

Raven's Appearance

The Language of Prophecy

Peter Kingsley

[*Editor's Note:* This piece has been adapted from a presentation by the author at the 2003 Conference on Language and Spirituality in Albuquerque, New Mexico.]

When I was invited to come here, to this conference, I agreed because I felt there was an inner need. That need has to do with the essential nature of dialogue.

This conference has been designed to bring out the best aspects of dialogue, the most positive aspects. But one particular aspect of dialogue is that it already implies a duality. Dialogue involves me and someone else—which is a duality—and then we gradually try to overcome that duality through interaction and listening and discussion. But often this process is slow and deceptive. There can be agreement between both sides or parties; or there can be disagreement. And yet there is no oneness.

From my point of view any formal dialogue between Native American traditions and modern Western science, such as the one we are engaged in here, is bound to remain at the level of duality and dichotomy. The only real way, as far as I am concerned, to get beyond this

dichotomy between different positions is to find the third point which creates a triangle that includes those two points but also brings them into harmony and interconnectedness by joining them at a deeper level.

That third point is the origins of the Western world and, ultimately, of modern science. Certainly that point of origin lies in the past. But at the same time, quite mysteriously, it also lies here and now because in reality the origin of everything—including time—is now.

This question, of the origins of the West, is my work and has been my work for over thirty years. During that time I have been drawn with increasing intimacy into an understanding that those origins have to do not just with the past but also with the present and with the future. They concern us far more than we realize. But as for what actually happened at the origins of the Western world we think we know so well: this is no longer remembered or understood.

Let me give you just one example. Earlier in today's dialogue the issue of logic came up. And the name "Parmenides" was also brought up in connection with this issue. Parmenides lived before Plato, before Aristotle. It

is no secret that he is generally known as the founder or father of logic. But we are also in a position now to know things about him which have been totally hidden for thousands of years.

A little while ago archaeological discoveries were made in his hometown. And it turns out, although there is sadly almost nobody today who wants to know about these matters because the implications are so far-reaching, that he was a priest of Apollo (the Greek god whose sacred bird was the raven) who specialized in other states of consciousness and in accessing the world of oneness; that he was a prophet, a messenger on behalf of the gods, who was given the divine ability to reveal hidden aspects of the past and present and future which nobody else is aware of; that he was a healer who worked, among other things, through the interpretation of dreams. It is common knowledge that Parmenides, celebrated as the founder of Western logic, para-

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doxically presented this famous logic of his in the form of a poem—in the meter of sacred poetry. But what is not understood is that he brought logic into the Western world from another world. And he brought it as a gift from the gods which was meant to take us back to the gods.

Parmenides is only one part of the whole picture, though. Not only he, but also other people around him who lived at roughly the same time, brought into existence the groundwork for what could be estimated at being well over ninety percent of Western culture. And they brought it in as a gift. I am talking not just about logic but also about all the fundamental aspects of Western science, from cosmology and astronomy through to the roots of psychology.

There are many, many things that I learn and have learned from these Greeks who lived two and a half thousand years ago. But the key, the one most important thing, that I have learned from them is that there are two ways of talking—just as there are two different ways of perceiving.

There is the profane way of talking, which is to talk *about* things. And if you care to notice, you will see that in the modern Western world we always talk *about* something. There is the word; then there is the point of reference for the word, which is always separate from the word itself. And this, of course, is the basis for nearly all modern linguistics.

But according to people such as Parmenides there is another way of talking. This other way is that instead of talking *about*, you talk *from*. If you sense oneness you talk from oneness; and that oneness is communicated through the magic of the word in a way that our minds may find incomprehensible but that, even so, fascinates and endlessly obsesses them. For these people were magicians. The founders of logic and science in the West were sorcerers. They knew what they were doing even if, now, no one knows what they did.

