

We Seed the Future with Every Breath

**Activist Predicaments
& the Inner Life**

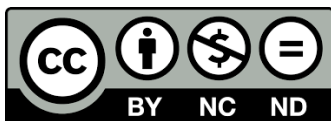


Lata Mani
in dialogue with
Amrita Nandy
Daniel Forster
Vanessa Chishti
Poorva Rajaram

Book & Cover Design: Poorva Rajaram

Interludes: Sindhu Thirumalaisamy & Lata Mani

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Lata Mani

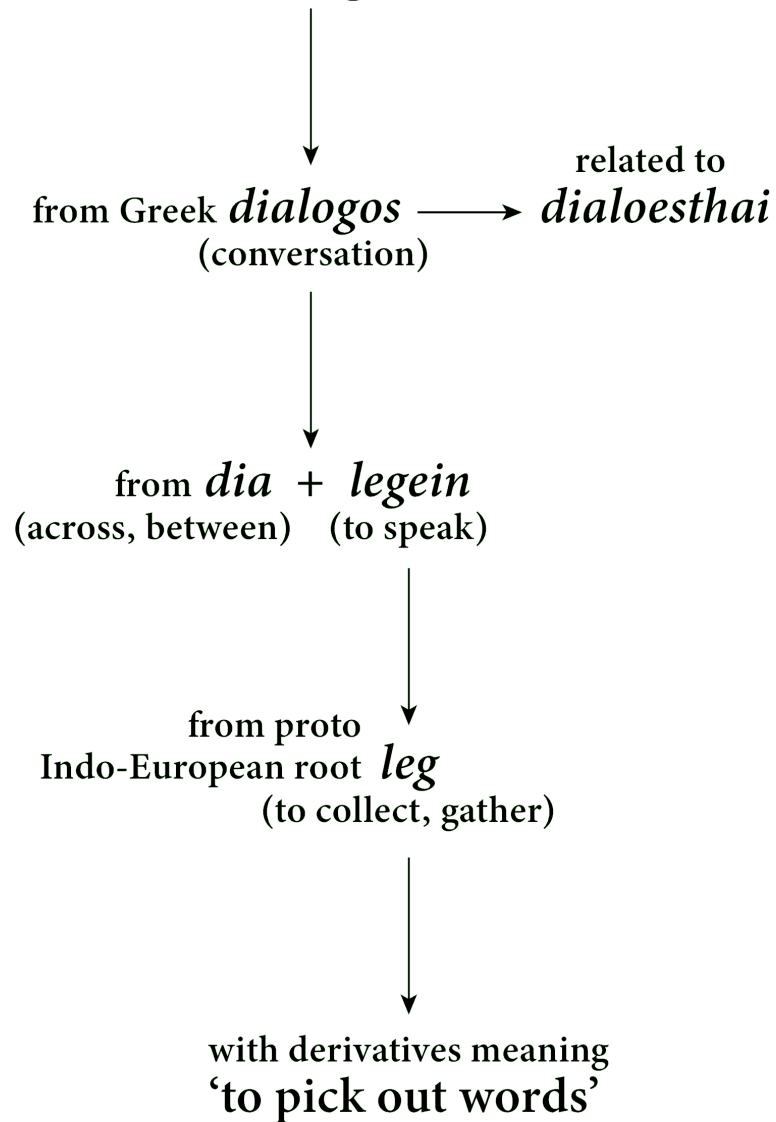
in dialogue with

Amrita Nandy

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Dialogue



Contents

I.	<u>We Inter Are</u>	
	Exploring Justice & Spirituality	6
II.	<u>We Seed the Future with Every Breath</u>	
	Presence as a Form of Resilience	29
III.	<u>We All Have Something to Learn</u>	
	Activist Predicaments & the Inner Life	42

We Inter Are

Exploring Justice and Spirituality

Moderated by Amrita Nandy for Sangat, New Delhi

September/October 2020¹

Amrita Nandy: Feminist encounters with the religio-spiritual in India have been fraught. The persistence of patriarchies in religious institutions and the political ascendance of right-wing ideologies and practices have invited a mostly singular response from feminists—rejection, suspicion towards, and estrangement from, the contemplative aspects of what we have come to see as religion. For those of us who are still interested in exploring what the contemplative can offer to feminism and justice, this enquiry remains pertinent philosophically and exciting intellectually. Yet, it often remains elusive in our politics, in our being and doing, in our everyday.

Today's conversation emerges from the need to pursue this enquiry, especially the intersections, relationships and tensions between social justice and the contemplative. Lata, your work speaks of and to the contemplative as pedagogy, and makes certain readings possible that in our secular,

¹ This transcript draws from two Zoom sessions, September 12 & October 17 2020. It has been edited for length and clarity. It is also slated for publication in a forthcoming anthology reflecting on Sangat's work to be edited by Amrita Chhachhi.

postmodern frames and training may seem troublesome, if not impossible. You offer us a language that straddles the two realms and the possibilities their twinning can offer us out of the miasma of human lives. Let's begin with the words "inter are" in your proposed title for this session. How do you frame it within the ambits of social justice and the secular?

Lata Mani: I borrow 'We Inter Are' from Thich Nhat Hahn's poem "Interrelationship" (1999, 154). The word 'inter' is a prefix used in words in English that come from Latin. It means 'between,' 'among,' 'in the midst of,' 'mutually,' 'reciprocal,' 'together,' 'during.' So 'We Inter Are' acknowledges how we are within, between, among. We are reciprocally, mutually constituted. We are always already together. Our social experience may not reflect this but it is very important for us to realize that even our grammar should reflect it. If in school we learned to conjugate the verb 'to be' as 'I inter am,' 'you inter are,' 'he/she/they inter are,' 'we inter are,' 'you (plural) inter are,' 'they (plural) inter are,' can you imagine how it would reorient us to the world around us? We would not begin by assuming that we are autonomous individuals, separate from each other, who need to learn about our interrelationships. We would be oriented to seeing our embeddedness in the world. 'I inter am' it makes it more possible for me to imagine my relationship to the breeze, the wind, the lake, the tree, the bird, to nature. It is a very simple way of signaling something which is true: our always already embeddedness in the near-infinity of interrelationships that make us who we are.

And then we can ask how is it that forms of knowing have contributed to disarticulating, to taking apart, these pre-existing interrelationships that distill each of us in particular ways. How is it that we have failed to see this? If we can ask that question, we can ask how it is that *all* frameworks - religious and

secular - have failed to see the interconnections that exist and that shape the texture, form and quality of our experience of being alive. We live in very stratified social systems but Creation itself is non-hierarchical polyexistence. So how do we take our place in it? The notion of equality as we understand it within a certain kind of liberal or even a left framework is actually an anemic concept. We need to radicalize our understanding of what equality could mean once we accept the idea of our always already being multiply, mutually, constituted in a field of near-infinite interrelationships with all of life, all living things.

AN: You just spoke of how phenomena are mutually constituted. So, can one say that the notion of "inter are" is not quite alien to feminism because it too speaks of the seamless web of life? Post-structural feminism is non-essentialist. In that sense, the schism between feminism and the spiritual can get blurry.

LM: Absolutely! Every articulation, every expression is limited because infinity is so vast. You can situate me in space, in time, in culture, in class, linguistically. You can even see how my own training in feminist, Marxist, post-structuralism continues to shape how I welcome and express the contemplative. So this binary of secular versus sacred, modern versus ancient does not work. I like to say the future is ancestral. We need to break open categories and be aware that every single one of these histories - of Marxism, feminism etc. has something very important to teach us. Each is expressing some aspect of non-hierarchical polyexistence. If there is a limitation in how that dimension is understood, then the framework is challenged from within and without-- feminism and Marxism have been.

Those of us who wish to bring these together with the contemplative traditions will have to do our own acts of transcoding. We need to pluralize the languages in which we speak, the frameworks on which we draw, the kinds of stories that we tell. A skilled spiritual teacher will choose the story she tells depending on who is in the *satsang*, who the students are, who's in the building if you like. These are different traditions to be sure but each is attempting to speak through the limitations of language to the profound truth of the cosmos in which we coexist.

AN: When our spiritual practices draw on religions linked to historical and ongoing oppression it is seen as cognitive dissonance or as contradiction. For example, how does an upper-caste feminist draw upon Hinduism's contemplative or spiritual resources? How does one negotiate that?

LM: Every philosophical frame offers a particular lens. Spiritual traditions appeal to the individual. Secular knowledge - sociology, history, anthropology - deal with the social for the most part. This is why you often find that spiritual teachers not trained in secular knowledge traditions can genuinely not understand social issues. Their ability to express spiritual teachings may be beautiful but their ability to address social questions might be limited. We need to understand that contemplative traditions are invitations for individuals to understand their relationships with the universe - relationships which presuppose an understanding of the social. But an understanding of the social cannot be arrived at only through contemplative traditions. You need feminism, Marxism, post-structuralism for their insights. We need to draw on multiple traditions. We need polyphony.

As for the violent nature and exclusivist histories of institutionalized religion, there is a peculiar, a priori way in which within secular thinking religion is deemed to be especially suspect. But every single framework that we draw on comes to us highly conditioned with very problematic histories of excluding certain people. I would apply the same lens of discernment or *saamyadrishti* (equal vision) to liberalism, post-structuralism, Marxism or feminism as for that which claims to be Hinduism. We are often loath to take these unpopular detours but this is part of our work as practitioners and students. And we are all going to be students until our last breath because there is so much that we do not yet understand. That is part of the humility and gratitude that we cultivate so that we can continue to learn.

I will say one thing about the divine feminine. She is like the most badass feminist you have ever heard of, to the power of infinity. She does not play around. She is very direct which is why, for example, she has that sword in her representation as Durga or Kali. She is much more interested in our liberation than in satisfying our ego. Speaking for myself, I have a very personal understanding of the divine. I have never seen the divine, only experienced it as an energy. There are other frameworks like Zen Buddhism which are equally gorgeous where there is no notion of the divine.

AN: Your multimedia work, *The Poetics of Fragility*, is about the inseparability of strength and fragility. What about the inseparability of the systems of oppression outside and the suffering inside. And also the duality of these systems themselves - a system of oppression can be a source or system of privilege. How can a contemplative pedagogy allow us to embrace and challenge this suffering - the internal suffering - that's inseparable from the systemic oppression outside. Where do I perch myself? How do I use the

contemplative to work with what's inner in terms of suffering and what's outside which is systemic oppression, structures of oppression?

LM: If you start from the position of indivisibility, if you start from an acceptance of our being mutually constituted, and you practice consistently or steadfastly, what it enables you to experience is that even if you have not had the same social experience as another person because of your location, the nature of that suffering is not entirely alien to you. I am not saying that we are equally socially positioned. But if I am open to the nature of suffering and to the understanding that I cannot know it all, I must open myself to the world as I would to a lover (as Joanna Macy puts it). Then I can make myself vulnerable enough to learn something. One does not have to identify with somebody's suffering or translate it in terms that we can relate to, in order to accept that it is true. I think we often feel that we can only understand that to which we can relate. But if we live in a world that is as complex as ours and which in any moment we are only beginning to discover the complexity of, we can say, "I hear you. I don't fully understand because I have not had your experience. I will take the gift that you have given me of the violation, of the beauty, of the glory, of the creativity, of the strength and the endurance of the life that you have described to me. I will take it into the chamber of my heart and I will sit with it. I will not even try to understand it. I will simply sit with it and see what it can teach me."

