

THE EXPERIENCE OF PSYCHOSIS

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The author of the following article has suffered from periodic episodes of major mental illness requiring hospitalizations of varying lengths for over twenty-five years.

There are many opinions as to the nature of psychosis. Unfortunately, most of them are mistaken and have nothing whatever to do with psychosis. Psychosis has come to mean everything from an imaginative idea to a war between nations. The terms we use synonymously for someone in psychosis include "lunatic," "maniac," "madman," and "killer." In fact, psychosis has nothing to do with differences of opinion or with fighting, and it has nothing to do with murder. Psychosis refers to a state of mind in which one has literally lost touch with consensual reality; it is a state of being out of ordinary reality. To be in a different reality is one thing. To be in a different reality and be psychotic is another. Psychosis may be thought of as an "in-between," incomplete reality, perhaps even a reality in process. It is in this nether region that psychosis is found. Thus, psychosis is a state of being "out of" reality.

But, we might ask, *is* there a state of being that is not in a reality? Where could this person be if he or she is "out" of reality? If we describe psychosis as being "out of reality," we may be saying to someone, "You are out of it," i.e., I am not; therefore, you are incorrect and I am correct.

It would be a great advance indeed if we could refrain from

judging psychosis and instead redefine it as a legitimate reality of its own. It is not the work of the devil, the work of God, or the subversive ideas of a political dissident. If psychosis were accurately defined, we who experience it would not be subject to random categorization. We would no longer be thought of as unpredictable, dangerous, or deranged, nor devil-possessed, special, or mystical beings with an ability delegated by God to visit other realms of reality. We would stop being subject to anyone's projection of reality. We would stop being scapegoats for society's failure to take responsibility for its own problems and failed hopes, and we would stop being idealized by individuals who are disappointed in their own reality.

If we can define psychosis more carefully, we can stop imposing our misconceptions on it and see it for the reality it is. We can come to some understanding of the truth of psychosis and why it causes problems for those of us who experience it, regardless of what reality we otherwise experience.

Psychosis is characterized by a loss of consciousness of the self, such that we can no longer discern our relationship to even our physical bodies. It is almost as though we have astral-projected. This would not be so dangerous if it had not happened inadvertently, without consciousness, and if we could have provided for our body which then goes on without us. It wanders aimlessly. It does not know to eat or drink or use the toilet except by reflex. It does not know to keep warm in the cold. It does not know how to avoid attack by violence. It does not know to protect itself from fire and deep water and the traffic that races down the highway. And its brain wanders equally without aim. It speaks in random and fragmented language. It hears voices from the myriad of sub-personalities or characteristics that occupy our subconscious mind, since we are not there to fill in the personality space where we belong. And the brain comes up with fantastic ideas about who we might be, since we are not there to correct it. Perhaps we are the Queen of Hearts. Perhaps we are a messenger from an-

other planet. Perhaps we are Jesus Christ himself. And why not?

The psychotic brain distorts the reality of the senses. Is this burner hot or cold? Is this coat wet or dry? Is this chair a chair, or what exactly is it, and for that matter, what in the world are you? Maybe bugs are jumping out of my mind and onto that wall over there. Maybe there's a current coming up from the earth and into my feet trying to pull me in. My brain can think of every combination of possibilities, for it has a nearly infinite number of choices. It has all it has ever experienced, all the sounds, sights, sensations, dreams, fantasies, and nightmares. Indeed, it is a reflection and an integral part of the collective unconscious.

When "I" am present, my brain understands its world by means of the emotions that are available to select from. But in psychosis, I am not there to add discernment, wisdom, and awareness based on what I have learned. My brain goes haywire. It has no one to guide it. No captain, no helm, and no rudder. It has no fingers at the keyboard. It wanders through its inner spaces like a steel ball that bounces at random off arbitrary bumpers in a pinball machine.

What is this "I" that is gone and where did it go? It is consciousness. It is awareness. It is the presence of the I in me. It is ego. It is my separation. It is the part in me that tells the difference between me and the world. It is the "I-ness" that holds me upright like a spine, and says, "You will not fall into this tree or this song or this ocean of water or air, and it will not fall into you." The I that is gone is the intelligence that says I am me, and you are you. It is the awakening of the little child ego to the mechanism that helps us define boundaries. In this way, we become differentiated from the world so that we learn to recognize reality. We step back so that we can see what we're looking at. Till then, we remain in wholeness. As we grow into our lives, we step away from the whole so that we can have a life to grow into. So this "I" is the entity through

which we can recognize and enjoy our life experience. This is the attainment of true wholeness—when we move away from the whole to become separate. Once we are fully conscious of our separateness, then we are able to see that in fact we are not divided, but are a part of the greater whole.

