

# DRINKING DEEPLY

*learning to listen*

*to the song of your soul*

Patrick Oliver

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## *PREFACE*

This is not a self-help book. There are no techniques, few "how to do it" tips, no "become spiritual in forty-two days" proficiency measurements. This book is about listening: it is about eavesdropping on our soul, it is about distinguishing the myriad of voices within us, and it is about reverencing and drinking deeply of the melody of our soul, to contribute to the repair of the world.

The Great Adventure of the spiritual journey is undertaken rarely by choice. Rather, we tend to embark upon it when we are forced to re-evaluate our life paths and directions, and to undertake an exploration of the inner self. Such an adventure is hazardous, sometimes it seems silly, but never is it boring.

*Drinking Deeply: learning to listen to the song of your soul* attempts to chart a map for the journey into relating with God, through contact with our inner spiritual nature. The progress of the journey is communicated mostly non-rationally, because it unfolds not so much through logical reasoning as through symbol and intuition. Because of this, *Drinking Deeply* employs concepts which are expressed in motifs and symbols prevalent throughout religious literature, mythology, and the world of individual dreams. It employs the language of symbol and mythology because such imagery can express unconscious material precisely, and in a manner which we can comprehend.

*Drinking Deeply* is a springboard into exploring the interplay between spirituality and the psyche. It aims to bring together scholarship, experience and reflection, to provide something that can help us (with the grace of God) to be midwives of new life for our own souls, and for others. Rather than another analysis, this work is primarily a synthesis, a weaving together of understandings from varied and differing backgrounds. Such a weaving is not arbitrary, but follows a pattern or framework which I have observed through my experience of companioning others in their spiritual journey.

Much of this book's contents have come from listening to many who have opened their hearts and souls to me, and the pattern seems to be true: that symbols and images are stirred within our deepest self wherein we touch the face of God, to express our truth, our deepest desires, and our yearning - named or not named - to participate in the dance of the divine Lover.

I am grateful to those many people who have helped me with the compiling of *Drinking Deeply*: firstly, I am indebted to my parents, who originally gave me the chance to experience the gift of faith. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to be able to share the journey for many years with my Spiritual Director, Mrs June Davis. I wish to thank the authors Morton Kelsey and John A. Sanford, whose books on spirituality and psychology I have known and loved for many years, and who provided much incentive for my PhD thesis. The wisdom of Fr Richard Rohr OFM has also enriched my journey.

I am blessed to have been able to walk through the years with many who have opened their souls and trusted me with the secrets of their hearts. I have learnt much from their courage. As well, I wish to express my appreciation to Evelyn Brennan, who has offered her wisdom and intuitive discernment regarding the nature of the inner world. Also deserving of thanks are my

students at Australian Catholic University McAuley Campus, who offered their comments and insights during the process which saw lecture material gradually mutate into book form.

Finally, I offer a note of thanks to Fr Terry Madden and members of the Ixθug community for their encouragement, and to those who contributed willingly their insights and their dreams, which serve as illustrations of theory.

As the dawning of the third millennium is upon us, I offer *Drinking Deeply* as a tool to help a little more the lighting of candles of soul consciousness, upon which our world's safe and continued passage depends.

*Patrick Oliver*

Brisbane  
Australia  
Christmas 1999.

A.

STORY

AND

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

## Why Stories?

*"The heart has its own reasons which Reason does not know; a thousand things declare it ... Do you love by reason?"*

- Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)<sup>(1)</sup>

*"The more I am by myself, and alone, the fonder I have become of myths."*

- Aristotle (384-322BC)<sup>(2)</sup>

In the bowels of the earth at Lascaux, France, flickering torches illuminate evidences of tribal gatherings from ten millennia ago. Haunting rock etchings over a thousand generations old at Riversleigh Downs in far North-Western Queensland stand as silent sentinels of myth and folklore. Generations have come and gone, but their magic is arrested and suspended in time.

Myths have been with us from the dawn of recorded history. Whenever tribes clustered, there the tales emerged to illustrate the insights of the group, and to impart a sense of significance. Such evidence across the world proclaims the human craving to construct stories.

### ***TELLING STORIES***

Many may understand the word "myth" to mean "made up" or "false" - for example, *it is a myth that the moon is made of green cheese*. To suggest that some biblical stories may be myths can create unease and extreme reaction in some quarters, and a wealth of time, energy and money has been spent in attempting to prove or disprove the historical truth of some of these stories. Questions such as whether the Red Sea parted in a certain fashion, whether the world was created in six days, or whether Noah's Ark rests upon Ararat have been subject to protracted and unending debate.

This book bypasses such minefields, for it is not interested in the scientific inquiry *"Are biblical stories factually true?"* Rather, there will be asked the more human questions: *"How does this story affect me?"* and *"How are the scriptures within me?"* There will be reference to the *cura animarum*, the curing or healing of souls, which ensues when we can listen and respond to the forgotten song of our soul.

