


Part One


My Quest Begins

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Landscape and Cup

Robin Baring 1976

Chapter One

MY QUEST BEGINS

The living spirit grows and even outgrows its earlier forms of expression; it freely chooses the men and women in whom it lives and who proclaim it. This living spirit is eternally renewed and pursues its goal in manifold and inconceivable ways throughout the history of mankind. Measured against it, the names and forms which men have given it mean little enough; they are only the changing leaves and blossoms on the stem of the eternal tree.

— C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*

Who can calculate the orbit of his own soul?

— Oscar Wilde, *Reading Gaol*

My story begins one hot summer day in 1942 when I was eleven years old. I had been told to take a rest after lunch. Lying on my bed, drowsy with the heat, I suddenly saw an intense purple light suffusing the whole room and felt myself surrendering to an irresistible power. Then, abruptly and without warning, the bed beneath me opened as if sliced by a knife. I was pushed down into the crevice and the bed closed over me. In terror I struggled to shout for help, move my arms and legs, open my eyes, but my body refused to respond. A noise like the roar of a tumultuous waterfall surrounded me, pressing on my ears and all about me. I shot through a tight channel and was spewed out, as if from a catapult, into a vast and silent blackness. Yet I could see that I was still attached to my body by a fine cord.

I waited for what might come next, terrified and bewildered by the shock of losing touch with the only life I knew. As I waited in that dark immensity, I heard two words: 'I AM'. I don't know, shall never know, whether more words were to follow or whether this was all I was meant to hear. Overcome with terror at being alone in space with this disembodied voice, I found myself re-entering the channel,

plunged once again into that roaring, deafening vortex of sound. Then, amazingly, I emerged from it and found myself lying in my bed, alive in a familiar world.

That experience initiated a lifelong quest. I had to know why I had left my body for that mysterious encounter. I had to discover the meaning of that experience; why it had happened to me; what it was asking of me. It was so powerful, so shockingly different from any other experience I had known that I felt impelled to follow a path of discovery, slowly integrating into my life what has been revealed to me stage by stage. How often have I wished that I had had the courage to stay in that place of absolute stillness and listen for that voice to say more.

The Dream of the Water

Soon after that experience, my mother told me about channelled messages she had received while meeting with her sister, sister-in-law and a friend in New York, where we were living at the time. One winter afternoon in 1943, at the height of the Second World War, they had met to talk about the life-and-death struggle that was tearing Europe apart. Suddenly, although the windows were closed because of the cold, they heard a roar like thunder and a window was blown inwards by a powerful blast of air. Lightning flickered all around them although there was no storm. They cried out in terror, and went to shut the window. Then they felt a tremendous presence in the room and, falling on their knees, were overcome with awe.

Weeping, they asked what they could do to help the world. The answer came in writing: "Follow your heart. Only through making space in your lives for listening to the guidance trying to reach you from another dimension of reality can you come to a deeper understanding of how you can most effectively help the world." The message warned of a future catastrophe for the Earth and humanity if the ways of men did not change and said that this warning should be passed on to anyone who was willing to listen. If enough people could become aware of the danger and respond to the guidance that was trying to reach them, the full force of the catastrophe could be mitigated or even averted. The message continued:

There are periods which seem to last forever. These are periods of incubation; everything is waiting. Humanity has lived for two thousand years in a state of adolescence. Now it must become adult or sink into general criminality which will bring chaos, confusion and, finally, destruction. If humanity chooses adulthood and responsibility to life, it will have the millennium of peace and

happiness and Earth will join the circle of planets which have already completed their evolution. From far distant realms in the universe come Great Beings to your poor benighted planet to help to overthrow the tyranny of evil so that never again shall it overpower the world. Only when men learn not to shed their brothers' blood can the House of God be built on its true foundations.

The breaking up of the established churches is but a question of time and will be accomplished partly by their inability to satisfy the spiritual needs of man and partly by the atheists who will play a greater and greater part in world events. Harmony must be found at every level as there is a danger of collective insanity. Man can no longer survive the disintegration of his psyche caused by his own destructive civilization. Only those who have reached an inner harmony between their knowledge and their intuition, their thoughts and their actions; those who are able to listen to and accept the guidance of their heart, will be given the strength and the knowledge to help their fellow men. Every act of a human being must be judged against the question: Does it offend Nature? Does it offend God? Does it injure Life?

Profoundly shocked by these words, and others which followed, they asked whether they should pray in church and were told: "Your church is your immortal soul."

My mother and her friend continued to meet in Europe for some twenty years after the end of the war. In later messages, they were warned (in 1944) of the dangers of splitting the atom and interfering with the laws of nature because of the disintegrative effects this would have on the human psyche. They were also told to study the early history of Christianity, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the Reformation. In particular, they were to study how the teaching of Christ had been distorted or obscured by the Church established in His name. Repeatedly they were urged to follow the thread of guidance that would lead them to something called the 'Dream of the Water', and to find their way to the 'Holy Mountain'. They were also told to look for a mysterious stone that was 'buried at the foot of the Tree'.