Where has my “I” gone in psychosis? It has gone into oblivion. In a way, it has been taken back. It is blocked from the light, just as if it never existed. This is the dysfunctioning of the brain. This is the part of the brain that closes down in psychosis, just as the liver or kidneys or heart closes down in certain illnesses of the body. The psychological system through which we reason and interpret the symbols of life ceases to function correctly. It is as though we have become short-circuited. We may resemble a robot gone haywire, stepping forward and backwards over and over in repeated motions, the sound of nonsequiturs flatly projecting from somewhere in the region of the head, without connection, without resonance, without life.

During this time of psychosis we may experience hallucinations of sound or taste or touch. We may smell strange odors or see bugs, or snakes, or dark forms lurking in our peripheral vision. Or we may become deluded and think that the breeze blowing a leaf down the street is a leaf actually coming after us, rushing down upon us to attack or to get inside our mind. And why not? If we cannot discern correctly, how could we know the leaf’s intentions? It seems logical to us. The leaf is moving rapidly, directly for us. “Well,” one might say, “Anybody could make that mistake.” Yes, anybody could, momentarily, especially under the right circumstances, such as on a dark, stormy night, for example, or when walking in a dangerous part of town. But when we realize it is only a leaf in the wind, our fear is dispelled. In psychosis, however, the brain cannot co-ordinate its information. We see a projectile streaming toward us. We do not know it has no life of its own. And why would it be racing toward us like a weapon if it did

not mean to attack? And listen to it! The noise of it! It is so loud. We can't bear it. It's a cutting sound, a grinding. It is so raw, like a giant shovel being dragged across concrete.

Perhaps we see a metal object—a door lock or a light fixture—and fancy it is a transmitter that listens in on our thoughts and takes them away. Perhaps we have a glass of Coke and suddenly sense a monster lurking inside the dark liquid. It wants us to drink it so it can live in our body or strangle us with tentacles as it reaches our throat.

We know there is danger in the world, but we don't know what is dangerous and what isn't. I am afraid when the train I am on goes too fast. Its speed pushes against me and takes my air. It's going to make me disappear. It's taking me away! I can't breathe. And when the train slows, everything stays perfectly still. What does it want? What is it going to do? I can't move. The door is too far away, and I will never get out. There is too much space in the way. There is a universe of space between me and the door. If I could just float across the ground I could reach the door. But the ground is so far away. Look, I am so big, as tall as the sky! Wait, I hear a voice crying. It's a high crying, like a child on a ride at the carnival. The cry—it's so close, it's in my head. It, it. I? And where am I?

In my novel, *The Common Loon*, the main character, Cooper, has become quite ill and is taken to a place where her doctor hopes she can stay.

“Standing outside the back door that day at St. Charles House...the colors were so vibrant I was astonished. It was as though I had never seen color before. The air was so clear that I could see it. I moved my hand through it as if to scoop it up. The whole scene had been created just for this event, just for me to walk into. It had been taken out of reality and set up here. I looked at the trees, but I could not put the word ‘tree’ together with what I saw. A staff person asked me if I was seeing things. ‘Seeing things?’ I thought, ‘What things?’ But then something distracted me. It was the leaves rustling in the breeze. The sound filled my ears, and I covered them with my hands, for I felt like a loose target in a shooting gallery. I watched the leaves, but I could not

keep track of them, and felt they were living things that meant to descend upon me and I would be battered like a branch against a window in a storm.

The woman asked me if I was hearing things. She spoke as if from a great distance, and I could not fathom her words. I could not interpret their meaning. I felt the leaves of grass twist under my feet and settle. I had broken their backs.

‘What is this place?’ I asked. ‘What are you?’

She said something but I could not decipher it. Other voices came into my head. Was there a crowd nearby? I looked around.

‘Would the sins that thou abhorrest, O soul! could thus decay and be swept away,’ the voices cried in my head. ‘Kyrie, Eleison.’