And this question of how we talk is also related to the question of how we discover. In the modern West we are governed, dominated, by the assumption that we discover things through time. By searching, by experimenting,

we will eventually uncover the nature of reality bit by bit. This profane model of discovery was already established in the West very many centuries ago. And it has given rise to a catastrophic sense of estrangement from ourselves and everything else. We spend the whole of our lives searching for solutions and only uncovering more problems; searching for ourselves but never finding; looking for answers in the places where we assume and expect them to be while neglecting the wisdom being communicated to us from every direction.

The sacred model is based on an altogether different principle: on the principle that you simply have to discover everything is already there to begin with. It is all there to begin with because everything is given. Everything we ever need to know is automatically provided to us in the very moment when we need to know it. There is only one requirement for entering into a living relationship with this sacred model: the ability to be open to the unexpected and the unknown.

I will give an example. We all know what happened on September 11, 2001—or at least we know about the outer events. But three days before, on September 8, a raven came and told me what was going to happen.

We tend as a rule to think about language in terms of verbs and nouns, adjectives and pronouns. But while these considerations can help us understand certain aspects of the mechanics that allow us to speak, they can just as easily hide us away from the sacred dimensions of language and from the infinite mysteries of communication.

For a long time I have been fascinated by the tradition in ancient Greece, and many other cultures, about the “language of the birds.” And several years ago I was out walking with the son of a friend who was studying at a prestigious college, here in New Mexico, where he was learning about the classics and humanities. We were walking up a hill together in some beautiful countryside, and I asked him: “What have you really learned? What is the most important thing you have discovered at college?” He answered: “The most wonderful thing I have learned is that we humans have language.” I asked if he meant that

nothing else has language and he said: “No, nothing else, this is something quite unique to humans.” As we were walking there were hawks calling out to each other from around and above us, so I asked: “What about the hawks?” And he said: “What about them? That’s not language.” Because of his conditioning, his education, he could not hear. He was simply unable to acknowledge that two hawks calling to each other could possibly be using language.

So, now for what happened on September 8.

I was alone at home at the time, on the island where my wife and I were living off the west coast of Canada. In the afternoon I heard a raven calling from just outside the window where I was: the house had an enormous number of windows looking out over all the trees and the lake. I went on writing.

The raven was calling loudly and insistently. I was aware of its call: I was, and am, very conscious of birds. I thought it must be calling to another bird. But then all of a sudden I was able to separate from myself and I became aware that it was circling the house I was in, flying in a clockwise direction and stopping off repeatedly to continue its calling.

Nothing like this had happened before. To begin with I tried to go on with my writing, but then came the moment when I knew without a doubt that the raven was calling to me. So I stood up, went through the house and out onto the tall deck which was facing due south. There, right in front of me on the branch of a tree and looking straight at me, exactly at my height, was the raven.

As soon as it saw me, it started crying out continuously without stopping. I had no idea what it was saying, but I was sure it was communicating something.

Then it stopped. I remember this so vividly. I said to it: “What’s the matter?” It started flapping its wings and calling out again, still on the branch in front of me. I could not understand. It stopped and I asked again: “What are you trying to tell me?” This time it flapped its wings even more intensely. It started rising from the branch and kept on flapping its wings while hovering right in front of me. I was completely attentive. By now I knew it had a message. I lis-

tened to it not just with my ears but from deep inside myself.

And in that moment it spoke to me, inside me. Its message came straight through to me in English words: not in raven language, or in any indigenous language, but in words I could understand. It said to me, "I have come here to tell you that there is about to be terrible death and destruction." And from the way it communicated I knew it was

referring to death and destruction which would affect not me or my wife particularly, but the whole world.

What does it mean when a bird talks? What does it mean when you are still enough to hear the bird talking? What really is happening when a raven comes and tells someone what is going to happen? And what is the language of birds—not the language of English or Spanish, or even the language of

humans, but the language of the birds?

These are the questions that no one in the modern Western world we live in, with all its apparent knowledge, can answer anymore. But they are also questions that come from an infinite depth and, if we allow them, can take us straight back into the infinite depth they come from. That is the depth of oneness where every culture and language and creature has its origin.

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