At first my mother and her friend took these images literally and looked for a place of refuge from the impending catastrophe (whose date was never specified), even spending many years searching for a holy mountain and a tree under which a special stone might be buried. Gradually, it dawned on them that these images were not to be understood literally but were metaphors for a state of being or state of consciousness which they needed to develop within themselves.

To begin with, in the 1940's and 50's there was no one with whom to share these experiences, leaving me with a feeling of great loneliness and isolation. Within my own family, only my American mother was the bridge to the unseen 'other' world. With my English father I could never speak of these secret things.

My parents' marriage suffered from this lack of communication between them and their inability to share what was of deepest significance to my mother. My mother was a poet and an artist; my father was a soldier and a rationalist, one of a long ancestral line of warriors who had served their country. He could not understand what my mother was talking about and built a defensive wall against her which was expressed as an unconscious compulsion to destroy her trust in herself with criticism and ridicule.

Years later, I came to understand that because he had lost his own mother when he was a small boy, having total control over my mother was the only way he could feel emotionally secure. He therefore lived an existence dogged by chronic anxiety, in a state that would later be recognized as depression. Anything which hinted at the non-rational was a threat to his security and amplified his need for control. My mother surrendered to this tyranny because her generation had no insight into the psychological roots of human behaviour. Lacking any qualifications which would have helped them to earn their living, women of her background and upbringing were conditioned to stay in unhappy marriages, to tolerate and submit to their husbands' need for absolute control and to devote their lives to the care and well-being of others in the belief that this sacrificial life would somehow find favour with God. All negative feelings were repressed for fear of divine punishment and social disapproval.

At the end of the war, the family returned to England. The next years were overshadowed by the destructive relationship between my parents and by the bullying I endured at the hands of my new classmates. So I turned to God for help but found no comfort in the Protestant church services I was made to attend at school. I hated the damp smell of church, the freezing cold, the heavy sense of sin and guilt, the dreary hymns and the condemnatory sermons that were so lacking in joy and communion with the divine. If Christ had redeemed the sins of the world, why was there still war and suffering and why was I a 'miserable sinner'? It made no sense to me. I dreaded Sundays and often felt so sick and faint that I had to leave the church. It all felt so wrong, but I didn't know why. God seemed remote, oppressive, judgemental and unforgiving.

The Garden of Eden

However, there was one place where I loved to be. Before the war I used to spend the summer holidays with my grandmother in the South of France. I longed to return to that sun-baked earth, to the clear luminosity of that landscape — the star-filled sky, the rhythmic sound of the crickets and the frogs' croaking at night,

the strong, rich perfume of thyme, lavender, pine and cypress. At the end of the war, it was again possible to revisit this early childhood paradise.

My grandmother's house stood on a hilltop on the site of an ancient temple to Minerva. It was called Malbosquet, meaning 'evil little wood'— so named, no doubt, because the local people felt it was haunted by 'spirits' and, therefore, to be avoided. It was a place of incredible beauty, a Garden of Eden: filled with the beauty of pink and white oleander bushes; tall dark cypress that exuded a delicious scent after rain; a fountain in which grew huge pink lotus flowers; orange trees filling the air with the exquisite fragrance of their blossoms in early spring; a rich red earth planted with vines yielding sweet grapes and, everywhere, flowers. I remembered particularly the anemones that carpeted the earth in spring and which also filled the house, for my grandmother was an artist and loved to paint them. In the cloistered courtyard enormous brown pots held camellias and masses of scarlet geraniums. In the distance to the West were range after range of violet hills; to the East the snow-capped mountains of the Alps. To the South, glittering distantly in the sun beyond a vast forest of pine and olive trees, was the Mediterranean.

I would wake up at dawn, inhaling the fresh smell of dew-laden grass, my heart bursting with joy at the dawning of a new day. I loved to walk at dawn on the wet grass just to feel the coolness of the dew under my bare feet. Later in the day, I would go and sit in a grove of olive trees overlooking a deep shady gorge that plunged down to the fast-flowing river far below. At night, when the moon was full and everything was flooded with its soft radiance, the whole place came magically alive with invisible presences. What was so precious about these childhood memories was that there was time simply to be and to wonder. It was here that I fell in love with the beauty of the natural world.

The trees of that olive grove seemed to bear witness to the secrets of centuries and the great civilizations that had flourished around the Mediterranean: Egyptian; Cretan; Phoenician; Greek; Etruscan; Roman. For millennia, owls had built their nests in the hollows of the gnarled and crinkled trunks of these trees. I used to sit for hours, happy to be there among them, watching the changing light as the sun filtered through the silvery leaves. Although the war had separated me for six years from this much loved place, I returned to it again and again in my imagination. It was the country of my soul.



The Call of Beauty

In the late 1940's it became possible to travel freely. The continent of Europe was again accessible, a place of sun and light to which I could escape from the grim austerity of England. In 1947, when I was sixteen, my grandmother took me to Spain, driving down the east coast full of almond trees in blossom, to Granada and Cordoba, then blessedly free of tourists. In the great mosque at Cordoba I had my first glimpse of Moorish culture and in the silence of dawn and dusk I was able to sit alone in the exquisite grace of the courtyards of the Alhambra, describing in my diary the features of the beauty that entranced me.