I looked at the woman next to me. Her eyes were large with fright. How could I tell her that I was seeing the same things she was seeing, but she wasn’t seeing the same things I was seeing? She didn’t know this scene was here just for now, that it had been inserted into reality like an extra frame being spliced into the reel. How could I tell her this was an alien world and I did not know if it was I or she who was strange?”

In this case, Cooper’s ability to decipher reality is impaired. She cannot quite put it together. It is as though things have lost the properties that can predictably describe them. You and I know that leaves fallen from a tree do not act independently, and that they are fragile and wondrous creations. But Cooper felt the life of the tree transferred to the fallen leaves. For her, in this psychotic state, life was spilling out of its containers. She was sensitized and felt the life-energy of the tree. She felt the life of the leaves of grass under her feet, and she felt that that life had consciousness. To have such a connection with life is a wonderful and enviable awareness. It is this relationship between ourselves and the life of the earth that we are currently becoming more aware of the need to restore.

But in psychosis, such connection to life is not a communion, where we remain ourselves and a tree remains a tree, where we can care for the tree and affirm our respect for the preciousness of its life, just as we do our own. Rather, in psychosis, physical reality breaks down. The boundaries between the tree and ourselves become distorted or disappear altogether. This does not mean that we cannot see the tree, or the

chair, or the vase sitting on the table. It means we don't know what they are. Further, not only can we not identify them, we cannot fathom them. It is not as simple as putting a row of objects in front of a child and pointing to each one, saying "apple, orange, peach, banana." The child has a sense of reality. The child is in reality. But in psychosis, we do not get the reality of the apple. We cannot *get to* the apple in order to explore its properties.

The apple is not simply a new object that we want to examine, in order to see how it is different from other objects. For us, its very physical reality is in question. What is this shape? What is this color? Not which color is it, but what is this phenomenon of color? What is this texture? What is this weight? Not how much is this particular weight, but what is this sensation of weightness? What is this depth? Maybe it's *here* that I am. Am I in here? Is this object passing or will it remain? What does this object mean to me? Is this real? Where is it from? I cannot pin it down. As soon as I begin to "get it," I have to start all over again. My painting keeps falling from the frame. The frame's not working. I thought there was a frame, but there is no frame at all.

In psychosis, we are not like Joan of Arc talking to her Saints Katherine and Stephen and Margaret. We are not like Saint Francis of Assisi talking to the birds and little animals that surrounded him, nor are we like flower fanciers and farmers and scientists who talk to their plants to help them grow strong and beautiful. Instead we wander out of context, not knowing the difference between what is real and what is not. It is three-dimensional, everyday reality that we cannot traverse, that we are "out of." In most cases, we are not totally oblivious. We have some consciousness in this reality. We can see and feel and hear. But we don't know where the "I" is that is doing these things; therefore, we are not with ourselves to convey that the wind is only the wind, that it is only the wind that is blowing the trees on the shore and the tides of the sea, and not

some malevolent force that means to harm us, to do away with us.

Yes, we anthropomorphize reality, because we experience it that way. We feel it, but we do not have the ability to interpret it. When this occurs, our subconscious mind rises up, with all its unsorted and indistinguishable fears and conclusions, and becomes loose in our world, without us there to control, shape, and discern. We become scared. This is the fear of not knowing who we are and who we are not, and what the things around us are and are not. It is the fear we see in our loved ones and friends with major mental illness who are experiencing psychosis. It is this same fear that creates paranoia, and why not? Paranoia is a way of giving form and meaning to fear that we cannot identify. It brings us into the picture, even if the picture is not real.

In psychosis it is not only selected objects whose reality we cannot perceive, but all objects, all matter, and all space. All that we perceive is out of reality, including our own body. We know no more about our body than anything else. Where is our consciousness then? We cannot tell. This is a terrifying situation. We cannot tell location, distance, or depth. We have lost the thread. Our anchor has come loose. It is not as though *we* are okay but everything else is not. We are included in being out of reach. The only thing left is awareness. We are like a paramecium in its bed of fluid, flinching at each bit of light, withdrawing from each tiny bump as if to double up on itself.