Gradually understanding will emerge; and in such understanding we will be drawing on the ways in which that experience echoes some aspect of our own lives. But it does not have to become comprehensible or legible only in terms of similarity. Something radically alien (as in not experienced) can also teach us our oneness or interconnectedness. I say all of this knowing that we live in very

stratified societies. I say all of this knowing that there is a social hierarchy and a social structure which is deeply divisive and violent. And yet, let us notice that it needs to be violent because it goes against nature. It is violent because it is trying to police something which is bursting with diversity namely nature, Creation, the capacity of humans to live and thrive and be together. Why do systems of hierarchization and disciplining need so much insistent enforcing? Because they are going against what would otherwise be true. Bearing that in mind can help us to understand violence and as well to figure out pressure points against that violence in the kinds of counter-hegemonic discourse or imagination that we might choose to develop.

Audience: How can a Tantric worldview help us reimagine this very fraught encounter between human rights, individual rights and a Self that extends beyond one's skin and encompasses all life? How does one make that move with the help of, say, the tantric worldview or the bhakti tradition?

LM: That's a beautiful question. I will say what I can. But I know there are others reimagining law and rights from environmentalist, eco perspective who have started to think about these matters in a more interesting way than simply saying trees have rights too, which is entirely insufficient. The relevance of the tantric view is that tantra sees matter as inherently worthy of reverence. If you think about the problems we are having today, they are a direct consequence of our trying to live in defiance of that fact. We have felt as humans that we have the right to manipulate nature in any way that we please. We have behaved as though the mind is more important than the body; as though the feet are less sacred than the hands, as in the caste system in which the hierarchy is head over foot. It is absolutely absurd. It is the feet that touch the ground, that feel the pulse of the earth, that feel the connection

to something larger. The mind has to discover it. The hands and the feet can touch and learn from sentience what sentience can teach.

It is only through falling in love with matter that a new imagination can be born. And in that falling in love with matter, we will be drawing on all of the things that we have learnt. After all it was Marxist-feminists who talked about the importance of reproductive labor. Within Marxism productive labor had always been hierarchized over reproductive labor. Likewise, trans-consciousness, the idea of gender being not simply binary. Wherever you turn you find that insights from various traditions and knowledge systems echo, extend and bring to our attention some tantric principle. There's a reason for that. Each of us is trying with the tools, resources and the frameworks we have, to understand in our own way the nature of the world in which we live.

In this time when knowledge has been reduced to the instrumental it is important to enable people to experience an idea. It is not enough to say, "Here are five points on caste. Here are five points on equality. If you know these facts, you've understood the phenomenon." Calling on people to understand something without giving them an experience of it especially when it comes to the sacred or to everyday life seems to make less and less sense. This is why I have begun to mix genres in my work, observational writing and analytical prose and as well to work transmedia with filmmaker Nicolás Grandi, through videopoems, videocontemplations, installations, artist books etc. And within them again multiple ways of storytelling. Always trying to keep the door open so somebody can feel, "Maybe I can come in and walk around. Maybe there is something here for me, or maybe not." But leaving it open, invitational and non-polemical by design.

My individual work will be limited. It has to be limited because I am a little fleck in infinity. My work is conditioned. It cannot but be conditioned because I am a historical subject locatable in space and time. But to the extent possible from within that conditioned, specifiable or readable location, you try to keep your mind as open as possible to unlearning, relearning and so forth.

To clarify an earlier point, to fall in love with matter in a tantric sense is to begin to disentangle our sense of sufficiency from the materialist notion of sufficiency. So much social justice discourse presumes that material aspiration is fundamental and the final determinant of sufficiency. Honoring material needs is critically important. But material sufficiency and a sense of contentment or abundance cannot be conflated. If they could be then in this supposedly richest country in which I now live, the United States, you would not see the kind of mental health issues that prevail.

Whether we are secular or have a spiritual inclination we are seeking to answer core questions. Who am I? Why did I take birth? What have I come to do? Nobody else can answer that question. That is a question that we can only seek for ourselves. But as we do this, let us not make the mistake so much social justice discourse has made, which is see people solely in relation to their social status and the facts of social discrimination. There is in each living being a pulsing consciousness, a philosopher, a creative artist, someone who cannot be defined by their social location and by their oppression alone. There is something deeply limited about the way in which we think about each other when we think about each other only in relation to the ways in which society treats us. We fail to see the profound contributions made by those whose intimacy to us we fail to recognize. To define someone as Other on the basis of that failure of perception is surely a tragedy.

Audience: On the one hand all life is part of non-hierarchical poly-existence, not separated but co-existing; on the other hand, it sounds like you relate to spiritual traditions as a matter of individual choice. This is puzzling since to me spiritualism is collective practice and worldview, not a choice you make as an individual as a free/separate being. How do you reconcile this seeming paradox?

LM: Thank you for this wonderful question! I want to distinguish individual from individualist. I don't think that is a conflation that the questioner is making. I think in my language what you're hearing is my individual journey. I do not have a guru in the body. I do not belong to any particular institution. I do not have a *satsang* (spiritual congregation or fellowship). It has been a very solitary journey in my case and it's been direct experience. If I speak in individual terms it reflects the arc of my path. I would agree with everything else that you're saying which is that if the journey itself continually invites me to see my always-already mutual and multiple constituted-ness, then obviously the individual is nothing but the condensed instance of that multiplicity, of that polyphony. If I speak not of *satsang*, or if I speak not in collective terms, it is because my work is an emanation from a single flame and it returns to that flame. That is the work that I have been called to do.

Audience: I have become accustomed to learn and gain knowledge only from already existing structured and organized systems of knowledge. It has almost killed my creativity to think beyond to the point that I feel guilty for thinking beyond. For example, if I think about my desire to be a homemaker, to cook, bake, read, get joy from all these things, I feel that feminism will judge me. It

has also been stopping me from learning new things if they don't serve me professionally.

LM: Your instinct is right. Free yourself. Some women were forced into the home; not all women but middle-class women and upper caste women while poor women, working class women have always worked outside the home too. But as we know it is always a certain subgroup or segment that comes to represent the universal. Different particulars represent different universals. Because we have privileged the experience of some people and because in the past certain kinds of labor were not socially recognized as intrinsically valuable, we have sometimes overcorrected in the other direction within feminism. We can set that aside.

But this view is also connected to another a-tantric principle, the hierarchization of activity. "Use your mind in a certain way; it's definitely much better than not using your mind" as though there is any activity which does not require using the mind. Whether you work with leather, with thread, with vegetables, with soil, with text – all are equal forms of laboring. We tend to think of some activities as intrinsically more valuable than other activities and that prevents us from seeing the radical equality of all life forms, all life activity, a basic tantric principle. If the bee stops pollinating, we have the end of agriculture. With the end of agriculture, we have the end of possibility of human life. If an earthworm stops turning over the soil, the soil cannot be aerated. If the soil is not aerated, nothing can grow. There is no activity that is too small, too modest, unproductive, only reproductive, or useless. There is nothing that is not intrinsically valuable.

To discover the value of everything that we do, we need to be open, to approach tasks as a lover would, willing to bow down and learn from the process. What can each of our activities teach us? Garbage, the product of our own making. Why is it that only certain people in our society are given the job of clearing garbage? Why is it that the things that we have produced and carelessly deposited on this earth are callously outsourced to certain others to dispose?

Relatedly we need to reclaim the idea of dignity as inherent. In our social justice discourse we say that dignity is affected by the facts of social discrimination. The truth is because of the facts of social discrimination somebody has been poorly treated. Dignity is a flame that burns constantly from the moment of birth to the moment one transitions to another realm. Dignity is untouchable. It is given to you. And it is who you are. The way I treat you may not recognize that fact but your dignity is inviolable.

Audience: Could you speak about seeing the world beyond dichotomies? Example sacred versus secular, religion versus atheism, oppression versus resistance.

LM: This question is very important because too often on the Left or in social justice circles, we have been satisfied with antithesis. You know the triad, thesis, antithesis, synthesis? If current social structure insists on some discriminatory notion, when we resist we challenge and reclaim it. We may do a range of things. We may say black is beautiful in response to the designation of black as less than beautiful. Or we may challenge understanding of the category in question as with gender or race. What often happens when our movements stay in antithesis is that we simply insist on valorizing that which is

being refused. But we might want to think about whether we only want to insist on claiming that which is being refused or whether we want to reimagine altogether what living together in solidarity could look like. For example, I have written about the ways in which a certain kind of feminist discourse is entangled with neoliberal ways of thinking about sex, sexuality, individual autonomy and so on. (Mani, 2013, 101-108; 2014, 26-29) Rather than staying with “the State is not giving me my right to do this so I will insist on it,” what would it mean to start not from where things are but how things might be? What other imaginations of the future might we dream if we start from a different premise than prevails now? Antithesis is exhausting because antithesis never fully satisfies the deeper hunger for liberation. We are often so concerned about how we appear to others. The conventionalism on the Left and among feminists is as stultifying as on the Right. We think of ourselves as radicals simply because we are challenging the state, dominant culture. We need to challenge ourselves.

Why limit our imagination to some notion of a liberal State that no country has realized fully? It has only been realized to different degrees in different parts of the world. But is that all? Is that sufficient? Or should we be re-dreaming the future more freely? Will we have place in this new world for things that we never talk about in our movements for social justice?

Ultimately, movements for social justice are an effort to find a new basis on which to live. “We Inter Are.” The inter-ness, the mixedness, the inbetween-ness, the togetherness, the mutuality, the reciprocity. How do we live reciprocity? How do we live non-hierarchy? How do we live interdependent impermanence which prevails as a gravitational force whether or not we honor it? This is why strength and fragility are deeply connected: if we are

living in interdependent impermanence, nothing stays the same. Why are we holding onto 19th century categories and insisting that we simply have not realized the future they imply in third-world countries?

Audience: How can activists reconcile the resistance inherent to social justice with Zen that would ask of us to let things flow? Do we need to redefine social justice as well?

LM: Every principle makes sense within a specific analytical and practical domain. If we are living in a society in which some form of hierarchy is operating which includes some and excludes others on the basis a range of false ideas, then to be aware and not cooperate with its logic is the ethical posture to take. Depending on the domains in which you work, the kinds of resistance and the kinds of practices that you will seek to cultivate will vary. If you're working in legal activism, there is a certain trajectory that you would follow. If like Kamla Bhasin you work with the police on issues of masculinity then your path would be different. We have realized that legal interventions alone are not going to secure real change in society. Transformation of attitudes means appealing to people at a human level, appealing to them to think about how it is that they've come to understand themselves as "masculine" etc.

