

A Dialogue of Light

THE SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM OF LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

by Jeannie Zandi



There isn't a particle in creation
that doesn't carry your Light
yesterday I was asking others for a sign of You
today there isn't a sign that isn't of You

— Jami

The idea of spiritual activism is being discussed by many leaders at this time of global transformation — conferences are being organized, people are examining what we can do to bring spirituality and activism together to form a new approach to responding to the urgent needs of our world. Many of these approaches, however, still contain the thinking, planning and doing that to Sufi mystic Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee has helped to create the present crisis. Llewellyn's vision of spiritual activism is radically based on a deep surrender to God and a sense that human beings alone cannot "fix" the world, but can participate in its healing, much as a therapist attends to a person in crisis through deep receptivity. To Llewellyn, the transformation of the world will not happen through the efforts of human beings divorced from what is sacred. He speaks to "pioneers of consciousness" who have glimpsed their own spiritual light and are called to serve the whole by entering into a dialogue with the light of the world.

I was drawn to Llewellyn from a deep resonance with Sufi teachings and poetry, and because he had presented with a teacher of mine, Adyashanti, and was about to present with another, Pamela Wilson. Then I found out he had been a devotee of Irina Tweedie, whose intense account of her experiences with her Sufi teacher had impacted me greatly as a 26-year-old. My interactions with Llewellyn's organization were very sweet, and as I drove to Santa Fe to meet with Llewellyn, I had a happy heart, as though on my way to visit old and dear friends. We talked by a fireplace in a hotel room, with his wife, Anat, sitting on the bed, occasionally adding

comments to our dialogue. What especially struck me about Llewellyn was the incredible sweetness with which he spoke about the Divine, his tender and reverent tone bringing tears to my eyes on more than one occasion. He made it a point, before the first use of "He" when referring to the Divine, to point to convenience as the reason.

The Divine is something simple within each of us that asks us to listen, to be receptive, to approach on our knees, quietly, reverently — then its secrets begin to be revealed. Thus, we must leave the busy, goal-directed, plan-making mental conversation about our world and offer all that we have known before to be burned in the fire of entering the moment fully, allowing the conversation with the sacred that is in all of life to guide us and show us how to live in a completely different way than we have been taught.

Llewellyn's perspective is born of the transformation he himself went through as a young man. When he was 16, he read this Zen koan on a subway train:

The wild geese do not intend to cast their reflection,
The water has no mind to receive their image.

"It turned on a switch inside of me," said Llewellyn. "Suddenly I woke up. At the time I was in boarding school on the banks of the river Thames. There was a beautiful garden that I used to sit in as a retreat from the dramas of boys' boarding school. I went back to this garden and it was completely different. There was a light there, a vibrancy, a joy, a beauty; it was like being in paradise. I laughed and laughed and laughed. I laughed for weeks because suddenly I saw the joy, the laughter within creation, this extraordinary, divine experiment that is, as the Sufis say, His joke. You wake up and you see the world as it really is, which is very different from the world veiled by our thoughts, our desires, our conditioning. You have a direct experience of it."

Then at 22, Llewellyn had a profound two or three weeks. "It got more and more intense, and then I was taken to a completely different level of consciousness," he described. "I was made conscious that I was a soul. I spent a year in a state where there is no mind, no time — there was just bliss. I stayed with my mother because I couldn't look after myself — I wasn't here. She cooked for me occasionally, but I hardly ate. And then slowly the ego-consciousness reformed itself around this other center of consciousness. You're never the same after those experiences. The ego is no longer the ruler of the house. It still has things to do, but it's no longer the boss."

Traditionally, mystics such as Llewellyn turn away from the outer world and separate themselves from society to find God. The outer world becomes less important because an inner world of incredible light has been glimpsed that is much more beautiful, and this inner world calls the mystic deeper and deeper into the truth of his or her own heart. "Your attention is really taken into that light, or what is called the 'dazzling darkness' — the mystical darkness in which all lovers lose themselves," said Llewellyn. "You make this extraordinary journey from existence to nonexistence. You discover the truth of your own nonexistence, the nothingness,

the void where you as a human being no longer exist. It's completely intoxicating and this outer world falls away. You experience that the physical world is only one among many worlds."

