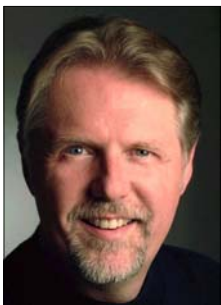


Love Affairs in the Age of Consciousness

by Alan Seale



February. It's the month of love – a commercialized version of romantic love, perhaps, but nonetheless the idea of love is on parade. February is also the shortest month of the year, though in the north where I live, it can also be the coldest month and therefore seem like the

longest. And February 2009, according to all media reports, may bring the worst numbers yet about all things related to the economy and jobs.

Commercialized love, bitter cold, dire reports of job losses and money disappearing, realizations that “money” has been reduced to numbers on paper that can be spun until the desired results surface – you might say this seems more like the age of deception or discontent or fear or collapse rather than an Age of Consciousness.

Yet in this apparent darkness some bright lights are shining. We recognize those lights as particular individuals or organizations, yet in reality the individuals and organizations are powerful manifestations of current shifts in consciousness. Through their thoughts, powerful presence, and actions, the light of our greater potential is piercing the manipulated realities of our habitual ways of living – potential that for so long has seemed far away or nonexistent. Potential to recognize ourselves once again as people and citizens, not as numbers and consumers. Potential to recognize ourselves as hearts in action rather than as personalities holding up a lifestyle. Potential to recognize ourselves by our essence rather than by

our outer appearance. Potential to recognize that each of us, if we were to hold this intention and make this choice, could be a manifestation of the greater Consciousness, the creative and sustaining force of all (you might also call that God or Spirit), rather than simply a manifestation of the fears, doubts, habits, beliefs, and paradigms of the collective consciousness.

Please note the distinction I make here between the greater Consciousness and the man-made collective consciousness – Consciousness being that creative and sustaining force, and the collective consciousness being the sum-total of the state of awareness and being of individuals. Increasing numbers of people are experiencing this shift toward living from a higher awareness of Consciousness – enough people that, even though we are told the situation is bleak, we may now be experiencing a more profound shift in collective awareness towards the greater good than ever before.

So this brings us back to February and the month of love. Even if February's “love” appears purely commercial, there is still a message for us to hear. Commercialized love is all about romance and love affairs. What if we were to expand the idea of love affairs and romance beyond a person and consider romancing an idea, a concept, a paradigm, a greater potential? What if we were to begin a love affair with a new way of being as individuals, communities, organizations, governments? You might say, “That sounds like a great idea; I think we should do that.” Great! Now let's step beyond that safe royal “we” and get to the “I.” What

would romancing greater potential look like and feel like for you? For each of us as individuals? Because the energetic shift can only come into form through us, and that starts with you and me.

In Bill Plotkin's book, *Soulcraft*, I came across this excerpt from David Whyte's poem, "Sweet Darkness:"

...Time to go into the dark
where the night has eyes
to recognize its own.

There you can be sure
you are not beyond love.

The dark will be your womb
tonight.

The night will give you a horizon
Further than you can see.

You must learn one thing.
The world was made to be free in.

Give up all the other worlds
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet
confinement of your aloneness
to learn

anything or anyone
that does not bring you alive

is too small for you.

The media, at least here in the United States, is constantly bombarding us with news of how bad things are. That may be true in other parts of the world as well since the global media is now dominated by a handful of companies. Yet even this deluge of negativity can serve us if we look for the greater potential of the moment: that we finally surrender to the dark night of the collective consciousness.

It seems that every region of the world is currently engaged in some sort of major struggle whether that is environmental, political, or economic. Even separating those spheres at this point is a delusion

because everything is complexly entangled. Therefore what happens in any sphere impacts all of them. These challenges could soon effect – or more accurately said, *interrupt* – enough people's lives in a significant enough way that we as a collective society will finally be willing to walk into the dark night. True, many people are walking into that dark night now, some more consciously than others. Yet as each one walks in, eyes open and with full awareness and intention to find truth, those light beams of potential shine even brighter. Slowly but surely, person by person, organization by organization, we have the opportunity to surrender to that dark night, get in touch with the deep yearnings within, and start to feed the light, the greater potential, rather than feed fear or complacency. Many people are engaged in that surrender now, but the tipping point hasn't yet been reached. We as a society, and therefore to some degree each of us as individuals, are still romancing outdated paradigms, outdated lifestyles, outdated ways of being in the world that keep us comfortable even if they are no longer serving the greater human condition.

And so the great invitation is to surrender to the dark night of the collective consciousness. That will mean different things for each individual, yet for the collective it will mean calling us forth to who we really are. In the south of the U.S. where I come from, they would say it's the "Come to Jesus" moment. It's the time for coming face to face with who we really are at our essence and who we're called to be. It's a time for the honest truth, which is sometimes hard and scary. It's a time for lighting a candle in the dark and inviting our souls to meet us there. And this "love" month reminds us that it's a time for tenderness and compassion. It's time for intimacy and seduction – that is, letting yourself be seduced by your soul rather than you trying to convince it to continue playing the game. It's time for great lovemaking in the night – lovemaking with your greatest potential as a member of the human family – romance and candlelight with the forward evolution of our collective consciousness – getting seriously snuggly with your soul and the mission it is yearning to live.