Allowing something to flow is also a principle that may be useful in legal activism. Allowing something to flow means allowing something to evolve. Allowing something to evolve so that you can see the direction in which it is going and at a certain point it will become clear precisely what the pressure point might be, what resistance might constitute. This is an example in the realm of activism. What about spiritual practice and the question of resistance

and going with the flow? For the spiritual practitioner, understanding the architecture of self, our attachments to ideas, is a crucial first step. For instance, the loop in your mind may include, "I must be a good person; to be a good person means X, Y and Z; my life must be useful; in order for it to be useful, this is what I should be doing; oh my god I'm not doing enough!" etc. You sit on your meditation couch or your chair - the posture is not what's important, the intention is what matters. When you hit up against some idea of self you hold dear, if you resist letting it teach you what you need to unlearn it will become an obstacle.

So there are domains, places and moments where resistance is precisely what is required- resistance as we understand it. There is a structure which needs to be opposed and you devise actions in order to challenge the structure as it is. There are other times when you need to allow a process to flow. If there is a critique that has come forward in our political organizations, we don't just immediately decide that we are either going to shut it down or act on its basis. You allow the critique to evolve, you allow that to flow and then you allow a new commonsense to develop. I think when we pose these questions in a binary way it does not help us. No serious spiritual practitioner will claim that to go with the flow means to accept everything. At the same time, without accepting things as they are we cannot figure out what to do about them.

Often political activists will say "I cannot accept that there is suffering. I refuse to accept that there is suffering." We have to accept that there is suffering because it is true. Once you accept it, once you've dealt with your pain about it, once you've dealt with your horror that you might be implicated in reproducing it because of your class position, your caste position, your gender, race etc., once you have faced all of that, then you clear away the bramble to

see what you can do. It may seem to you that the only thing that you can do is something modest. But there is no modest action. There's no action that is too small. As scientists have shown us, a butterfly flapping its wings in Tokyo can create a tornado in Brazil. Every single action, every gesture, every breath, counts. I remember when the idea of 'engaged Buddhism' was proposed to Thích Nhất Hạnh, the Vietnamese Buddhist teacher, he said your breath connects you with the universe, with every breath you are engaged. We have tended to limit action and significance to a Newtonian notion of cause and effect: the cue hits the billiard ball, the billiard ball is pocketed. Something that you can see, something that you can measure, something whose consequence you know immediately.

As for redefining social justice, there may be times when we need to redefine justice to include attention, care and concern for those aspects of what it means to be human that are not possible to legislate. Can you legislate kindness? Can you legislate care? The Hathras rape case currently unfolding defies understanding. We can understand it historically, in terms of caste oppression. One is not pretending to be innocently uncomprehending. But at a certain point we need to ask what about practices of care - self-care and other care? What are the practices of compassion? How can our political movements make these an integral part of how we imagine working with, within and against the structures that exist and that desperately need to be transformed? The idea that if a State accords rights to everyone within its borders you have solved the problem of suffering is, as we know, untrue. Can we bring together those practices, philosophies and wisdoms that enable us to attend to what you might call the texture of life and those that are designed to deal with structures that need to be challenged? Can we expand the canvas, transform the vision and widen the lens to include those microscopic textures that determine the feeling of our lives? The two are related.

It is not an accident that so many social justice activists carry so much grief. It is because of how we have understood social justice, how we have understood being an activist and so on. There is much concern that the kind of inquiry I describe here is self-absorbed, narcissistic. And yet without those practices of care (which feminists above all others should be most open to since practices of care have been something to which we have brought attention) we cannot sustain our activism. We have to make our practices sustainable. We use the word sustainable in relation to our economic choices but it also pertains to what enables us to wake up every morning ready to meet the day. The bird wakes up in unalloyed joy. And sometimes we wake up in the morning groaning, then hear the bird and think what's wrong with me? How can our political practices allow us to wake up in joy?

Not that grief does not have a lot to teach us. There is something extraordinarily beautiful to be learnt from sorrow. There is a lot of teaching in every single mood we experience. Our mental states are like the weather. Sometimes it's raining, sometimes it's sunny, sometimes it's gloomy, sometimes it's joyful. It's all part of the weave of life. But if we only feel like things are going well when we are happy and we feel we have done something wrong when we are sad, or that we have no right to our sorrow because other people are suffering more than we are, then we are beginning to hierarchize one cry over another. We will all need to make choices. We may be called to work in different ways, to address different aspects of social problems. But that does not mean that those problems that we intimately experience ourselves, or those aspects of social problems that we are not working on, are not important.

Audience: How can feminists who are deeply disturbed by religion and yet drawn to spirituality experience feminism in the spiritual? And one form this dilemma could take is the feminist assertion of the 'I' or the rights of the 'I' versus the contemplative dropping of egocentric consciousness? How does one straddle the two?

LM: The purpose of undertaking spiritual practice is not to eliminate particularity. It is to allow that particularity to blossom outside of conditioned perception. So there is no real tension. Conditioned perception is precisely what feminism is also trying to shift. Feminism is saying "you tend to think of women like this or you tend to think of women of this caste like this or women of this class like this or women who undertake these occupations in this way and you belittle them and discriminate against them and you legitimize and socially sanction this form of behavior." What happens in a spiritual practice undertaken in complete fearlessness is not the elimination of particularity but it being released to dance in joy. Imagine if we thought of gender diversity as we do the bark of trees: some are smooth, some are ridged, some have striations, some you are drawn to stroking vertically, some horizontally! Gender as something that expresses the beauty, diversity and plurality intrinsic to Creation. As opposed to gender now, which is largely the experience of being in a body that must only go to certain places and must only do certain things and that must be seen to be doing certain things at a certain point in the lifecycle. Must bear children, must be a certain shape, size, color, etc. What you are dropping when you drop egocentric understanding is conditioning. You are not dropping the 'I', you are dropping conditioning.

While there are aspects of different religious traditions that actually call to social identity, if you look at mystic traditions and at the spiritual practices

themselves they are calling to you as an individual. It is an individual invitation to discover your relationship to the cosmos, to discover your relationship to that aspect of the cosmos that is calling to you. Whether through a notion of divinity, Buddha nature, nature spirits etcetera it is calling to you as an individual. Why would it call to you as an individual if the individual did not matter? The universe is non-arbitrary coherence, nothing is accidental: how can the individual not matter? The point is: *how* does the individual matter and *who* is the individual? Those are the questions you ask on a spiritual journey.

Audience: How does one then learn to unlearn our conditioning yet retain the intuition and not confuse one for the other? Have you used spiritual practice to work with conditioning?

LM: Definitely! Almost every idea I had about myself came to major crisis in the practice and that is why I trust the practice. If I had held on to my sense of self, if I had held on to the self that entered that practice against the pressure of realizations that were being revealed to me, I could not have had a journey.

Can I take a few minutes to speak about Navaratri? Today is the first day of the festival which narrativizes the journey to liberation that in a way we have been talking about here. It is a nine-night celebration of the Feminine Divine followed by a tenth day of liberation or victory. The first three nights are dedicated to Durga, second three nights to Lakshmi and the last three nights to Saraswati. For those not from South Asia, Navaratri is a celebrated widely in the subcontinent within the tradition that we now name Hinduism and I want to keep framing it that way because there is continual slippage between the variety of practices that characterize this tradition and those legitimized versions that are masquerading as the tradition itself. From a spiritual

perspective, Navaratri narrativizes the journey that we have been trying to find language for in our conversation.

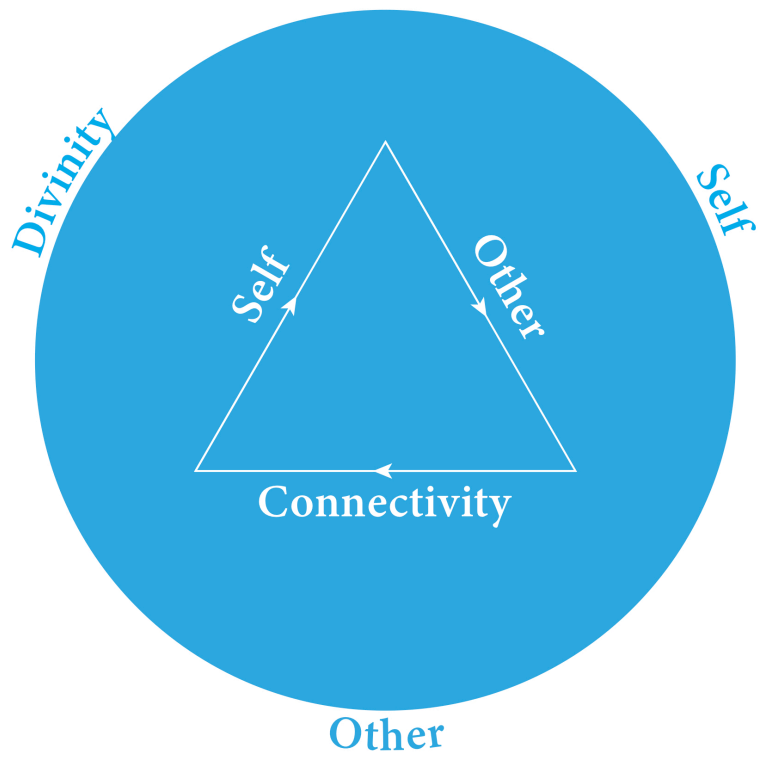
Why Durga for the first three nights? Because we need to unlearn everything that we believe to be true. It is that process of ferment and deconditioning. She is very precise in her actions but she's also like the mother who knows that you have to rip the band aid off the child's knee because to take it off slowly would actually be more painful. The process of confronting your conditioning is so hard that you then need to experience abundance. And that's where Lakshmi comes in. Lakshmi is the dimension of the divine feminine that represents abundance. It is our colossal lack of imagination that we've turned her into a cash register, a violation of what that abundance principle represents. That abundance principle is one in which a mango can fall whole to the ground and become compost and rejoice in what it has given to the universe. That is the principle of abundance, not propitiating the goddess before you open your shop in the hope that you make money that day. You are of course welcome to do that. That is not a lesser request from the divine. Everybody has their livelihood and that is important. But to only see her in that way would be to limit what the principle of abundance might represent. Once you have had that principle of abundance revealed to you then new knowledge can be poured into you. The last three days are thus dedicated to Saraswati who represents learning. And the tenth day is the day of victory.

What is the victory? It is our victory as Mahisha. *We* are Mahisha. We are looking up at divine mother aware of this duality in our consciousness where we want to be free, be freed, and at the same time we are terrified of letting go of what we already know. Because to let go of what we know, we have to be in free fall, cognitive free fall, in unknowing. It is terrifying. Look at

representations of Durga looking at Mahisha. She is looking at Mahisha like the mother about to rip the bandaid off the child's knee. There's enormous compassion in the gesture by which she uses her sword to sever us from our suffering. She then wears us as an ornament on her body. The skulls that she wears around her neck are those egocentric aspects which we have been terrified to let go of, since paradoxically they have also become a way in which we make sense of our lives. Navaratri narrativizes that human dynamic, one which continues through the rest of the year. The same dynamic is at play in our political consciousness and political learning. Clinging, worrying what it means to let go of our ideas about this or that, allowing the abundance of new knowledge to come in, needing to feel helped. That is where practices of care for activists also comes in. We can manifest that abundance principle by opening our sense of what care means to and for us, care for each other, care for self.

