does not mean that the great patriarchal wisdom traditions have nothing to teach us, any more than it means we shouldn't use the wheel because a man invented it. It does mean, however, that there is a whole value sphere yet to be, literally, unearthed in the modern era. The great traditions do not need to be simply jettisoned--that would be catastrophic--but they need desperately to be supplemented.

And that means, above all, that we are desperately in need of, yes, the Wise Woman.

Frances is such a one: the woman who brings wisdom into the world, and does not simply flee the world for wisdom somewhere else. The woman who teaches individuality, but set in its larger and deeper contexts of communion: communion with others, with body, with Spirit, with one's own higher Self: the Spirit that manifests its very being in relationships.

And that is how I think of Frances most often: the wise woman who teaches sane and sincere relationship, the woman who sets us in our deeper contexts, this wise woman who I am proud to know.

But it is not just as a Wise Woman that Frances comes to us. When historians from Toynbee to White remarked that the introduction of Buddhism to the West would likely be regarded by future generations as one of the great turning points in civilization, I think they were on to something important. Perhaps Buddhism per se will not become a culture-wide movement, but the point, I think, is that the introduction or discovery (or rediscovery) of some form of genuinely transpersonal endeavor is crucial to the future of Western culture.

In the West, where psychology (and psychiatry) have completely replaced religion as the dominant sciences of the soul, it is the school of transpersonal psychology that carries most clearly the banner of genuine contemplative spirituality. Drawing on the great mystical and contemplative traditions (but not limited to them), transpersonal psychology weaves the ancient insights with modern psychotherapeutic techniques, creating a unique synthesis and amalgam of ancient wisdom and modern truths.

And Frances is one of the relatively few transpersonal psychologists actually "in the trenches," as it were--working with clients, day to day, on a professional basis. Not only has she been trained in several contemplative traditions (from Zen to Sufi to shamanic), and not only has she received her "orthodox" training and license (from the highly-regarded California School of Professional Psychology), she is bringing that combined wisdom to the actual day-to-day details of the therapeutic situation.

And the book you are holding in your hands is, so to speak, dispatches from the front lines. Which is why it is so incredibly important as a document. It is what Frances and her clients have taught each other about sane living, sane relationships, care and compassion, dignity and grace, in and through the most difficult of times that bring people to the office of a therapist, looking for a kind ear and a sense of gentle direction. They have lost their way a

bit, in this society that doesn't particularly care, perhaps even lost their soul, and they come quietly and confused, and can you please help me?

In the type of transpersonal practice that Frances (and a handful of others) are attempting to forge, we see the emergence of whatever it was that Toynbee and White recognized as so crucial: some sense of the transpersonal, some sense of the Mystery of the Deep, some context beyond the isolated me, that touches each and every one of us, and lifts us from our troubled and mortal selves, this contracted coil, and delivers us into the hands of the timeless and very Divine, and gracefully releases us from ourselves: where openness melts defenses and relationship grounds sanity, where compassion outpaces the hardened heart and care outshines despair, this opening to the Divine that Frances teaches each of us.

One of Frances's clients once told her that she (Frances) had helped to midwife her soul, deliver her soul. I think that somehow says it all. To midwife the Divine--already present in each, but perhaps not shining brightly; already given to each, but perhaps not noticed well; already caring for the world, but perhaps forgotten in all the rush: this opening to the Divine that Frances teaches each of us.

Like all dispatches from the front, the following notes are not linear. They are not in the form of a logical argument where one enters the tunnel at point A and is coerced through an argument to come out at point B. They sometimes meander, these notes. They sometimes bounce around. They follow the contours of real-life terrain; they are conversations with her clients, conversations she is having with us as well, following the ups and downs of real thought and genuine dialogue, and not the stiff lines of geometric proof.

And so, if I may suggest, let these notes wash over you, wash through you, and follow gently the curves of the terrain, and don't force it into a linear argument. It is a new and strange and wonderful terrain, this transpersonal journey, and your tour guide has seen it all, and lived it all, and lived to tell the tale. And there, just there, is the definition of the Wise Woman.

Let us both, you and I, take the hand of the Wise Woman, and walk with her through the land of our own soul, and listen quietly to the tale she has to tell. And know that a surer pair of hands we are not likely to find in this lifetime.