We all operate from a mythology - even if our mythology is that there is nothing in which to believe. It has been my personal good fortune to be immersed in the Christian story of the historical Jesus who lives and dies in Palestine twenty centuries ago, and whose life the Gospel writers wish to firmly embed and entwine within the genealogy of human history. The Christian soul-story is alive for me because I and many who have gone before me have realised that its consistent power lies in its *profound* truth: that is, not because simply this or that happens to have been factually true in the first century CE, but because its persistent melody echoes within human hearts down the centuries.

The presentation of symbolic material in this book is not an attempt to explain away God's reality as simply "psychological"; rather, the life and love of God within our soul or deepest sense of self reflects the reality of the Lover. With many varying names through the centuries (such as the Greek *daimon* or the Egyptian *ba*), the lighthouse that is the human soul can enable the reflection - admittedly dim - of the face of this divine Reality. In this way, the commandment of Jesus to "*must love the Lord your God with your whole heart*" becomes not an imperative but something we cannot *not* do: we then cannot help but love, because we sense the pulse of this Lover's presence and vibrant energy within our soul.

This story of the dying and rising God becomes personally enlivening as we discover a similar refrain in the waning and waxing of our own life rhythms. It would be absurd to suggest that since this motif seems to be stamped within our very soul, and is reflected in the great religious stories of every age, then this annuls the central facet of Christianity, namely the Paschal Mystery, or the dying and rising of Christ (which in this book will be called *life-after-losses*). Rather, it serves to underscore its *perennial reality*, for the Paschal Mystery did not remain an intuition, but was and *is* a physical taking-flesh and surrendering of God in human history: an incarnation never to be revoked. The embrace of the spiritual and physical worlds, which Christian faith recognises as having occurred in Jesus, can also transpire within our soul. The melody of the story of the Saviour has reverberated through history; countless millions have shared the symphony of a song similar to that of the Singer - a symphony that allows the rediscovery and nurture of our soul back into full health.

### ***SHARING SOUL-STORIES***

In the lofty mountains of the Phaedriades near the Greek village of Delphi lie the ruins of a magnificent temple. For centuries before the birth of Christ, public leaders and private individuals came to consult the Delphic Oracle through highly elaborate rituals. Whether within Greece, or within the majestic Hypostyle Hall of Rameses II at Karnak, Egypt, or through the initiation rituals of the Australian aborigines, humans have displayed their irresistible need to celebrate seasons of significance for the individual, the group, and the society.

Soul-stories are remembered and retold because some significance is imparted in their retelling: they become hooks for us, in that through them we sense that we are like characters in the story, or perhaps that we *need* to be more like them: we drink from the same well. These stories evolve by interweaving what later generations may see as helpful within an unfolding culture. Thieving a people of relationship with their symbol system can deny them a connection to their pattern of meaning - as the numerous deaths in custody amongst jailed Australian aborigines and other native peoples may suggest.

When society surrenders contact with genuine soul-stories, a valuable window into transcendence becomes lost, for we forget who we are. Mere information becomes confused with knowledge, knowledge of facts is labelled as learning, and accumulation of learning is mistaken for wisdom. Why is it often assumed that others will *reform*, if not be *transformed*, simply because we have *informed* them? Purchasing more computers for schools to access the profusion of data on the Internet can be erroneously labelled the pursuit of "knowledge", yet an encyclopaedic collection of learning does not necessarily make us any more discerning or sagacious.

Wisdom comes not from increased education, but from deeper *eduction*, or the ability to catch the strain of one's soul melody. Losing connection with soul-stories means that there is an unplugging from deep wells of wisdom; the symbolic, which supplies a sense of significance, becomes diluted into an excess of signs that are empty of soul. Stories of genuine heroes are swapped for the titillation of tinsel celebrities, and the richness of symbols is switched for the trinkets of trademarks.

When we visit the movies and discover ourselves shedding a tear or two, when we find we must read our favourite book over and over, or even when a particular advertisement on television fascinates or arrests us, it is a sure sign that connection with the inner self is being activated. Themes of journey, struggle, love, hate, selflessness, victory and being vanquished possess power to engage and entice us at deep layers of our being, by waking and enlivening relationship with our dormant and drowsy soul. Perhaps a certain place "speaks" to us by resonating with our spirit, or a certain environmental season connects us with a season of soul-life.

These patterns of energy cluster and constellate around images, like iron filings surrounding a magnet. The images are then painted in myths, and celebrated within ritual. The creativity of ritual has conferred upon countless millions the opportunity to elevate their sleeping spirits, and to sink their souls into wordless wonder and reverent regard for that which is most authentically human.

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