How do we learn to separate intuition from conditioning? You may know that an advanced spiritual adept is often given the honorific paramahansa (great swan)? This is because a swan is able to separate milk from water, truth from conditioning. And part of unlearning our conditioning is learning to distinguish instinct from conditioning. If in your practice you find some instinct keeps coming back and refuses to go away then you have to ask it to tell you what it has come to teach. Don't turn away any thought, feeling, sensation, any recurring pattern of mind in your meditation practice. We open the door completely. We welcome all our feelings. It can be unnerving. Then we ask whatever principle we can trust, to hold us all as we undergo the difficult process of staying open to the prospect of learning. There is no formula. There is only practice. And these practices are ancient. And the reason that they have survived for millennia is because they work. If we open ourselves to them with neither fear nor favor we will gradually learn. This is

why knowledge cannot be instrumental. Because knowing is a process. Knowing is committing to a practice of inquiry.



We Seed the Future with Every Breath

Presence as a Form of Resilience

Conversation with Dr. Daniel Forster

Escuela Meditacion Pali,

Buenos Aires, April 28, 2021

Daniel Forster: We are presently experiencing a very difficult time on our planet. The circumstances may be optimal for rethinking how we understand ourselves better and as well the existence that contains us and of which we are a part. Today we have the deepest pleasure of welcoming Nicolás Grandi and Lata Mani. Nicolás is a transdisciplinary artist and educator who worked for five years in India where he met Lata Mani and they developed many projects jointly, including *The Poetics of Fragility*. It is an amazing film. Between the two of them they were able to tell a story in a most beautiful way. Today Lata will speak to us about tantra. But before I give the floor to her to I want to mention a filmed interview with Lata shot by Nicolás, *The Earth on its Axis, We in Our Skin: The Tantra of Embodiment*. Watching it I had two very strong experiences. The first one was that I felt that I fell in love, so to speak. That was very moving to me. I teared up. I was emotional. I also had a sensation that was hard to describe. We all know about experiences that are hard to put into words. What I felt was that I was not alone. I hope that you may also be sensitive to the way that both Nicolás and Lata talk about experience and how to think about

things. It's very poetic. Not only that but quite accurate as well. Why don't we begin, Lata, by asking you to comment on the title of this session?

LM: I am so happy to be here with you today. Thank you for inviting me. 'We Seed the Future with Every Breath, Presence as a form of Resilience.'

We: From the beginning collectivity. It is impossible to separate the individual from the collective, even as the individual is very important. For the universe is difference, diversity, distinction in a complex dance, one in which every element that composes it is as important and as equal as every other. We/I: distinct and inseparable.

Seed: The word seed points to processes of germination, growth, evolution and it includes the idea that we reap what we sow. The verb 'to seed' is an action that brings together intention, process, outcome. Sowing is always embedded in an ecology, a context or set of interrelations, all of which impact the process of what happens to what we sow. We are reminded of complexity, the impossibility of control, and importantly of mystery. Will the seed sprout? Will heat, moisture, breezes arrive as needed? "We seed:" the two words remind us also of agency and free will, capacities that define human existence.

We Seed the Future: Time. We are reminded of the relation of present to future. And of the future as potential in the present. And in the context of seeding or planting, to the multiplicity of time. Many timelines co-existing.

With Every Breath. Breath brings us firmly into the body, our home. And at the same time, it recalls the mystery of breath. What is its source? Our life

depends on breath. But where has the air we inhale traveled from? Every breath connects us to the trees to be sure, but also potentially to the whole universe. Whether we like it or not, the very nature of existence requires us to surrender to unknowing, to interdependence, to interconnectivity. Additionally, the fact that every breath counts reminds us of non-hierarchy. The universe as non-hierarchical polyexistence. It follows from this that each action and gesture also matters.

This brings us to the subtitle: Presence as a form of Resilience

Presence: awareness - physical, emotional, psychic, mental. Here-ness. Now-ness. Not split screen. Not scattered. Not distracted. But place-time-awareness converging. Presence is not tense concentration but a natural alertness. A moving through space, time, space-time with relaxed dynamism, like a runner, swimmer or surfer. Presence: a state of being you cultivate so you know how to align with the currents, when and how to push, when and how to hold back.

Resilience: the capacity to bounce back, rebound. In other words, elasticity and flexibility. This kind of supple adaptability requires one to be rooted in awareness. Awareness of self, of one's location, of the broader environment. Breath is the most tangible instance of the intimate and evolving interrelationships in which we are embedded. To live in such awareness is to meditate. The poetics of meditation then is living in awareness of interdependent impermanence with generosity, ease and the spirit of collaboration.

DF: You have said that part of what you are talking about has to do with tantra. Can you speak a bit about your understanding of tantra?

LM: The word tantra is to be found in what we today call Hinduism and Buddhism. But the ideas are ancient and they are to be found in all traditions: indigenous spiritualities and in the mystic aspects of all the major religious traditions. Tantra sees the entire universe as alive. Everything in the universe is alive and has awareness. Tantra sees matter as sacred, embodiment as sacred. It considers the senses as a form of intelligence. In tantra every living thing exists in two linked triangles: self-other-connectivity & self-other-divinity.

DF: We know due to your history that you suffered an accident that left you ill for a very long time. I know that you have described pain as a teacher. Could you tell us how to make pain a teacher?

LM: Let me step back a little. I had a brain injury from which I am still recovering. What the injury did was to drop me into my body. Until then I had lived in my mind. The experience of intense physical pain and the unplugging of mind meant that I became aware of myself in a very different way: awareness was very close to the body and the body and pain began to be my teacher. How? The mind was so injured that it was quiet. It could not try to control or manage what was happening to me. It had to sit and watch. It had to witness. The body is unconditioned. It is by its nature open and welcoming to experience. I know what I am saying is not commonsense today. But I am drawing on ancient spiritual wisdom in which you make a distinction between pain and suffering. Pain is physical and like everything in this universe constantly evolving, transmuting, changing. Pain is never static. What fixes our

experience of it is the judgement of mind, the grief of mind, the resistance of mind. Judgement, grief, resistance turn pain into suffering.

We have a lot of conditioning about the body. But the body itself is unconditioned. Since mind was quiet I was unable to resist the pain. I began to experience that I could float in the pain, I could allow it to teach me. Since then I have come to understand that joy can teach you, ecstasy can teach you, depression can teach you, grief can teach you. Anything can teach you if you don't resist it. Every human experience is a window to understanding. I am not saying every human experience is pleasurable. There is a lot of suffering especially in challenges that have to do with the mind. It is easier to witness physical pain than say, depression. This is because depression feels very close to the mind so to find the crack - to allow light to come and create a little gap or distance between you and a heavy mindstate - can be difficult. But what you learn if you don't resist is that you can call on body to teach, you can call on mind to teach, and you can call on the heart to teach. Each has a very distinctive kind of wisdom and we need all three. Does that begin to answer your question, Dr. Forster?

DF: Yes, thank you. I am very interested in the triad you mentioned, the intelligence that is triadic: body, heart and mind. Can you expand on that please?

LM: What I have come to learn is that despite society's distrust of the body - one can even say hatred or suspicion of the body - it is in itself the most objective consciousness. The challenge is that we have so much conditioning *about* the body. We need to become aware of our ideas about the body and then sweep them away so that the body can speak its unconditioned truth. To

give you a very simple example, it is very difficult to physically recall a headache after it has abated. But you can recall your feelings, what you felt when you had the headache: anger, frustration, sorrow, annoyance, disappointment etc. You can listen to a song and it can remind you of a time when you broke up with your partner and you can feel sad. But try to conjure up and experience a stomach ache after the fact! It is very difficult because body does not hold on! Mind holds on.

When you understand that intelligence is triadic then you can ask mind to come and converse with the body – my language is jumbled because body, heart and mind are all *in* the body. I am making an analytical distinction. But it is also a concrete and material distinction. Once you are aware of this triad, you can ask all three in turn about any problem that you are facing. What does body think? What does heart say? What does mind feel? You often find that mind feels responsible and worried about keeping things together, rather like a single mother of four who is anxious about providing for all the children. As you undertake this form of inquiry you may discover that mind's fear can meet heart's courage and body's wisdom and slowly a way forward reveals itself. How the process unfolds depends on many factors. Depending on the issue it could be that mind's excitement might encounter heart's caution and body's lack of enthusiasm leading you to explore why this might be the case. I am proposing a practice. And if you practice it the wisdom that you need for your specific situation will surely reveal itself. It should be understood as a process of inquiry.

DF: I am pretty sure you are speaking of this as a practice of contemplative development. We would like to know how the poetic, the metaphorical and the conceptual is related to the contemplative.

LM: 'Poetics' comes from 'poiesis' which means making, 'aesthetics' derives from aesthesis, meaning that which is about sense perception. So, the poet is trying to *make sense* through the word. The poet is making sense by playing linguistically, placing words next to each other in ways that startle, surprise, help us to see anew and in so doing dissolve existing or habitual frames of reference. Contemplative practice follows a similar principle. As you sit to meditate, or as you sit to do yoga, or if your practice is prayer and the rosary (when you pray you also enter a state of stillness) you become aware of the architecture of your mind: how you have come to see reality in the way you have. And in that process, you are like the poet, also engaged in the art of sense-making. And just as a poet can make you experience sensorially how ink dissolves in water, how a bear comes down the mountain slowly, how the afternoon light can slant into a room making the everyday magical, you too in your contemplative practice start to discover the world as a remarkable place.

DF: There is something that I have always thought about. Many people are working towards making a more conscious world, not only by teaching but also personally. These searchers are appearing more and more and they are expressing themselves. And although the future does not exist per se one can form a hypothesis (which is necessarily false) with regards to a world where human beings are conscious of their nature. I wonder what that might look like, whether it could be possible and how each of us in our transcendent acts can work towards that?

LM: I will say two things. One is I have been gifted very poor imagination in terms of visioning the future. But I do know that we are moving into the age of Aquarius. We have moved already. This is a time in the universe when a huge

transformation of consciousness is under way. In fact, the stresses and strains, the misery and suffering we see across the world today is the breaking down of the old order and everything wrong with it coming to the surface. In that sense it is as though humanity is in a birth canal. It is dark and we are seeking. We are wondering if we dare to keep going forward towards the light, whether we can even trust that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

What tantra teaches me is a method. It is a method that is non-toxic. It is free, available to everybody and it is in synchrony with the laws of Creation. Beyond that it is hard for me to predict what a society of beings residing in full awareness of their true nature might look like, except at a meta level. At that level one can say that it will be characterized by collaboration, cooperation, deep love and respect, non-hierarchy, acceptance of the limitation of what it means to be human, a being radically equal to all else that exists in the universe. I feel that is in living in context of this understanding, and by drawing on whatever wisdom speaks to our heart, that we will collectively remake our societies.