Later, in Italy, my mother and I explored Tuscany and Umbria by bus, with the local people, delighted by their lively, laughing chatter, their caged, squawking chickens, and their mountainous bundles of provisions. I gazed, awestruck, at the marvel of the Baptistery in Florence, the Duomo, and Giotto's lily-like tower; the paintings in the dimly lit Lower Church at Assisi; the Siennese Madonnas; Botticelli's *Primavera* and the Birth of Venus. All shine in my memory like the glory of sunrise to one who sees it for the first time.

I travelled through Italy on an indrawn breath of wonder. Each destination became a pilgrimage. At Borgo San Sepolcro, Piero della Francesca's painting of Christ rising from the tomb burst upon my consciousness as the startling vision of an awakened and enlightened man—utterly different from the image of the helpless and suffering figure on the cross that hung above the altars of the many churches I visited. I wondered why there were so many images of the crucifixion and so very few of the resurrected Christ.

I fell passionately in love with the painters of the early Renaissance — above all Sassetta and Fra Angelico — and all those artists for whom rock and earth and sky and man and angel were transparent to a divine ground which sustained and permeated the physical world. I experienced this kind of painting as a praising, a loving, a longing, a communion with, and a method of discovering, God. I was also attracted to the figure of St. Francis, for some of my mother's messages had come from him and I had taken him as my spiritual mentor. I encountered him in the many paintings of his contemporaries, along with the great red angel who had appeared to him and seemed to hover still in the Umbrian skies.

I visited the little hermitage near Assisi where Christ had spoken to St. Francis telling him to rebuild His church. Here, as in Borgo San Sepolcro, was another radiant image of Christ, not hanging suffering on the cross. I remembered the messages telling my mother and her friends to study the history of early Christianity and how the teachings of Christ had been distorted. I felt I needed to know more and prayed to St. Francis for guidance.

It was in Italy that I became aware for the first time of another kind of spirituality: one no longer impregnated with the heavy sense of sin and guilt that was so prevalent in the Protestant churches of my childhood, but deeply rooted in people's age-old sense of connection with the land and with the towns and hermitages where saints had lived and taught. I responded to the incredible beauty of the landscape of Italy and felt the strong, vital sense of continuity between the present and the past. I absorbed the perfect proportions and human scale of the buildings and the climate of revelation that the very air of Italy seemed to breathe. I stood in awe before the genius of the architects, sculptors and masons who, working together, had been able to imagine and bring into being marvels like the exquisite marble façade of the Duomo at Orvieto.

On a second journey the following year I climbed a hill on a starlit morning to attend mass and receive the blessing given to pilgrims by the renegade Italian friar, Padre Pio (later to be made a saint) and smelt the strong scent of violets emanating from him. Afterwards, the taxi-driver taking me to the station insisted that I should visit the shrine of the Archangel Michael at Monte Gargano nearby, where crusaders had knelt to be blessed before embarking on their sea-journey to the Holy Land. With bowed head and holding his hat in his gnarled hands, he led me down a flight of broad stone steps into the bowels of the mountain and the black, glistening walls of a great cave that sheltered the shrine of the Archangel. Over its entrance were the words: "This is the abode of God, the Gateway to Heaven". I knew that St. Francis had hesitated to enter this cave, saying "Lord, I am not worthy to enter Thy shrine" and that he had probably embarked on his journey to meet the Muslim ruler Saladin from the nearby port of Bari. Astonishingly, as a result of their meeting, Saladin had twice granted permission for the Christians to enter Jerusalem peacefully and twice they had refused, choosing instead to take it by force.

In the cave there was no one else present except an old woman rhythmically sweeping the floor. As I knelt to pray, I burst into tears, suddenly overwhelmed by the sorrow and suffering of the world. I asked the Archangel for help and guidance for myself and for humanity. It seemed a natural thing to do in this holy place.

Preparing for the World

My mother was determined that I should go to university since she herself had not been able to. Oxford laid the foundation for the future, giving me the opportunity to develop my mind and extend my knowledge of the past. I chose to study

medieval history and also learned Italian in order to study the Italian Renaissance and renew my connection to art. The current fashion in philosophy at that time (the early 50's) was Logical Positivism. Here I had my first encounter with a purely secular approach to life and it made no sense to me. I vowed then that one day I would find the answer to the questions that perplexed me, questions that modern philosophy could not answer and did not even ask. I became preoccupied with finding the path of spiritual guidance that could lead to a deeper understanding of life.

Just as I was about to leave Oxford (1951), I fell in love with and became engaged to a man who was charming, intelligent and very interested in the arts. I thought I had found the ideal husband. But a few weeks later, he was arrested and accused of molesting some boy scouts near his home. Homosexuality was something that was not discussed in those days and the whole subject was socially taboo until the details of the court case erupted in the media. I was loyal to my fiancé and clung to my belief in his innocence. The trial aroused huge interest and public support and led, ultimately, to the law being changed so that homosexuality was no longer treated as a crime. However, my fiancé was found guilty and sent to prison for a year.