Some traditions see this world as a veil of illusion, like waves on the surface of the water — transitory, unreal, simply an appearance. And yet, despite the fading of importance of the physical world for the mystic, some are drawn by God back into the world. Such a person is no longer here for oneself, for what one can get. Instead, one has given oneself in service to God. According to Llewellyn, in the Sufi tradition, after the state of union comes the station of servanthood. And "in times of need, something in the heart of the world calls out, and something within the heart of His servants responds. For myself I discovered my attention being drawn back into this world — not into the play of illusions but into something else in this beautiful, terribly abused world that is crying out."

When one has gone through a transformation such as Llewellyn's, one no longer sees the world in the same way. Like waking up from a dream, this experience allows one to see a light in the world that one did not see before. The veils that separate us from direct perception lift and one begins to see the world as it really is. Sufis like Llewellyn see this world as a place of divine revelation — although we cannot directly know God (no one knows God but God), we can come to know Him through His creation. This world is a place where the divine oneness is being expressed in so many different ways. "We have forgotten that the world is alive, that it is a sacred being, that it is divine," he said. "We have exiled God to heaven so we can do what we want here. We may get into trouble after we die, but for now we can do what we like."

Many people feel the pain of the planet and want to do something — but what we are conditioned to do is to solve problems. Yet in Llewellyn's view if we respond from a place of anxiety or a feeling of needing to fix the world, we simply constellate more of the same. "This is not an activism comprised of rushing around doing things," he explained. "We have done enough. We've made a big enough mess with our culture of *doing*. We do not need to make a big plan to save the world. Even well-meaning plans don't embrace creation in its entirety, don't work with the Divine within creation. Instead, we must work from a place of trust and faith in order to constellate the higher and open a space for the Divine."

Just as a human being is a living spiritual being who can go through radical transformation, so too is the world. A human being is often drawn into deep transformation through things falling apart and not working anymore, so that a search for a deeper meaning within begins. This is also happening to the world, which, according to Llewellyn, is not simply in an ecological crisis, but in a spiritual one. "We have treated the world very badly," he said tenderly. "We no longer respect it spiritually, we no longer treat it as something sacred, and that has caused a deep wound to the soul of the world."

To Llewellyn, the answer is relationship — to make a real relationship with the world as a living spiritual being, much like the relationship we make when we hold space for another person

who is in pain or crisis. "When you are in crisis, you just need one person to see you as you really are. Then something within you begins to celebrate, to wake up with joy," he said. "You don't need somebody to tell you what to do, fix you, give you a regimen of diet or exercise. You need somebody who is present with you as you really are, in your sorrow, and also in knowing — because they have been through it themselves — that there is a doorway at the end of the sorrow to the deeper, richer person that you can become. Why should it be different for the world? It isn't. Farmers of old used to make a relationship with the seasons, with the land; they used to listen and watch. Sailors, when they had to travel across the seas, listened to the weather patterns; they made a relationship. We have insulated ourselves and tried to dominate the world; we have been in this patriarchal power drive and it doesn't work any more."

There are many people in the West who have been given a glimpse of their spiritual light who know that this physical world is not all there is. Many people have had a mystical experience of oneness, even if just for a moment. Maybe alone in nature or listening to beautiful music, they have been taken out of themselves and seen everything as one. Once we've been given awareness of this truth, the question is, how can we use that to serve the whole? Said Llewellyn, "Sadly there is this Western infatuation with the ego that says, 'How can I use this new awareness for myself, how can I now have a better spiritual life?' instead of 'I have been given this gift of spiritual awakening, I have had a glimpse of this oneness, this light, this peace, this love within me — how can it now be used in service to the whole?'"

So how can one be in service to the Divine?

First, by learning how to *be*— rather than asking what can I *do*, ask how can I *be*? From this state of being, we can attune ourselves to the spirit within creation. "This world is not some ecological happenstance," Llewellyn explained. "There is a divine principle within creation, and in my experience the best way to access that is to be silent, to be still, to listen, to be receptive. I am a Sufi, and for us the whole relationship with God is of lover and beloved. You don't tell your beloved what to do, you learn to listen, to be receptive, to say, 'Beloved, what do you want from me?' So, part of our training is to still the mind, to put the ego to one side so we can listen to what we call the hint from God."