DF: Thank you very much Lata, your description is beautiful. I am moved and I would like Nicolás to share anything that comes to mind, an anecdote, a theory, an experience. For he has worked with Lata many times with exquisite sensitivity.

NG: One of the most wonderful things in the last ten years of working together, one of the most precious, was to discover trust in the creative process. Any time we came to a crossroads and did not know what to do we would look at each other and say, "We trust the process." It somehow echoes what Lata has said about this triad of the intelligence of body, heart and mind.

Often when we worked, we worked in a triad, Lata, me and La Madre, the Mother who is in charge of everything. Maybe I would like to ask what this process implied, how our practices came together, me as a filmmaker and Lata as a writer and how we generated with this union a new creative monster, so to say, of artist books, films, space-based work etc. Can you reflect on this process?

LM: Trust you, Nicolás, to put me in the spot! That is a whole discussion in itself and I cannot do it justice here. What I can say is that it's been a magical journey for me because in a sense Nicolás trusted my visual instinct well before I was able to feel that there was something there that I could follow, trust. I had worked with words until then and I loved the discipline of the word being reduced to a small element in our collaborative projects. This was at the very beginning. We have now been working for about ten years so it's a little different now. But just as in spiritual practice in which you have to walk off a ledge before you can learn something because unless you let go something new cannot emerge, I also had to walk off the ledge of comfort to discover what we could do together. And I think the most exciting aspect of what has been possible has been working together to think how to expand and deepen sensory perception. The visual has capacities that the word alone does not. We live in a world where words and images are traveling at high speed, colliding and detonating in people's consciousness. The question for us has been how to bring together word and image to create another kind of experience of time, of feeling, of exploring, of staying with and expanding understanding. This has been the challenge. Nicolás is unafraid of time and that was a perfect precondition, a perfect disposition, for us to try something new.

DF: Beautiful. I love the description of this existence in movement, in interaction, in interdependence, in interbeing, Thich Nhat Hahn's concept. In that existence there is a certain individuality. I heard you name that conjunction as isness if I understand it correctly, a concept that you have developed. I would love if you would speak about that.

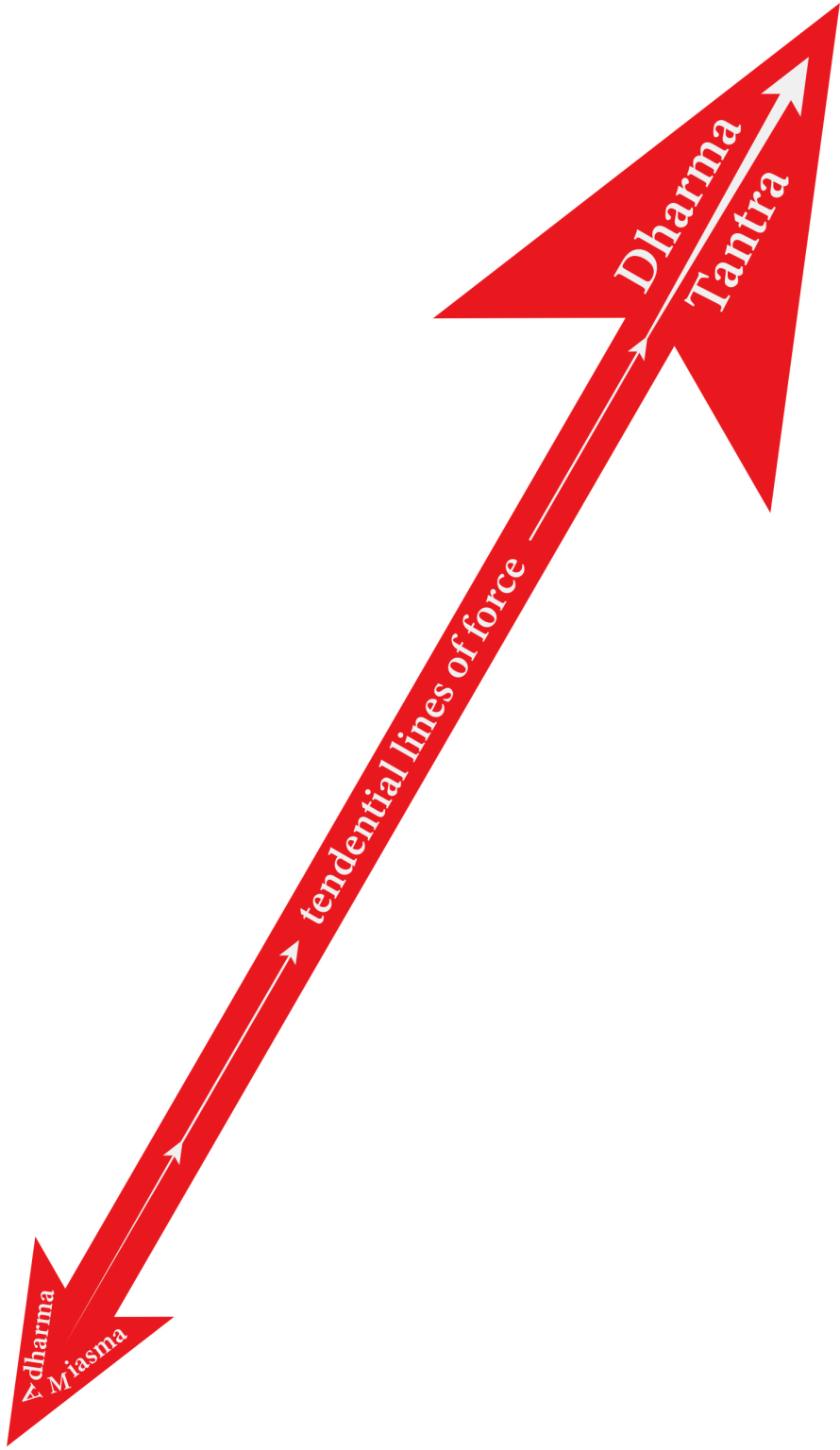
LM: I was taught the concept of isness. Much of my learning has been direct teaching. My partner Ruth Frankenberg and I used to practice together and we received direct teachings in our meditations. One of our teachers was La Madre (the Divine Mother, Devi as she is named in what we call Hinduism today). She taught us the concept of isness. The teachings are free to download but unfortunately, they are only in English. The collection is called *The Tantra Chronicles* and comprises teachings from Divine Mother, Lord Shiva, Jesus, Mary and the Moon. The very first teaching from Divine Mother is on isness. Isness is that specific vibration that characterizes every living thing. It is distinctive to each person, entity, being. And it is that which makes that person so particular. It is their isness that draws us to them. Their isness is something that is prior to, beyond but also during and in the midst of all the other ways you can describe that person: male/female/transgender; gay/straight/bisexual. In the midst of all these social categories there is this specific vibration and accessing it enables that relaxation that we were talking about. It is important that we always remember that we are all these social descriptions and much more besides. Our isness contains within it - like a seed - so much about us that we are here to discover! Our isness can help us find our destiny and our path. Isness is not just individual. I *am* isness. Isness is also collective: I *live in* isness. That falling in love that you mentioned at the beginning was you experiencing isness in the visual and sonic offering of the filmed interview *The Tantra of Embodiment*. Awareness of isness makes the world magical.

DF: We have a question from the audience. We are going through a planetary pandemic in this particular time that is affecting our isness, although I understand that the pandemic itself is isness as well. We have experienced the loss of physical touch in our relationships due to need, ritual, habits. How can we relate to one another with the loss of this ability to touch, this limitation on the physical?

LM: It's a beautiful question. I think touch is fundamental. But there are other ways in which we can breathe each other's isness. Even when six feet apart we can simply be with each other and open our hearts to one another. I have found that even on Zoom if the intention is there I can drink from the isness of another. Partly it is about awareness and intention and openness. I am not trying to minimize problems. I am simply saying that if life is dynamism within constraint then the pandemic is a particularly challenging example of such a constraint. And within it we can start expanding our notion of touch. I have not been able to hug anyone since April 2020. I find myself drawn to touching the bark of a tree. I find myself paying more tactile attention to vegetables when I am shopping, cutting etc. I can take this opportunity to love my own body. If we can embrace eros - love in its essence - we can discover it in places where we may not have thought to look.

DF: We shall wrap up keeping these words in mind. We shall remember to feel. It has been a pleasure. Thank you Nicolás for being present in this joint isness and thank you Lata for the opportunity to listen to your words. I hope the flow continues.

LM: Thank you Daniel and all those who have tuned in. Time is the biggest gift we can give each other. Thank you for giving us your time, attention and affection. And thank you Maria for your superb simultaneous translation.



We All Have Something to Learn

Activist Predicaments & the Inner Life

Conversation with Vanessa Chishti & Poorva Rajaram

May 30, 2021

Vanessa Chishti: As people who have departed from expected social conventions and are in one way or other engaged in, and with, the process of attempting to refashion the world in more just ways, we find that while there are a lot of collective resources in feminist and Left circles on how to change the world, one thing often lacking are resources on how to navigate one's inner life. Both of us, and I am sure many like us also, have found ourselves grappling alone, often in profound isolation, with the question of how to be, how to exist as a certain kind of a person. Of course, a political project does give you certain broad principles to think about in terms of your inner life as well: justice, compassion, criticality, kindness, all of those things. But filling in the details of those broad contours is often very, very difficult and is done as I said in profound isolation. Many of the questions that we sent you in preparation for this conversation, all of them really, come from that place.

Lata Mani: It is important to set the context so that we can be as precise as possible. One of the challenges that we face is that secular philosophical frames frequently pretend to omnipotence, an Archimedean standpoint from which one can see the whole. The presumption is that it is possible to describe

or elaborate a philosophical frame in sufficient detail to capture the whole. And that is a real problem. I think one reason we quite often find ourselves irritable (I am trying to use a word that would link the inner and the outer) in relation to the frameworks on which we draw, or the way in which we disagree with each other, is because that desire to be the 'master of all I survey' is continually called into question by the enormous complexity of what actually prevails. "Reality" slips away from the categories we use to bring infinity into some kind of shape in order to feel we have a map with which to negotiate it. So the more precise we can be, the more modest we can be. It has brought me enormous peace to accept that I can only ever grasp a fragment of the whole. And that that much is enough.

Care and intelligence are in a sense one and the same: developing intelligence about something is a form of care, and in order to care you have to develop the wisdom necessary to be able to stand near an object, process or person and think about them in a way that enables you to pay sufficient attention. The more we are able to locate our conversation the more honest I can be about what I know and what I don't know.