I broke off the engagement and found a job in New York working for an Austrian psychiatrist (Dr. Manfred Sakel) who had developed a method of treating schizophrenia with insulin shock treatment as an alternative to electric-shock treatment and was looking for someone to edit the book he had written about it. The whole experience of the broken engagement profoundly affected my life because, just at the point when I was emerging into the wider world from the rather cloistered life of university, my trust in myself was totally destroyed. That winter of 1951–2 was truly a dark night of my soul. It was my first encounter with psychology and mental illness and I fell into a deep depression, unable to help myself or to ask for help. In my distress I forgot the words of the messages and the images of the Dream of the Water. The Stone at the foot of the Tree faded from memory.

The Revelation of India and Asia

Returning to England, I took various secretarial jobs which led nowhere. But in 1956 my life unexpectedly opened out in a new direction with the opportunity to visit India and the Far East. That journey changed the course of my life because it led to an encounter with cultures and religious traditions which offered the greatest possible contrast with my own European one and enormously expanded

the horizon of my life. To me, India symbolized the mythical destination of all explorers — an unknown, mysterious, fabulous land. When I first caught sight of the great chain of the Himalayas gleaming far above the great plain of northern India I felt like Columbus discovering America. There was no place for fear because I was ecstatically involved in the discovery of a new world.

In India I discovered the ravishing grace of men and women in their turbans and saris of dazzling yellow, lime-green, magenta and pink and the staggering size and beauty of a landscape utterly different from anything I had seen or imagined. Everywhere I went I felt the presence of a very ancient civilization and the extraordinary range of the human imagination and artistic genius expressed in art and architecture, in poetry, literature, music and the creation of every kind of beauty, from the fantastic sculptures on the temple walls to the exquisite designs stamped on the saris displayed in the markets. What struck me most was the sense of timelessness — that very little had changed in tens of thousands of years. It was an intoxicating time. I had no ties, no responsibilities, no fears. I could simply follow the longing of my heart, which was to enter into the soul of India as my sandalled feet reverently touched the dust of that ancient soil. Travelling alone, I found a richer, deeper, more vibrant experience of life than I could find in my own country and culture. I knew I had to return as there was so much more to discover and assimilate.

Through contacts in Rome the following year, I had the amazing good fortune to be offered a job collecting photographs from museums in India and the Far East for an Italian encyclopaedia of art. To choose the photographs I would need to travel from country to country, visiting the sacred sites and museums of India, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Japan, Taiwan and Indonesia. I would also have rapidly to assimilate not only the history of each culture, but also its religious spirit as expressed in its art because art, in these cultures, was inseparable from religion. This extraordinary commission would take me into the heart of each culture. It was a journey of discovery beyond my wildest dreams and would change the whole course of my life.

It was the sheer splendour of the art, sculpture and temple architecture of India and Asia that first kindled my strong attraction to Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. Only later was it deepened and extended through the sacred texts I studied. In the dark recesses of a great cavern in Taiwan where half of the Imperial Treasure taken from Beijing by Chiang Kai-shek had been stored for safety, I had my first glimpse of the Taoist paintings of the Sung dynasty and my first real encounter with Chinese art. I was struck not only by its utter difference from the art of India and the West, but by its different quality of soul.

As I travelled to places like Angkor in Cambodia and Borobodur in Java, as

well as to many sites in India, Thailand and Burma, and the museums in the capital cities, I felt myself entering into the heart of Hindu and Buddhist sculpture, deeply awed by the sculptors' power to evoke in stone the immanent presence of spirit. In India, I saw that gods and goddesses — utterly different from the monotheistic Christian concept of God — were not just present in their images but were mysteriously immanent and integrated into everyday life; they were still, after thousands of years, vibrantly alive in the imagination of the people. The temples were thronged with hundreds of people bringing offerings to the various goddesses and gods, obviously deeply emotionally involved in their rituals.

As a young woman travelling alone in 1957, I was never molested or robbed and was welcomed everywhere with curiosity and warmth. This was before the era of drugs and hippies. I was often lonely but never afraid. So many people helped me, so many kindly passed me on to friends in other countries or contacts in museums. It was only in Japan that the fact that I was a woman temporarily denied me access to the museum archives. In Tokyo no one spoke English and the museum authorities could not believe (and seemed insulted) that a young woman had been entrusted with this job. Eventually, however, I got my photographs.

In the course of these journeys, I came across sculpture after sculpture of Mount Sumeru, the 'holy mountain' of Hindu mythology. In Cambodia, I discovered that many of the temples of Angkor, half-buried in the jungle, evoked this same image, for every single temple represented this holy mountain, which was the sacred heart of the universe as well as the divine presence hidden in the heart of every human being. So here at last, it seemed as if I had found the 'holy mountain' of my mother's messages, some sixteen years after I had first heard of it. I felt that my quest had led me to discover this image so wonderfully carved in stone, and enshrined in the mythology that was still so vibrantly alive in India and much of Asia.

I was also deeply moved by the incredible beauty and magnificence of the land and the warmth, beauty and grace of the people as I travelled from country to country. The sheer richness and colour of India, the breadth and depth of its culture, were overwhelming. I was struck by the exquisite designs on women's saris, and the thronging number of people who, everywhere, despite being poor beyond any European conception of poverty, had an immense dignity, beauty and grace.