Secondly, to recognize and come to know that we are part of one living whole, whether we see it as a living organism or a spiritual being, and then make a relationship with this living whole. Then we make a conscious connection to the organic oneness of life from both a physical level and a spiritual level. "We can make a direct spiritual connection between our spiritual light and the light of the world, and open a dialogue of light," suggested Llewellyn. "Humanity is being given the opportunity to make a shift from this insular, ego-centered consciousness — I, me, mine; what matters is me, mine, my prosperity — to the consciousness of oneness. We all belong to this divine oneness."

Real spiritual activism is to be drawn to the spiritual energy of life and to see what happens. If we can make a relationship with the world as a living spiritual being, we suddenly realize we are part of the organic structure of life, not only on a physical level, but also on a spiritual level. Llewellyn sees the world as an organic structure of light and our spiritual consciousness as part of this light. So how do we work with the world as a living spiritual being of which our spiritual consciousness is a part?

"What matters is presence and awareness: to bring an awareness of the Divine into daily life, into our daily practice," he said. "In every moment that's possible — to be present with the Divine in life, when we are cooking, cleaning, in the office, taking the children to school. On the global stage, some will be drawn to how the world works ecologically. Some will be given a deep understanding of global finances and how to help money flow around the world. Others are building networks of light, people who are coming together through prayer, meditation or chanting. I find spiritual groups important — groups with a shared higher purpose that we are all here in service to something higher, where there is a real relationship between the people. Then a beautiful light, a quality of spiritual energy, is held in that group of people, and that energy can begin to heal the planet. It's a bit like global acupuncture. Human beings can heal themselves better than any doctor, and the world is the same; it needs to be rebalanced with the spiritual light of awakened human beings, which is very powerful.

"Global change is going to happen one way or another, and some people are going to go with the change and be part of life as it is re-creating itself. Some are going to get too frightened and anxious about what they might lose, and they are going to fight the change and get caught in the pain. Humanity can function differently; humanity can wake up. You cannot convince people of this, but my sense is there are people who hold that as a knowing within themselves and they just need to have it reflected.

"This planet historically has been through many times of terrible crisis," he continued. "There is a possibility for real transformation at this present time of global crisis, which is also a time of grace. We mystics trust in God because we know we can't do it ourselves. We know we can participate, but without Him, we can't do anything. Rumi says you cannot get to the first way station on your own — without grace you cannot do anything. I've been through this experience myself, and I know how the Divine can change your life.

"The world needs people who are open to grace. That is what I have been shown: that there is a possibility for the world to make this step into this next era, into a celebration of itself as one living divine being of which we are all a glorious manifestation. That is what I want to work with. I am a mystic and I know that it is His world. He is all-powerful; He is so tremendous, a divine force. Yes, He is giving humanity an opportunity to participate, but it is His world. We need to realize it's not about us. This is the big mistake we've made: the world is not about us, it's about God, the divine, oneness, light, love, the sacred or whatever you call it. As a Sufi we say, take one step away from yourself and behold the path. Real change is very simple: the

closer you get to what is sacred, the simpler things are. We are conditioned to see the world as a complex problem and to look for complex answers. This world is not a complex problem; it's our mental state that has become complex. There is a very powerful divine force within creation that could possibly wake up. I would be interested in what happens when it does."

*A Sufi Teacher in the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya Sufi Order, Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee has specialized in the area of dream work, integrating the ancient Sufi approach to dreams with the insights of modern psychology. In recent years the focus of his writing and teaching has been on spiritual responsibility in our present time of transition, and the emerging global consciousness of oneness (see www.workingwithoneness.org). Author of several books, including *Awakening the World: A Global Dimension to Spiritual Practice*, *Spiritual Power: How it Works*, *Light of Oneness*, and *The Face Before I was Born: A Spiritual Autobiography*, he lectures throughout the United States and Europe.*

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