So, we attempt to approximate reality. We get approximately dressed. We eat food approximately. We apply make-up approximately. We behave approximately. We put our words together to speak approximately. These things we do with the help of the anti-psychotic drugs, the dopamine blockers. Without medication, the hallucinations and delusions can become so bad, that is, our loss of reality is so complete, that we cannot make any sense of it whatsoever. The medication allows us to approximate, so we can at least pin the tail some-

where on the donkey and not on the living room drapes. We can make a phrase. We may not be able to make two phrases that relate, but we can relate words to the idea of communication. We know that clothes go on our body. We may not know about size or color or style, or that it's summertime now and we don't want to wear a wool cap, but we can put the clothes together with the region of the body. And we can pick up a tube of lipstick and know that it relates to the region of the face. What we can do, essentially, is approximate reality.

Psychosis is like seeing the world through a tank of water, or waking up one morning in the fun house. The floor is higher under one foot than the other. We look at a picture on the wall and we see through it to a strange woman sitting at a weaving machine. We look in the long mirror and our body is distorted beyond recognition. We speak and our voice echoes as if we were in a deep chamber. Suddenly we don't know how to move. We are standing at the top of three steps, and we step forward, but forget to step down, and so we fall over. We sit up and look back at the steps, frowning, as if they were an aberration of nature. It begins to dawn on us that this place is full of tricks. As the day wears on, at some point we become aware that the biggest trick of all is that there's no way out. Our anxiety compounds itself as all that once was solid falls before our eyes like fragments of glass from a shattered window. We pause. Is this an event or—wait, I see. I look beyond. Is this life? There, the trees, the traffic, people walking down the street. No, yes, I'm afraid "this place" is life.

This reality, this "other" reality, is in truth not another reality. It is this reality gone awry. Sometimes we think the reality of psychosis must somehow be okay. We may assume a very modern perspective, saying to our psychotic friend or client or child, "You're okay. It is not up to me to judge your reality." Or we might say, "You should just relax with your psychosis. You could really find out something new about yourself." Or, "Maybe those voices are spirit guides." Or "maybe they're

ascendent masters who want to be channelled. You, too, could be the voice of Ramtha or Lazaris, or someone equally important." Or we might simply say, "I know your psychosis has meaning. After all, medicine men and women go into psychosis voluntarily to get privileged information from the nether regions which they bring back to help others. Maybe you are our medicine people, and you have such a hard time because we don't recognize you for what you are."

While this is expressed somewhat facetiously, many people take such ideas seriously. Regardless of conjecture over the purpose or use of psychosis, those of us who experience it are not impressed. From our point of view, this illness is dreadful. We are in a place of infinite danger where we are terrorized by the continual lack of substance. There is not a single thing we can count on, and in our vulnerability, we are never, ever safe. We are subject to a myriad of dangers each moment from the outside world—exploitation, rape, robbery, death from exposure, disease, malnourishment—and from the inside world we face destructive delusions that may lead us to injury or death.

In a chapter from *The Common Loon*, Cooper is sitting in front of a fireplace, and the coals begin to speak to her. A voice in the coals says, "I am the one. Take me."

"Then I knew what to do," Cooper said. "I took the iron shovel next to the poker and placed its mouth at the edge of the offspring coal that had fallen. Gently I lifted it, and it pulsed red and orange and blue."

"Yes," said the voice, "hold me, I will show you."

"Again I lifted my right palm," Cooper continues. "I got to my feet as I remained fixed upon the sight of it. I walked to the back door and went out. The rain fell, and I looked into it. I dropped the coal from the shovel into my right hand and stepped into the rain. My chest collapsed with the searing, and I fell to my knees. I heard a drop of rain sizzle into the coal. I braced my palm with my left hand, and another drop sizzled. Then another came, and another. Then there was no sound and my head was bowed."

"I had cried out into the night," she goes on, "and my eye sockets had filled with water. My mouth held wide so I would not be cut off at the throat. I did not look at my palm but got to my feet and went into the fireplace. The voice

said, 'Here, here is the core. Here I am.' The voice offered me the nucleus, the space within the nucleus from which I could look out and from which place nothing could ever be hidden."

The voice in the coals goes on to direct Cooper to burn her hand more and more until she finally falls to the ground in the rain. As she finds her breath, she feels the heat from her hand and vomits from the stench of her burning flesh. She remains a long time, lying in the rain until it becomes gentle and the voices diminish. Then she begins to chill. She returns to the fire, and the voices are no more. She holds her hand against her breast and begins to rock, forward and back, like a child with a fever who slips into vague dreams of warm and churning water.