At Tiruvannamalai, in southern India, I visited the ashram of the great Indian sage Sri Ramana shortly after his death and walked the nine miles around Arunachala, the sacred mountain which symbolized the same 'holy mountain' — the hidden heart of the cosmos. It was here that I encountered his teaching of

repeatedly asking myself the question ‘Who am I?’ This question urged me to go further, look deeper. I had never thought about the need to discover an unseen reality as great as, if not greater than, the familiar outer world of my experience. I began to connect this question with the voice that had spoken so many years before, saying only ‘I Am’.

In Thailand, the abbot of a monastery invited me to stay and experience the Buddhist approach to enlightenment but I felt unable to accept his invitation, not willing to commit myself to any one path or leave behind the ties of family and my life in the West. Yet, as I travelled, I revelled in my growing understanding of a different purpose and meaning to life. The claustrophobic weight of the Western concept of a single life opened out into a great vista of lives, both past and future as I encountered concepts such as the law of karma: the belief that one’s life experiences are the result of actions and experiences in past lives; that one’s present actions affect future lives; and the idea that we reincarnate countless times in many different bodies, gradually growing in spiritual insight and moving ever closer to reunion with a divine ground. The idea of this reunion seemed to be carried in other words of Sri Ramana that I remembered long after I left India, “Your own self-realization is the greatest service you can render the world.”

I saw that in all these different times and places a rich and potent humus had been created by countless human beings over countless millennia: artists, poets, mystics, astronomers, musicians, architects, philosophers, mathematicians, scientists, and a few wise and extraordinary men like the Mogul ruler, Akbar, whose patronage had fertilized the deep sub-soil of culture. But there was also the moving vista of millions of people so poor that they were barely able to survive, creating incredible beauty with their hands: weaving, dyeing, stamping brilliantly-coloured cotton and silk cloth with ancient designs. Carving wood and sculpting stone with incredible skill over countless generations, they nurtured an age-old culture in India and Asia, transmitting it through millennia.

These journeys gave me a perspective on life which could only be acquired by physically travelling to far distant places. The discovery of Hinduism, Buddhism and, later, Taoism, brought release from the prison of a Christianity that I had experienced as claustrophobic, oppressive and forbidding. In these traditions I did not find the guilt-inducing Christian sense of sin but rather the belief that suffering was due to ignorance; that humanity was unconscious or unawakened rather than mired in sin.

When I returned to England I put everything that had entranced my eye and evoked a response from my heart into my first book – *The One Work; a Journey Towards the Self* – an account of these two journeys to the East in 1956 and 1957 and my quest to understand the quintessential message of Hinduism and

Buddhism and relate this to a deeper understanding of Christianity. The main focus of the book was a different concept of spirit — one that was equated with an unseen ground sustaining all forms of life rather than a creator remote from creation. Once again, as in childhood when my longing had been awakened by the messages, I felt drawn to follow the path of a spiritual quest. This desire had become more conscious and focused as I travelled.

My life acquired a greatly enlarged perspective that encompassed a meaning beyond that of responding blindly to events as they happened or feeling constrained by the limits of a single life, however well-lived. I particularly liked the fact that neither Hinduism nor Buddhism had a proselytising agenda. While both had spread far beyond India, neither had attempted conquest and conversion by the sword as had Christianity and Islam.

During these travels in the East, I was made aware of the incredible difference between the lives of people in the West and those in the East. First of all: the privilege of freedom from want and access to a good education. Secondly, freedom from the indescribable poverty, misery and disease that I saw in India in particular, where there seemed to be no hope of any change for the better in the lives of tens of millions of people, particularly for those unfortunate individuals belonging to the lowest caste who were treated with the utmost contempt and cruelty by people belonging to other castes. Secondly, I was drawn to piece together an approach to reality that seemed utterly unknown in the Christian West and which supplied what I felt was missing there without being able to define precisely what it was. At first I was led by an attraction to certain myths and works of art, then to the texts of the Vedic, Buddhist and Taoist traditions — above all, to the concept of enlightenment. I learned that enlightenment was an immense expansion of consciousness and that it brought direct experience of the hidden ground of life as well as one's own essential being.

This was the beginning of a more conscious phase of my journey of discovery. I felt drawn to study the artistic heritage and spiritual legacy of the great civilizations of India and China and through these to develop a deeper insight into life itself. It took many years to see the whole picture and bring back this ancient knowledge into my own culture. Nor could I have written this book without experiencing the different facets of the journey I have described and will describe in subsequent chapters.



Marriage and Motherhood

In spite of the satisfaction of writing my book about my wanderings in the East, returning to England in 1957 brought me down to earth with a thump. At that time, for any woman who had not specifically chosen the career path of a scientist or a doctor, there seemed to be only three career options: a secretary, an academic or teacher, or a nurse. The alternative to these was marriage and motherhood. In the 1950's there was still a cultural split between the married woman and the professional or academic woman who presented a threat to the male-oriented society of that time. The immense panorama of life I had glimpsed on my travels made it difficult for me to settle down to what seemed a very restricted and restricting life. Since the teachings of the Hindu and Buddhist sages had taught me that immersing oneself in the usual concerns of the world was an impediment to the goal of spiritual enlightenment, it was extremely difficult to focus on finding a steady job, marry and adapt to the routine of domestic life. The call of the spirit and the life of the body seemed to oppose each other across an unbridgeable abyss.