The other challenge is how to discuss the possibility of a method for thinking through your questions because they are deeply philosophical and profoundly spiritual questions. You may not have used the language of the sacred but they are questions about the meaning of life, the meaning of action and the significance of our existence. And to the extent that those three questions are shared both by secular liberationist political frameworks and spiritual frameworks, and given that my own work is at the intersection of both, I would like to tread a path which honors the pedagogy that I find most enabling in both streams. My challenge then is how to offer a method to ask better

questions, how to offer concepts or techniques that might help people in their inquiry, rather than simply making pronouncements. And the problem of pronouncing is to be found in both the secular and spiritual domains, right? We can be very prescriptive out of an anxiety to address vital questions the answers to which matter greatly given our political investments, hopes and dreams. That was the reason to start with the premise of specificity; with specificity, context, a certain frame in which we can try to think these questions aloud with each other. Does this make sense?

VC: Makes plenty of sense.

LM: Let me continue with the ground clearing then. Because you have started with these two domains that are always spoken of as though they are binaries, let us note that we now know that in many different ways the sacred and secular are not binaries. But even in this way: one of your questions had to do with pessimism, the deep sense that people in movements often feel that they can never do enough. They can never do enough. That sorrow and grief among activists can lead to greater irritability (I'm deliberately trying to choose a word that is not judgmental). I think we can be very unkind with each other. But part of our unkindness comes from the fact that we can feel incredibly impotent in the face of problems that seem to be enormous. And this too is connected to the question of specificity, to humility, to locatedness and the premise with which we must begin, which is that we can only know so much and only do this much and that is not a defeat. This much can be enough.

"This much" may not be enough to bring in the revolution but enough for an individual to imagine sustaining a contribution towards a praxis of liberation that can replenish itself, and build into itself practices of resilience such that

we are not drained by our incapacity to meet goals which, however wonderful, we may or may not see realized in the time that we have on earth. How can we see specificity and limitation not merely as constraints? How can we think of specificity, the limits of our understanding, action and capacity to impact the world as, rather, the preconditions of what it is to be human; as what can help us to take our place in the vastness of the world in a way that is authentic to us?

This has bearing on many of the tensions we find within identity politics which is something we are all grappling with. There are those who dismiss identity politics out of hand. I don't. The idea of situatedness as important because it is the particular perch from which you see and experience the world is crucial. The argument for difference - attending to it, learning about it, asking what it can teach us - comes from an insight that there is something to a social location that is consequential. But there is a difference between what I am saying and the ways in which we have often gone about practicing or making the case for identity politics. Regardless of theoretical claims the implicit assumption is often that the relationship between locatedness and understanding is one of correspondence. When we speak polemically it would seem as though, "I am therefore I know." "I am *this* therefore I know *that* and because you are not this you can never know that."

But when you start from the premise that limitation is built into every positionality and that each position is produced relationally - in other words everything is multiply constituted by a number of processes which converge to distill an individual, an identity, a social experience, a location - then what you begin to realize is that socially sanctioned and hierarchized differences are a result of refusing to see the co-constitutedness of each of those positions,

the fact that they are produced relationally. That which you think of as the differences between the genders or the worlds of differences between castes, while they may be true to a degree of the social experience of both because of how society is organized, they are at the same time miasmas and lies. The lies that underwrite segregation and difference are constantly revealing themselves but are not necessarily legible to us or understood by us. When we fail to start with specificity and limitation we drift further and further away from what one might call first principles. We end up taking the language of the social logics of exclusion at face value. It then becomes possible to assert certain things in a definitive way that will not bear careful scrutiny.

Poorva Rajaram: Actually, that's what I want to add to this conversation about locatedness and locating this conversation. I do feel like the historical backdrop to it specifically in India is the secular Left being under attack and lacking the kind of community and cultural power to give people a sense of meaning. That's one aspect of it. And the other is the internal splintering between different strands of identity politics, some online, some have longer histories here. But that's the kind of predicament all of us are in, right? An older leftist mode that didn't acknowledge situatedness that is now under attack and we have to figure out our relationship with specificity and the other stuff Vanessa mentioned about how to live a meaningful life. And I think a lot of our questions are about that. Vanessa do you want to just pick up the questions?

LM: It would help me to know if what I have said relates to your interests, that we are in the same railway compartment.

VC: We are definitely in the same railway compartment! I have always carried this ambition of thinking about the whole in as expansive and as ambitious a

way as I can. There are ways and there are moments when I am able to do that and they are rewarding and there are moments when I cannot see beyond my nose. I'm not sure how to say this but what you've said about the importance of situatedness, about the importance of locatedness and accepting that there is only so much one can see and do and be and that is enough...in ways that I cannot fully articulate right now, it does speak very deeply to the lives from which these questions have sprung. The questions we put forward came from the very particular, individual lives that we've lived and we were tempted to frame them in more general terms. Moving on then, how do we conceptualize our ethical responsibility to the "outer" world? Given that we live in a world that is grossly unjust in many ways, what is "owed" as part of an ethical life?

LM: First, we put "the outer" in scare quotes. There is no definitive separation between the inner and the outer in the sense that the world is first encountered within. And we experience the outer in a very embodied sense, in a way that is at the hinge of the inner and outer. Politics is played out on our bodies in a visible social way. But even in those moments when politics are not being visibly played out on the terrain of our bodies we are experiencing them internally. Therefore, this idea that we are bounded, autonomous individuals who act upon a world that is external to us is part of the problem.

And yet, we cannot collapse the two planes. There is something which can genuinely be named the interior life. You are posing questions from that place, about how to center the inner life as we move in the world. If we start with the premise of indivisibility, that everything is always already related to and connected to everything else and yet there is specificity, say a particular distillation that we can call Vanessa or Poorva or Lata, how then do we think the relationship between the inner and the outer? How do we act when we

know that this is an analytical distinction that is experientially difficult to sustain? Once we accept that these distinctions are misleading yet we need them, are hard to sustain and yet we must be mindful of them, how do we think about what is owed? And to whom do we owe it?

I think that in asking this question we are essentially asking "Why am I alive?" What is the meaning of my life?" This profoundly individual question is not an individualist's question because it is about the relationship of the particular to the general, of the particular to the extra particular, of the particular to the multiplicity of forces that compose the force field in which the individual exists. It is an individual's question but it is not about the individual at all because in asking that question the individual is already aware of interrelatedness, even though our political and even our analytical language does not always come to our assistance in thinking that interrelationship. There are certain notions in modern democracies that are sacrosanct, for example that of the individual as a bounded and autonomous repository of rights. As soon as you move into social or political organizing you have to work with that fiction. Even as you ask the question of meaning you are already complicating that idea of the individual.

So, what is owed? I think if we are aware that the question that we are asking is about *us*, then it becomes clear that we are trying to figure out how we want to move in Creation, in the world, in a way that honors this gift of our existence. That is really what is being asked. And yet when we don't understand that that is what is being asked, we look outside to affirm the value, meaning and significance of each of our actions. We live our lives with reference to some external notion of what is being owed to society because of

one's privilege, one's education, one's capacity to labor in a particular way, one's artistic faculties etc.

It seems to me that when we don't anchor these deeper questions at their source, we start to drift from that dynamic, always replenishing, always fresh inner anchorage point. And we become more and more irritable because we find the answers increasingly insufficient since we are drifting from that very live and complicated center pulsing with desire; the center that is first of all the gift of desire. Life itself is a coming to fruition of desire. If you believe in a Creator you would say that Creation is the expression of the Creator's desire. If you are secular you would at least have to admit that you are the fruit of your parents' desire. At the heart of this question is what Kahlil Gibran describes as "Life's longing for itself." (Gibran, 2000, 17) If we can bring the question back to that center then we can see why our scramble to answer it in terms of owing something to those who are less fortunate than us, to society, to our fellow beings, never quite satisfies. And why if we are not able to ameliorate suffering we are unsure about the purpose of our life. Does it look like I am dodging the question?

VC: It doesn't at all look like you are dodging the question. I think there's a way in which I now realize that trying to pose it in more general terms changed the question. In a sense you are peeling back that layer of the attempt to generalize and going back to the question we were literally grappling with: Here I am and there are things that I know and there are things that I can do and things that give me joy and things that pain me. What do I do with my life, whether that is in politics, in academics, in artistic practice, in something else? What is it of myself that I give to the world and to others? You are digging

behind the attempt to generalize. You are seizing on the question in its original form.

LM: Can you see how we keep going back to specificity and how important it is to honor it? I don't think that a banyan tree wishes it was a palm tree. But humans continually wish we were someone else, something else, somewhere else. We are constantly drifting away from the exquisite and unique specificity of our energy fields, and the particular gift that we each come bearing. Rather than saying, this is what feeds me, this is what nourishes me, this is what makes me wake up ready to go, how can I honor that? Where would I like to take these gifts and apply them? How would I like to develop them or discover them more fully? It may be in the field of politics, in academia, elsewhere.

Imagine the mayhem that would ensue if the rest of nature did what humans did. If the palm tree said I want to be a bird and the bird said I want to be the ocean, can you imagine the chaos that would ensue? That is the kind of chaos to be found in our minds and hearts in the battle between societal expectations, misrecognition of what human existence is, and our own wishes. It is natural and human to wish "otherwise:" if you are sick you may want to be well, if your life doesn't enable you to be an activist as much as you would like, you may suffer that longing. There may be many desires that may be thwarted in life. But if you fundamentally want to change the ground upon which you are taking your place in the human realm you are making it impossible for yourself to thrive.

When I say "you" I mean all these forces, these misperceptions, all these misrecognitions, frameworks that we have come to accept as commonsense ways of thinking about ourselves, human life, human action, collective action.

All these things end up inadvertently muffling the very voice one must pay attention to in figuring out how, when and where we might want to do all of those things that honor the specific gifts each of us brings. We are speaking in terms of the individual because we are speaking about existential things such as the meaning of life. But none of us is an island. Even when one lives alone life is enabled by a host of intersecting social, cultural, material and energetic forces.

The argument then is not individualist. It is to say that even to take our place in the various collectives of which we are a virtual part, a literal part, a material part, a daily part etc. we have to start from the place of being anchored in an increasing understanding of our own isness, our own beingness, our specific vibration, our particularity. And those specificities will range from the individual to much more collective dimensions like caste, class, privilege, dis-privilege, gender, sexuality etc. So, I think that the thing that is owed most is self-discovery. But when you start with the presumption, more accurately recognition of the twin principles, "Out of the one many" & "In the one every," then it can never be a journey or inquiry that is only about yourself. For even your "self" is understood to have been multiply constituted, requiring us to develop a subtler analytical language.

PR: Actually Lata, I think you have anticipated the next question to some extent, the question underneath the first one of how to live a meaningful life, the meaning of our existence. I wonder if I can draw in right now the third question for this session which you had asked me to clarify which is about fatalistic pessimism. We really do feel in our social circles right now that things are so bad that they can only get worse. The question below this one is about our relationship with time and Vanessa and I as historians are very interested in

this. The teleology of the present right now is planetary destruction accompanied by the genocide of various minority populations. That seems to be so thick in the air that it is actually being said to us sometimes, "Live your life expecting this. This is the inevitable outcome." When I say fatalism and pessimism, I mean that. Our reading of social systems tells us that accepting anything else is foolish. This is the writing on the wall so find a way to survive. Also, our generation is really not having children. I think it's that link, find a way to get to the end and don't risk putting other beings on earth in the future. In the question here is something about the coexistence of utopianism and fatalism. That's why I wanted to mention that this does come from all of our hopes for a better world. The question really is how do we live around this? What action comes forward from there?