Psychosis is an expression of an illness that takes life away. It is an illness through which life is virtually lost. Psychosis is not another reality. It is a no-reality, a place of no beauty, no joy, no depth, and no sustenance. It is the place of depletion itself, a void. It is the antithesis of life. It is the origin of the idea of hell. Psyche, being mind or soul, is the fulfillment of life. Psychosis is the loss of life, of soul.

Psychosis is not an adventure—it is a horrendous, monstrous experience. Its message is not that it has something special to tell us, but that the answers are to be found in ordinary life. That is where we find beauty, truth, fulfillment, infinite wonder, the mysteries of the universe. The message in psychosis is that the way to wellness is through life, through reality.

Let us be clear about the nature of psychosis. The mind has vast, untapped potential—we might even call it infinite potential. Like life, the mind is always growing. It is capable of forming endless combinations of our perceptions as we experience reality. It is capable of either direct or intuitive knowing. When the brain, being the vehicle for our mind, our consciousness, fails us in psychosis, and the "I" is derailed, the ongoing story loses its context. It wanders here and there, this way and that, because it has lost its narrator. The story that

was forming is suddenly jostled, and comes apart like a jigsaw puzzle in a million pieces.

It is not as though we have been invaded by beings outside ourselves, from other realms or planets, angels trying to help us or demons trying to destroy us. We have our demons and angels within our own consciousness. We have our own voices to channel. In psychosis, these voices come uninvited. We do not sit and meditate and welcome entities to use us. We are invaded, imposed upon as if a thief has broken into our home, pushed us aside, eaten our food, broken our belongings, and is sleeping in our bed.

Psychosis enters through a crack in the door of our brain. It lets out the fear that has accompanied us on our journey of life, that we let go of when we no longer had use for it, or repressed when we were unable to work through it. Fear, in the most positive sense, protects and teaches us; in psychosis, however, fear comes at us from every direction. We don't know which thing to fear first, because we have lost the meaning of everything. Our fear sensors work in full force, not knowing how to proceed. Our brain has ceased to perform that function for us, to say, "Okay, this leaf is just a leaf, this vase is just a vase, this wind is just the wind, this person is just a friend." Consequently, our anxiety reaches an unbearable level. There is nothing we can count on; nothing that remains the same.

Our hallucinations, the voices we hear, and our delusions are the result of our mind's attempt to deal with reality. They are its way to protect us. Our fear is like a frantic mother trying to put things together for us. She grabs everywhere, at anything, thinking, "Maybe this goes here, maybe this will help, maybe this word goes with this phrase, maybe this idea fits together with this one." She is building a fortress against an oncoming army of unreality. Thus, she builds a monster of defense. She can turn into any shape and any idea. She can be anything in our vast store of imagination. She can be rats, bugs, snakes, or people we've known or imagined, feared, or

dreamed. She can be the devil. She can be Jesus Christ. She makes up the story of our psychosis. She is our paranoid delusions and grandiosity, and she will become as elaborate as our mind can allow.

If, for example, in my delusion, the soles of my feet become so sensitive that I can't bear to put them on the ground, I may begin to think, logically enough, that an electromagnetic force coming up from the earth wants to enter my body. Perhaps, then, it also wants to enter my mind. It steals my thoughts when I put my feet on the ground. I cannot be talked out of it, because I know it's true. I feel the force with my feet. It is real! It is my experience. It is not a story I make up. I have evidence. I feel my thoughts being pulled away. They buzz through my body with a force. My logic is impaired because my brain cannot put the puzzle together more correctly.

Or perhaps my mind follows a different delusion and I become queen of the world! Who or what could get me then? How could I not be real, if I was queen of the world? And why not? If I am nobody, I might as well be queen of the world. She is surely fearless. She is surely guiltless. She is surely somebody.

When delusions come to us for our defense, to reduce our fear and assuage our guilt, they are false beliefs, that have no sense of proportion, because we have lost ourselves altogether. It is in this state that we become unsafe to ourselves and possibly to others. In psychosis, when we damage ourselves or others, it is the result of a deranged idea; we believe that we are fighting for self-preservation. Such damage is a way to receive retribution for imagined wrongs, or to pay for them. This is the mind run rampant, without us there to manage the reins. This does not mean that we, ourselves, are delivering or receiving punishment, because we are not there. We are out of reality. Our mind, left alone without us, puts such ideas together.