However, when I was working on my book, a friend introduced me to a man whom I felt I could trust, an artist whose work I admired. My family was delighted, having almost given up hope of my finding the 'right' man: at that time twenty-eight was considered late for marriage. They were even more delighted that he was an artist because both my mother and grandmother were artists. We married in 1960 and a new phase of my life began, a phase of initiation into the experience of a close relationship with another human being and into the delight of finding someone who became a true friend and companion, someone with whom I could share my intense love of art and beauty and who was a kind and gentle person. But first I had to learn to cook and clean a house — skills which I had neglected to develop before I married because, with the arrogance of someone immersed in spiritual and intellectual concerns, I did not consider them to be important, let alone essential to a harmonious married life.

After two miscarriages, we had a daughter whom I dearly loved but hadn't the slightest instinctive knowledge of how to look after. Having lived life mainly through the mind, with scant regard for the body, I had received no preparation whatsoever on how to look after a baby. I was terrified and this terror was made worse by the fact that she was a pyloric baby: the milk I fed her was immediately ejected by projectile vomiting to the other side of the room, caused by the fact that the pyloric muscle would not open. At three weeks of age, she was losing weight rapidly and had to have an immediate operation. In those days, mothers were not allowed to stay with their children in hospital. I was deeply upset by the separation from her, particularly as I wasn't even allowed to see her for twenty-

four hours. After three days she was able to come home, but I fell into a post-natal depression (unrecognized at the time as a mental state that could follow childbirth) and was totally unable to cope.

The years of tension and unhappiness watching my mother being destroyed by my father, and my complete inability to protect her, had led, from the age of twelve, to my falling into suicidal depressions for days and sometimes months at a time. This condition was never medically diagnosed or treated because in those days depression was not recognized as an illness. In fact, it was considered shameful even to admit to such a condition because of the taint of mental instability and even insanity. Although I had many times come close to suicide as an adolescent and young adult, I had never actually attempted it. But now that I was married, I soon realized that I had to do something about this situation. If I did not, I feared that it would destroy my relationship with my husband the way my father's depression had destroyed his relationship with my mother and myself, and that it would have a negative effect on the life and happiness of our daughter. I did not want the pattern to be repeated in another generation. My husband was immensely supportive but was perplexed by my perpetual unhappiness and lethargy. My ongoing depression increased the pressure on me to take some action. By chance I met a woman who had come through a nervous breakdown and she gave me the name of the psychiatrist who had treated her, a man who was also a Jungian analyst. So began a new phase in my life: my introduction to psychotherapy and to the work of Carl Jung, and my becoming aware of a mysterious and (to me) unknown aspect of the psyche called the unconscious.

Encounter with the Unconscious

Trust in my analyst gradually established trust in myself and led to the eruption of a passionate longing to create beauty, the same longing that had been awakened by the colours and designs of the saris I had seen in India and the beauty of women's clothes in the paintings of the Italian and Flemish artists of the early Renaissance. These drew me to a sensory delight in the appearance and feel of beautiful materials and a desire to design clothes. I took a correspondence course in dressmaking with the London County Council. Suddenly the idea occurred to me that I could make evening dresses to sell; I could use beautiful fabrics and design the dresses myself. In those days (the early 60's), women from my background living in London wore long dresses to the theatre and opera or when they entertained friends at home or went out to a dinner party.

I found to my amazement and delight that I could design dresses that women

wanted to wear because they made them look and feel beautiful. Soon I had too many dresses to keep in the house and, in 1964, I realized I needed a shop. A friend suggested Beauchamp Place in Knightsbridge (London) and I found a tiny shop to rent there. My sister-in-law suggested the name Troubadour. I liked the romantic associations to the word. On the first day I sold three dresses, which covered the week's expenses, and from then on, week by week and year by year, my business grew until I found that I was making a great deal of money. I had two brilliant cutters to help me: one a remarkable Polish woman who had survived years in a concentration camp in Poland; the other a Spanish woman who had worked in Madrid with the great designer Balenciaga. By a stroke of incredible luck, I inherited a whole workshop of Polish seamstresses from a business that was closing down in a nearby building and these women made the dresses I designed. Each of these courageous women had a remarkable story of survival to tell (under the German and Russian occupations) and I became very fond of them all.

Twice a year I gathered together swatches of the finest silks, velvets, chiffons and organzas as well as materials from India and spread them out all over the surface of my work table as a prelude to designing the evening dresses I so loved, inspired by paintings of women by my favourite Flemish and Italian artists. Once a year, in November, I travelled to the great annual trade fair in Frankfurt where, walking up and down the aisles of three enormous halls, I bought the materials, embroideries and trimmings I needed. This experience grounded me in everyday life, helped me to earn my living well and taught me how to manage a growing business and keep the women who worked for me happy and productive.