LM: Here's how I have been taught to think about it. As you know, within the abstractions of what you might call Hindu-Buddhist tantra, the triangle is very important. There are two triangles. Let me name them in the more classical way and then I can also transcode in a language more amenable to you. Dharma-Tantra-Tendential Lines of Force. Adharma-Miasma-Tendential Lines of Force. Let me explain.

When I say dharma, all I mean is living in accordance with the laws of nature: interdependence, inter-relationality, everything being a dependent effect of a dependent cause, dependent co-arising as it is named in Buddhism. The fact that we are facing planetary destruction is because we have acted as though we can ignore this principle. Whenever we act contrary to these principles, discriminating against communities, castes, genders, the rest of nature, we are acting out of a miasmatic understanding and/or reworking of what is otherwise a deep co-implication. By tantra, I mean the world as sentient, matter and the

body as sacred, the senses as a form of intelligence, a love of existence. The tendential lines of force is a concept extended from Marxism. Tendential lines of force tend toward harmonization. As used here, they are the complex of forces that are always correcting so that the laws of nature prevail. Adharma is acting as though the laws of nature can be ignored, negated and violated without consequence. Miasmas are misperceptions of the actual basis of existence and support the illusion and delusion that we can violate every rule and every law and that there will be no consequences to doing so.

An example of this would be capitalists like Elon Musk and others currently plotting to colonize another planet. They recognize that Earth has been wrecked and ruined for human habitation. They are imagining a new kind of feudalism here while they take their money and escape to Mars. This is their miasma. But nature will always prevail. The tendential lines of force will always prevail, always support the fundamental principles on the basis of which Creation was manifested. They will interrupt and trip up miasma, adharma, sectarianism and so forth. Which is why no empire, no authoritarian state, no system of oppression has remained uncontested or survived forever. But because we are so hungry for liberation we can feel defeated by the kinds of Braudelien timelines, some even longer, to which we need to stay open.

That said, in our own lives, in the three of our lives, we have already seen so much change. It is not that there is only one temporality. There are multiple temporalities. The political register, what is happening day after day after day on the front page of our newspapers or reported on news portals dominates to the exclusion of all else. And that is when fatalism can come in. Because we feel we will not be alive when our utopian dreams finally come to fruition. Indeed, we feel our utopian dreams cannot come to fruition because wherever

you look all you see is death, destruction, disrepair, indifference, wanton cruelty.

It is not that all this is not true. But if we think about the fact that the news cycle peddles either in the scandal of human action or in the scandal of human inaction it is really limited in what it covers. If you just step back from what counts as news you realize that if you were to add up every single act of kindness, love and self-love in a day, it far outweighs acts of cruelty. But it is not newsworthy. It is not part of our political discourse. We are waiting till the last baby stops crying. Now, if we are going to wait until the last baby stops crying before we risk taking an outbreath we are very unlikely to be able to do even what we can to remedy and repair, to open hearts and widen minds, to speak the truth. You may consider what I say to be an article of faith. The Left has its own articles of faith but doesn't always cop to them. I am steadied knowing that however modest my impact on the world, however fleeting my life, however uncertain my sense of its meaning, the tendential lines of force will always harmonize and we can learn to work with them.

We have a very bad habit on the Left of feeling that we can only feel our value and our worth if we are constantly pointing to the work yet to be done. And it is a habit that feeds on itself. It may have come from genuine care for remedying the ills of society but it has become a form of narcissism. We are not able to inspire other people to continue to care because they can't keep up with our misery. They don't even know how to cope with the misery of taking this position which is why on the Left at least in India there is so much excessive drinking, so much abuse of self. It's a form of narcissism and it feeds the energy of inertia, what you call fatalism. If you go on the basis that

television and newspapers reflect the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, why would you wake up in the morning? There is no reason to.

Meanwhile the earth is breathing. The earth has a heartbeat. It is breathing. The sky is breathing. Trees are kindly taking in carbon dioxide and breathing out oxygen. People are giving birth, tending each other, taking care of the environment and making things of beauty. These are so many gifts! We are basically treating them as irrelevant in our insistence that one register of what is happening (and I am not saying it is not happening) is the sum total of everything to which we need to pay attention.

We should remember there is a multiplicity of timelines. Some are moving relentlessly and at a velocity that is gathering all of our attention because that's what the political, governmental and media discourse is highlighting. But there are other temporalities. There are multiple temporalities within our bodies alone which means that one day is not like another day. One reason why we push to be out in activist spaces even when we really know we need to go home and rest is because we are not able pay attention to the multiple temporalities that constitute our bodily experience.

Why is it that we care so much about life? It is because we actually recognize that our life is sacred, meaningful, and we don't want to waste these x number of years. We want to do something. But we have an exaggerated sense of the importance of our lives so we feel that if the arc of justice cannot be seen to be bending towards truth, then the entire life is a waste. I think that explains something about the utopianism that is often explicit, often incipient, and the grief and pessimism that also dog that utopian hope. We cannot necessarily see with our own eyes the fruits of our labor. Also, as soon as a problem has

been resolved we simply go on to the next. We don't pause on what has been achieved, what has changed. And a great deal has changed between my generation and yours. A great deal has changed in my own life in ways that I could never have imagined.

To notice both is not to settle for quietism, is not to settle for fatalism. It is about cultivating a consciousness open enough to be able to hold simultaneously the centrifugal and the centripetal: all that brings people together, all that separates, decimates, desiccates, disempowers. We have to have a heart that's strong enough and a mind big enough to hold it all. That is dispassion. And it gives you the inner resources to sustain your passion, to keep walking. So again, your specificity need not be a constraint. Your specificity can enable you to see certain things and in conjunction with the symphony of other human voices you learn to see more. Together our awareness can become more and more subtle. But in order for us to find what can hold our longing (for that's what it is) we can't look to the movements themselves. The movements themselves are only imperfectly and partially narrativizing longing. At the deepest level our longings cannot be contained by them. We need to find a place of rest, an axis upon which we can rest, that is not just the particular expression of longing offered to us by movements. Does that make sense?

PR: Yes, it does. Lata, I found myself latching on to one of the things you said which is that we don't have the vocabulary but in a sense what we feel, or our point of departure, is that our lives are sacred. I think one of the other things in the backdrop of this conversation and this links to the question of temporalities is that a lot of us think in this politicized temporality that often mirrors our own human life. One of things I realize that we haven't thought

about enough is the question of daily life, everyday life. So, bringing these things together, the fact that our lives are sacred and everyday life, there's another set of questions for us there.

LM: Absolutely. This is the problem with the 'outer;' once you have the notion of acting on the outside world, then your domestic space can collapse into something called private and personal and individual. That said one has to be careful not to overstate, right? Many of us in our one room apartments or three-room apartments or whatever try to undo many social expectations. We try to experiment with many ways of being, whether it is sharing labor, childcare, building alternative families or whatever. We are trying to experiment in our own little pods. And this is where tantra is important because it centers the everyday, it centers materiality; it is matter that is the starting point.

This is why in most monastic disciplines what you are first asked to do is sweep, cut vegetables, clean the toilets. That's the work novices are given to do and unless social hierarchies are reproduced institutionally all novices do all of the work. For two reasons. Firstly, it brings you very intimately in relation to that which enables your life and to which you may not have paid any attention. Secondly, it connects you through that process to all the other things that are implicitly part of the texture of your everyday life. As Thich Nhat Hahn says, "If you are poet you will clearly see that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper" (1987, 45) because if it hadn't rained etc. etc. You begin to see those connections, you begin to experience them.

Physical labor is sacred because it enables you to reflect even as you are doing it in a way that mental labor does not. When we engage in mental labor we

usually reflect after the fact on what we've said, what is there or not there. When I am doing something physical, I can be aware of my breath, I can be aware of where the tension is in my body, I can be aware of my relationship to dust, to leaf, to breeze, to sky and so on. Far from it being something "purely mechanical," "merely physical," if done with care and awareness it is the very opposite. It is the gateway to new forms of cognitive understanding. But if you take everyday life seriously, if you do the things you need to with care and attention, you cannot squeeze a lot into every day as activists endeavor to. In order to be dancing with materiality you need to devote time. But we have always hierarchized activity, right? We have always felt that something that is discernibly impacting the outside world is more important. Again, that outside/inside binary; you can see how it reproduces itself over and over and over in so many ways.

PR: Vanessa?

VC: I've nothing to add but I just had a very powerful realization while you were speaking about this kind of culture of the Left of not resting till the work is done and obviously the goalpost of what the work is will shift constantly. And never using these words but I have instinctively thought about the ways in which you are trained to be invested in futures that are not only distant but frankly improbable in one's own lifetime. I think there's nothing wrong in being invested in them but that's often the sole investment that is encouraged, right? In that context often one's capacity for joy, pleasure, for finding meaning outside of the organization, outside of politics, can be treated as a kind of indulgence or as signs of being elite. They can become a lightning rod for all kinds of unstated fears and anxieties.

LM: Indeed. I feel this way of thinking is related to the tendency on the Left to reduce individuals and groups to their social experience. I don't think that peasants, the working class, women or Dalits can be reduced to their social experience and prevailing dominant descriptions of them. There is a longing of love, of life, the will to thrive in every being and that flame cannot be extinguished. It cannot be extinguished even under the harshest of circumstances. Sometimes people find they are broken by harsh circumstances, that is very true. But they are still not reducible to their social ill treatment. And because it is assumed that that is the case, any sign of joy is an affront to the idea that you care about justice. Cornel West, the African American philosopher defines justice as love in public. If you start with love it is another kind of journey.

The other thing I have never understood is that all of our political movements are supposed to incubate the future, to experiment with how we could live in ways other than society at the time in which we are struggling deems we ought to be living. And yet if it is so telos oriented then we have not taken the occasion to conduct experiments in what love could mean, what care could mean. It's a form of capitalist thinking. Capitalist logic is always about telos. It doesn't care about process, it doesn't care about what it destroys along the way. And I think we have unwittingly bought into it. After all Marxism is a nineteenth century philosophy so it shares many of the misrecognitions of the period in which it was born, even though it continues to offer us concepts without which we cannot think.

But you also touch on something we should pay attention to, the deep hunger for recognition by other humans. We can withhold that from each other in our movements because we only recognize certain kinds of difference, or certain

kinds of specificities as important. You hold a mirror to me so if I were to recognize your capacity for joy I'll have to think about why am I so miserable all the time. This is why I feel that it is in the inner that we need to work if we are to change our relationship to the outer world. We do need recognition. But what we are really searching for is to be witnessed as we are, for all that we are. Granted, to be human is to be limited; but somebody who has dealt with their own stuff is more capable of being fully present to you. And if I am present to you even if I can never understand what it means to *be* you there is something about the quality of our interaction, the space in which we hold each other, that means you can relax into yourself.