Cooper, hearing the voice of the coals, burns her right hand with fire. The voices, like a chorus, indicate that this is good. This is what must be done. It may be that Cooper's mind felt that it should seek retribution for her, for something she may have thought she had done. Fire, being a symbol for purification, would renew her, make her clean, as her spirit wished to be. The choice of the right hand would also be logical, that hand being the instrument of the deed, and also the strongest, the one most deserving of being struck down. In the consciousness of Cooper's mind, the symbolism of the hand is clear: the hand of the thief being cut off in fulfillment of the law, the bloody hand of Lady Macbeth, the religious idea of cutting off the hand that sins, the hand in the cookie jar, the hand in the till, the hand raised to the face to ward off blows that hurt and humiliate.

While psychosis is manifested in very individual ways, according to each person's store of psychological constructs, a biochemical breakdown in the brain is the source of it. Psychosis is an agony, for there is no torture more effective than that invented in our own brain. The diseased brain stops at nothing in its attempts to re-balance, to make things right, to restore us to a condition in which we can survive. This is its job. It will break down its own house, reality, if it fails to recognize it. It will break it down in an attempt to find it. Psychosis might be said to be the cancer of consciousness. Like an illness of the body that results in monstrous growth, so the mind, from mental illness, grows into psychosis, a monstrosity of consciousness.

In relating to someone who is experiencing psychosis, it is crucial (it may be a matter of life or death) to deal with the illness at the source. This means providing the right medication, in the right dosages, and with adequate side-effect medication. Above all, it means treating the ill person with the concern we would feel for anyone who is critically ill. But since we are dealing with someone whose perceptions are out-of-reality,

there is with psychosis a special challenge—to give up fear of their world that seems so alien to us. When we give up fear, we can begin to give up judgment. We are free then to open our eyes, to look inside, and perhaps to catch a glimpse of that person's world, to see the extraordinary pain and terror there. We can then provide a sense of reality that must come from deep within ourselves, from a place that is loving and solid and clear. We want to be absolutely confident in the reality we experience, so that we are not intimidated by the psychotic person's fragmented experience. We accept it as the reality that they are experiencing. We can give up the need to convince a person in psychosis that their way is wrong and ours is right. We cannot talk our ill ones out of psychosis any more than we can talk their neurotransmitters out of imbalance. We must be willing to go to them, to look at them, to touch them, to connect with them through our eyes and our hands. It is in this way, through love and fearlessness, that our ill ones can find something solid in a world that is hopelessly disorganized and disintegrating.

In *The Common Loon*, Cooper describes another patient, David. "Sometimes in response to his voices he would pound his head against the wall. By the time someone reached him, he might be unconscious. Having fallen into a sitting position, he would pound the wall with his head and grab it with his hands at the same time. He would try to bring the wall to himself as if he meant to cling to it. He would be screaming, 'David, David, David, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you.'"

"One day," Cooper continues, "she hears someone screaming. It goes on and on until it finally registers with her that it must be David. She was near to his room and went to his door. She says, 'I saw something I had never seen on the ward. Mrs. Harrington had pried David from the wall and was holding him. She cradled him, and his head bled against her chest.'"

"Never before," Cooper said, "had I seen a staff person embrace a patient. David cried and whimpered softly, 'I hate you, I hate you.' Mrs. Harrington held him tightly and stroked his frail shoulders, and said to him, 'It's alright, David. Look, it's me. I'm here. You're going to be alright now.' And David heard Mrs. Harrington. His crying subsided, his mind became still, and his

body came to rest. He laid there against her like a child in a feverish delirium, and was comforted until they came to take him away.

For those of us in the midst of psychosis, if we can see two strong and friendly eyes that look at us as if to say, "Wherever you are is okay"; if we can hear a voice that is assured, calm, and patient, speaking and listening to us as if we are really there; and if we can feel a hand that touches us with confidence and awareness, that knows it is real and conveys to us trust; then we may be able to feel a little bit safer, a little less lost, in a greater world that deceives us at every turn. Our heart is then able to connect with another's, which is speaking to us, saying, "Here I am; I am not a trick; I am not an illusion. I will be an anchor, a lifeline, in this sea of storms."