Meanwhile, through the Jungian analysis, I was learning the importance of paying attention to my dreams and keeping a careful record of them. In those years I dreamed of great warehouses filled from floor to ceiling with materials of unimaginable fineness and beauty; of dresses far beyond my capacity to invent or make; racks filled with clothes that were a marvel of design and magnificence. These dreams inspired me to make ever more beautiful dresses in an attempt to come close to the ones seen in my dreams. But my own designs could never match those of my dreams either in the complexity of the design or in the fineness and splendour of the materials. Who, I began to wonder, was the dress designer of my dreams? Who was the weaver of these fabrics? I knew that the unconscious was sending me these images so far removed from my own capacity to create, but who and what and where was the unconscious?

Once, I remember, I had a dream of a tiny woman with the head of a greyhound presiding over a room filled with about 100 seamstresses seated at sewing machines that filled the room with a steady hum. Each woman was busily engaged

in sewing the top part of a dress to the bottom part. The meaning of that dream only occurred to me years later when I came across the work of women who were writing and speaking about the goddess and the feminine principle, connecting the historically known to the hitherto unknown, the conscious to the unconscious, the visible to the invisible, the top to the bottom.

After twelve years, at the height of a major recession and inflation in the 1970's owing to a huge rise in the price of oil, I felt the time had come to close the shop. The cost of wages and materials spiralled overnight and long evening dresses were suddenly out of fashion, owing to the impact of the French designer, Courrèges. I felt that this phase of my life had come to an end.

My analysis had continued during this time, but at this point my analyst suggested that I should apply to train as an analyst myself. He had heard that Dr. Gerhard Adler, one of the two editors of Jung's Collected Works, was considering applications for training. I applied for an interview and while I was waiting for a reply, I had the following dream:

I am travelling in a rocket to the moon and on landing there, see that a huge rusty iron construction shaped like the Eiffel Tower has been built on it, so huge that it towers high above its surface. The moon itself is a dead planet: all vegetation has dried up and wasted away. There are no human beings anywhere and no animals — no life at all. I travel across the moon's surface in a train, staring out of the window at this desolate landscape that looks as if it had been blasted by a nuclear bomb or shrivelled by a terrible drought. At the end of the dream I am precipitated into a swimming pool.

I discussed the dream with my analyst but, inexplicably, he could not fathom its meaning. When I went for the interview with Dr. Adler, he asked if I had had a dream recently and I told him about it, saying that I did not understand it. He said he thought the dream was drawing attention to the neglected state of the feminine principle or archetype — the moon being one of the primary images of that archetype. He suggested that the dream was showing me the plight of the feminine, which was also the plight of the soul, both in relation to my own life and to the world as a whole. The rusty iron structure was, in both cases, something that had been imposed on the deeper levels of the psyche by the rigid control of the conscious mind or ego. The water of the swimming pool suggested the water of the soul, the water of the feminine in which I needed to immerse myself. Tactfully, he suggested that more analysis was needed before I could be accepted for training. I needed to dismantle that massive iron structure and regenerate the surface of the moon. Despite the years of analysis I had already experienced which had helped me to save my marriage, earn my living in the world and open a

channel for my longing to create beauty, the dream suggested that I needed now to go deeper into the psyche. So I began to work with Dr. Adler's wife, Hella, who had worked with Jung's wife, Emma, and who was able to initiate me into a deeper understanding of the feminine principle. After a few years of analysis with her, I was invited to embark on the five years' training to become an analyst myself.

I had found my way to depth psychology because of a crippling depression. Through my analysis I learned that depression can signify not only a genetic inheritance and the presence of traumatic and repressed childhood memories, but also a call from the unknown depths of the psyche to connect with those depths. The opportunity of responding to that call was the second major factor that changed the course of my life because it gave me insight into the fact that so much suffering and unhappiness arise from ignorance of our own nature. Quite apart from helping me to develop insight into my own psyche, the experience of depth psychology, as Jungian psychology was then called, gradually freed my ability to write and gave me fascinating subjects to write about. It widened my knowledge of history, psychology, philosophy and religion and gave me a new perspective from which to view them.

While science had been making extraordinary discoveries in the fields of physics, cosmology and biology, I discovered that depth psychology had been exploring the vast and unknown dimension of the unconscious. Jung's discoveries about the nature of consciousness went far beyond Freud's because they granted a transcendent and spiritual dimension to the psyche. As I learned more, I realized that they were making as significant a contribution to our understanding of life as the new discoveries in science yet, perplexingly, they were ridiculed and rejected as 'mystical' by mainstream secular culture, particularly in the field of clinical and behavioural psychology. Jung's contribution was so massive and significant because, as far as I was then aware, no one since Plotinus (3rd century AD) and Marsilio Ficino in Renaissance Italy had explored the soul as a living cosmic entity rather than an abstract concept.

I knew by then that science believed that consciousness originates with and depends upon the physical brain. Because of my encounter with Eastern philosophy, I could not accept this hypothesis. It was therefore an immense relief, almost a delight, to find that the important discoveries made by Jung's researches into the psyche suggested that what we call the conscious mind rests on an immense matrix or psychic field of the immemorial experience of our species that he called the Collective Unconscious. It has taken untold millennia for the conscious mind and our capacity for self-awareness to evolve out of this unfathomable matrix of the unconscious.