There was one question you had proposed, about whether it is possible to have some kind of spiritual practice even if you are an atheist. I think you have to have contemplative practices. They can be secular. You have to know yourself, you have to understand how ego is dictating the way in which you are taking a certain position as opposed to another, why you are so determined to crush somebody, what is it about you that they are magnifying that means that they are not allowed to survive, let alone thrive. For all of our so-called bravery for belonging to movements that are against current conventions we can be worse to each other sometimes than our family members are to each other. We have escaped that horrible uncle only to be in some group in which somebody behaves exactly like him!

How can we meet the world in a non-resistant way? It feels as if we leave the house and the world is resisting us, we are resisting it. It's a continual battle, a seemingly agonistic battle. That is how we can often experience it. How can I see Vanessa or Poorva as life's longing for itself, to go back to Kahlil Gibran? This is why the concept of isness is so important to me. Isness is that specific

vibration that defines each thing that is alive and it is both an individual and collective term. We are isness and we live in isness. The more we understand about our isness, the more we are able to see what is specific about our situation and the particularity that is a gift we carry within ourselves and into the world, a gift for the world. The irony is that we all join movements in order not to be conventional. We just insert ourselves into a new set of conventions to belong in them.

VC: We carry so much of the ugliness of the family into these spaces. Also, in the acceptance that just as in the family you will be told that you are loved but also be beaten and mistreated in a number of ways, you develop a remarkable capacity for sticking around in political spaces despite a great deal of abuse. It doesn't strike you as odd that people who claim to be your comrades and fellow travelers will also mistreat you because your family claimed to love you and ill-treated you. There was one thing that you said earlier that I think is so important about how movements narrativize longing but then they only do it partially. I guess the challenge is to participate in collective spaces in ways and to the extent that feel meaningful and possible while remaining true to yourself. Another phrase that you used earlier which I want to remember is the sorrow and the grief when you drift from the live and complicated center that is yourself, the importance of remaining anchored always in that live and complicated center. This is all very clarifying for me.

LM: I think the reason we feel so let down by movements is we invest so much hope, so much optimism, so much of our sense of self in them. Your movement friends become your family in a way. Your friendship networks are sometimes more important than your family networks. And for queer and trans activists this *is* the family sometimes. There is nobody else. This is why we

need to care for each other even when we don't agree with each other. That is something we don't do well.

VC: Can we address the question of privilege? Is acknowledging it enough? Do we accept it, and keep moving along? Or do we do something with/to/around it? Do we think of ways to make it a resource for collective processes of emancipation — including but not limited to political organizing? Essentially, is there a way to 'act' on/about/around privilege without guilt, self-flagellation or pretense?

LM: It goes right back to the first thing we dealt with, specificity. I have to accept my privilege. Acceptance is key. If you do not accept you actually cannot move. I think some of the paralysis and the self-flagellation is because resisting truth is like trying to keep a ball under water. It is the nature of the ball to float to the surface and it takes enormous pressure to keep it submerged. Acceptance brings you face to face with the tapestry of social conditioning that is making you feel entangled and resist what is true. We cannot change unless we begin to accept that this is where/how we have been placed and with it comes this way of thinking, this tendency to be afraid of x, this inclination to feel I am entitled to that etc. etc. If you accept then you can honestly take a measure of how you are and who you are. When we reject the privilege we embody, we are refusing to deal with the social conditioning that makes so many entitlements seem naturally owed to us.

I cannot renounce my class or caste privilege in any simple way. I am located in a particular way in relation to hierarchical principles that structure society. It is something of which I can become conscious. I can work to make sure it does not mediate how I am with my fellow beings. I can learn what I don't know. But

feeling ashamed for the particulars of my birth makes as little sense as my shaming another for their accident of birth in a historical time when their accident of birth is seen to be a disadvantage. We have to accept the things that currently separate and divide us. And we have to accept them in ways that enable us to move towards greater recognition of what that means in context of our fundamental co-implicatedness. And ultimately of our indivisibility. An indivisibility which is continually disarticulated by existing structures and ideological/philosophical frameworks, the kinds of knowledge we have come to accept whether on the Right or on the Left. It is a process. It can be painful to realize what one does not know. The best way to honor the complexity of the world in which we live is to know that each of us has a piece of the truth and we need to learn from each other.

Each of us has something to teach. And we all have the privilege of life. We all have the privilege of loving, of being loved, of having the capacity to love, of wanting to care, of wanting to make meaning in our lives. How much meaning is made on a daily basis in the small and not so small acts that people undertake! I think that is why Devangana Kalita's letter from prison about the rainbow is circulating widely. Our true nature is to celebrate love and to recognize it when we see it and to be moved by it. That letter is an example of that. It doesn't mean that she should be in prison, that any of those people should be in prison. Why am I even having to say that? It is because of a context in which to not also state the but/the whereas/the even so etc. is to leave open the possibility that one is only interested in good news

VC: Or that one isn't serious.

LM: Exactly.

PR: I have a kind of add on question to this. In one recent conversation we discussed being slightly at odds with the contemporary way of dealing with issues in our circles on the question of identity. I suppose what I am talking about is everything we've discussed about how our lives are sacred, we want meaning in it, how do we go about it in a daily way. In our small circles we feel at odds with the movement. There are people we share a lot of things with but perhaps we don't share some things. Perhaps they are a little more what I described as fatalistic or perhaps they genuinely feel when speaking to me that they are reminded of the blindness of my social location. I guess this question is about keeping co-travelers who are similar but different.

LM: I don't think affinity should be sought on the basis of similarity or agreement alone. Affinity should be sought on the basis of care. If you care for the other person and you are concerned that they are only seeing the negative, you offer them the invitation to notice that fact as an act of friendship. And then you let it go. That's a kind of invitational pedagogy, right? That's what we need to practice with each other: an invitational pedagogy based on an ethic of care. This also goes back to the whole question of community and family and all of our senses of betrayal etc. When I first came to feminism I really thought we were all going to grow old together. We were all going to see each other through every trial and tribulation. Some people have done exactly that though that has not been my experience since I moved countries. But often a lot of the ways in which people implicitly keep that pact with each other is on the basis of agreement and, if not that, conflict avoidance; though a vigorous tradition of debate also exists. The other thing is how to accept our friends just as they are. How do we meet another human being without any desire to change them? For those of us who have been in

political movements that's pretty tough. We all desire to change somebody/ everybody even though we ourselves don't necessarily wish to change!

Today we face the stark reality of polarized politics riven apart by miasmas like communalism, casteism, racism, patriarchy etc. As illusory and delusory modes of explanation miasmas distort what is true. But equally they destroy memory, intellect, morality and commonsense. This is why their repertoire is limited, deadeningly repetitive, and impossible to counter with facts. Miasmas are not "analysis" so they cannot be countered with "analysis." It is as though we and those with whom we disagree are ships passing in the night. Perhaps the only things that can undercut or sidestep the impasse are non-ideological acts of love, care and kindness. But love is a discipline. It requires me to respect those who differ from me - not their position - but their humanness. Equally it requires them to respect my difference from them. It has to be reciprocal.

PR: I think what you've just said has really helped me also situate my own journey. If in your 20's you assumed you would grow old with the feminists, in my case it was queer people. Right now, that future is disassembling but of course other things are being born through it. But the tensions have become so micro because there is no master narrative of the Left. For me now I want to go closer to the mothership of feminism but I also don't want that mothership to be too near me. But then broadly speaking that journey of being freed once a particular future is gone, I do feel that also.

LM: Perhaps we should let go of our temporal assumptions. Some connections are meant to be lifelong, some for a decade, others for a few years. They are very authentic while they last and it is fine to let them go. If we are open to whatever process we are in, like your renegotiating your relationship to the

queer community and to the mother lode of feminism, if you are really conscious of it and you open yourself, whoever needs to be with you as you move into the next phase of your life will arrive. Whereas if you try to repair the breach with people who have no interest in noticing that there is a breach, then another future cannot be born. We are constantly reincarnating the past because we are afraid to let go until we can be sure of what will take its place. But unless we let go nothing else can arrive. And we won't recognize it even if it does.

These questions feel urgent because of the times we are in. Capitalist depredation and the neoliberal state have made life precarious. Of course, there are differences of degree and differences of kind. Still, people are overworked and under enormous stress. There are too many demands on them and too much peer pressure thanks to social media. Even more than in the past people are feeling insignificant. Social movements are on the back foot so we cannot always be sure that our life has meaning because we are affiliated with one. We are back to the question of meaning.

Re-sacralizing everyday life, being in the present, this is where we find meaning. The true revolution is in developing an anti-capitalist, pro-matter, love-suffused, care-motivated, body-anchored way of living the everyday. All the while trusting that nature and the tendential lines of force will energize cooperation, collaboration and interdependence and enervate all that resists or opposes these principles. If we can accept and respect gravity it should not be too difficult to also extend both to these laws of nature.

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Bios

Amrita Nandy is a widely published New Delhi-based researcher working on gender, rights and culture. Her doctoral research on women's choices vis-à-vis motherhood and mothering won her the Fox Fellowship at Yale University (2013-2014) and is the subject of her book *Motherhood and Choice. Uncommon Mothers, Childfree Women* (Zubaan and New Text, 2017). Winner of the 2015 Laadli National Media and Advertising Award for Gender Sensitivity, Amrita has a Ph.D. from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and a Master's from the University of Oxford, U.K. In addition to working with human rights and feminist organizations she looks after elderly parents and her many plants, trying to fuse it all with the contemplative-spiritual.

Daniel Forster is an Argentinian doctor. He specialized in Psychoanalysis and applied this knowledge to individual and family treatment in companies, organizations, institutions and political campaigns. In 1999, he began to travel frequently to the East to learn meditation, to Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Bali, Myanmar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, India and Japan. Intending to share his search he founded the [Pali School of Meditation](#) at the Columbia Foundation which he directs. He offers meditation workshops in Buenos Aires, Uruguay and Spain.

Vanessa Chishti is Associate Professor at Jindal Law School, where she teaches history and social theory. She is a historian of and from Kashmir. Her primary research interest is in histories of capitalism and social reproduction. She has in the past been active in radical Left organizations. Her doctoral thesis, 'Articulating Kashmir: Commodity Economy and the Politics of Representation c.1770-1930,' is currently under revision for publication.

Poorva Rajaram was a research student at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. She has just finished a PhD thesis about pensions and life insurance in colonial India. She has been affiliated with feminist and queer groups over the last decade. She co-founded *The Ladies Finger* webzine and her journalistic writing has appeared in *Caravan*, *The Hindu* and *Tehelka*.

Sindhu Thirumalaisamy is an interdisciplinary artist and filmmaker. Her work has centered (un)common spaces of resistance and care within hospitals, parks, streets, kitchens, temples, mosques, and lakes. Sindhu holds a diploma in video production from Srishti School of Art, Design, and Technology. She received an MFA in visual arts from the University of California, San Diego and is an alumna of the Whitney Independent Study Program.