I learned that Jung had recognized a process of inner development that he called individuation, which could be activated and developed through analysis. With practice, experience and insight into the meaning and symbolism of dreams, he found that a relationship could be established with this vast field of consciousness, and that this relationship could radically transform our understanding of life, granting it a deeper meaning and value and healing the deep split which had developed between the two aspects of our nature.

The Call of the Rose

During the years of exploring the psyche and training to become an analyst, I continued to travel, mainly to Greece and the Greek islands, for the great civilizations of the ancient Mediterranean world held an overwhelming fascination for me. On one such visit, I have a vivid memory of going with my husband into a Greek Orthodox Church in the Peloponnese and being shown around it by an artist who was restoring the frescoes on its walls. He finally beckoned my husband to follow him into the sanctuary behind the screen. When I naturally followed them, he stopped me with his hand saying, "Women are not allowed in here." I was too astonished to remonstrate, particularly as inside the sanctuary I could just catch sight of a magnificent fresco of the Virgin Mary. Why would I be barred from the contemplation of one of the most sacred images of my sex? Why would the most holy place in the church, sanctified by the image of the Mother of God, be forbidden territory for woman and not for man? The implication was that I, as a woman, would somehow defile the sanctuary. What historical processes underlay the Christian attitude toward woman that was reflected in this artist's gesture of rejection? Once again, as in the church services of my childhood, I felt that something was deeply wrong with Christianity.

I was often haunted by the words of a poem by Walter de la Mare that I had discovered while I was at Oxford, in a book by Helen Waddell called *The Wandering Scholars*:

*Oh no man knows
Through what wild centuries
Roves back the rose*

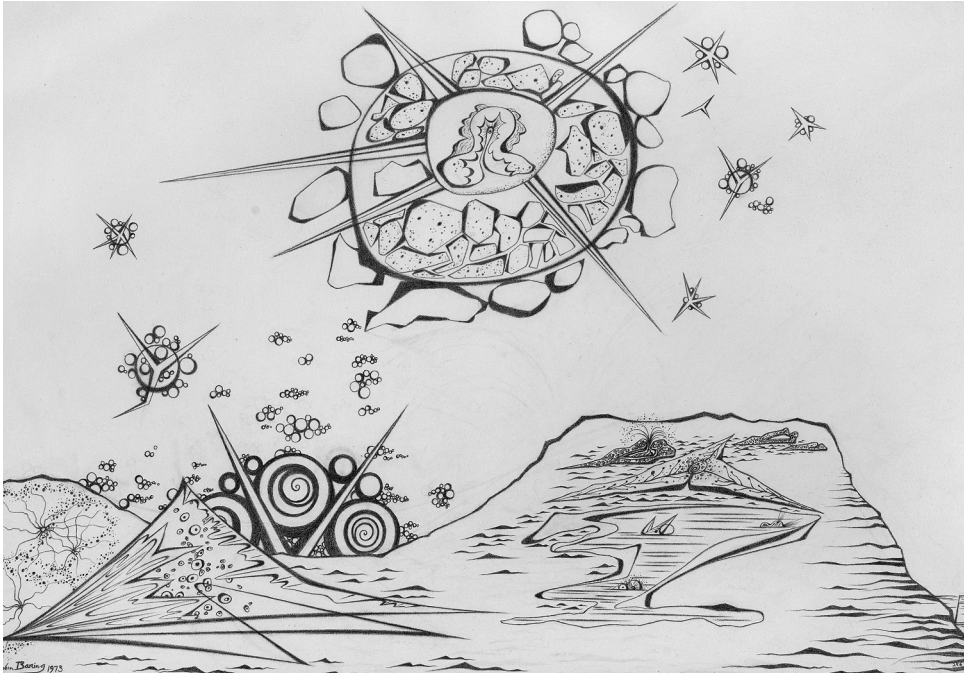
The image of the rose and the verse above kindled such a burning passion to know more, such a longing to reach back through those wild centuries to some discovery dimly apprehended as waiting for me at the roots of time, that the memory of the day I came across those lines of poetry lingers still, across the space of fifty years. Then, I knew virtually nothing about the Goddess, the feminine archetype, or the

soul; nothing about the symbolism of the rose in Sufi mysticism nor the rose's connection with the Virgin Mary and the lost tradition of Divine Wisdom; nor its connection with the elaborate patterns formed by the orbit of the planet Venus. Yet the image, even the scent, of the rose was overwhelmingly numinous to me and I planted many roses in the garden of our home, entranced by their ancient names.

Galvanized by my experience in the church in Greece, I began a new phase of my journey of discovery — one that was to lead me into a deeper understanding of the soul on the one hand and an exploration of the roots of civilization and the loss of the feminine image of the divine on the other.

I found myself drawn to return to the earliest beginnings of the growth of culture, to the time when the image of the Great Mother presided over the life of humanity. It is to this ancient time, so distant from our own in every respect, that we may look for the genesis of ideas and symbols which eventually developed into religious and philosophical systems and all the different ways in which we have attempted to define a reality that transcends our power of understanding, yet which draws us, ineluctably, to itself.





Green Planet
Robin Baring 1973