Your soul is the core of your greatness. Greatness doesn't have to mean that the whole world or even your whole town knows who you are because of the "great" things you have done. As Mother Teresa said, it is not about doing great things, it's about doing small things greatly. The soul longs to fully inhabit life and its possibilities. It wants to live large, regardless of the arena you choose. It wants to be fully engaged in life and know that it is contributing to the forward evolution of who we are as a collective, how we act, what we create, and the world we are leaving to those who come after us.

It is in the dark nights of our lives that we come face-to-face with who we are and who we are called to be. It is in the dark nights that we get clear about what is really important to us – not what we have been taught or manipulated to think is important, but *what truly matters* to us – what we know deep in the heart of our being that we stand for.

That is the light beam of potential that is shining in the darkness of the collective consciousness right now. If we are standing in the full light of day, we can't see the beam of light. It's only by going into the darkness that we can, in fact, see the light. And it's that light beam that brings us back to David Whyte's words:

You must learn one thing.
The world was made to be free in.

Give up all the other worlds
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet
confinement of your aloneness
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anything or anyone
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The Age of Consciousness can only come into its fullness when we are willing to surrender to the dark night of the collective consciousness. The dark night calls us to let the confinement of our aloneness in our struggles help us understand the

full meaning of "anything or anyone that does not bring you alive is too small for you." It's here that we can fully grasp that "The world was made to be free in." We must look together as a collective at what brings us alive – truly alive from the soul level – and truly sets us free – and what doesn't. That which doesn't bring us alive and set us free is indeed too small for us. It holds us back. It keeps us from moving forward as a collective consciousness and as a human family. When we are held small, the soul starts to die. And, over time, if the soul of the collective consciousness is not nurtured and supported toward its greatest potential, then neither are we as individuals.

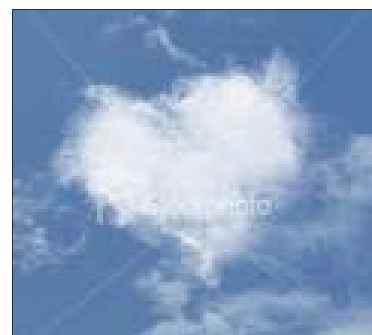
Are we living in the Age of Consciousness? Not yet, but we could be at the threshold. What will it take for us to cross that threshold? What will bring us alive and set us free at the soul level? What would it mean to romance that which brings us alive? What is the love affair with potential that is calling out to us, calling out to you? We must answer those questions both for the collective and for ourselves as individuals. Let yourself be seduced. It is the month of romance and love affairs. Imagine what could happen if we each romanced our souls and our greatest potential, and if we together romanced the world's soul. Imagine what is waiting for us in an Age of Consciousness.

Many blessings,

Alan

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Soul Mission Profile—Marianne Karslake

A Heritage of the Heart

by Johnathon Pape



In early January, Marianne Karslake and her husband Dick celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. Marianne is a wonderful artist among many other things, so one of the ways she chose to mark the occasion was by decorating and framing an old

photograph from early in their relationship. The photo is of a production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* in Heidelberg, Germany. Dick was stationed there in the army and performed the role of the Count in the opera. Marianne, who grew up in Germany, was living in Heidelberg at the time and sang in the chorus. The rest, as they say, is history.

And what a wonderful history it is. After Marianne and Dick married, they returned to the United States to live. They raised three remarkable children (their youngest son Daniel was our very first Soul Mission Profile), and now they also enjoy their remarkable grandchildren. They split their time between their home in the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania area and their summer home on the grounds of the Chautauqua Institution in Western New York. In addition to her art work, Marianne is a skilled antiques dealer, a tireless volunteer for numerous organizations, a gracious host, an amazing cook (the best berry pies you can possibly imagine!), and an incredibly generous spirit to both people and animals.

These gifts come very naturally to Marianne, since her soul mission is, *"I live from the heart."* She took the *Soul Mission * Life Vision* workshop at Chautauqua in the summer of 2003. "When I took Alan's class," Marianne explains, "I realized that I'm carrying on a heart tradition. I was led into this by

my aunt. She was an amazing person and lived from the heart all her life. She would find out about what people needed and then do all she could for them. I'm always looking to help people, too, and I'm happiest when I am able to do that. Whenever I do something 'over-the-top' for Daniel and his partner, he'll say 'There goes Tante,' which is German for Aunt. People say to me 'Why do you do this, it isn't necessary?' And I say, 'It's necessary for me.' I was always this way, but I didn't realize that I *have* to be this way until Alan's class. When I do things for people, it is the greatest joy for me. It's who I am."

Johnathon Pape: *Happy Anniversary! What a wonderful achievement. I hope you had a celebration to match.*

Marianne Karslake: We went to St. Lucia for a week to celebrate. The island is very beautiful and fun—we had a hard time leaving. The people were amazing—warm and friendly. Even though tourism is their livelihood, their hospitality wasn't put on; it was really from the heart. Our son Daniel had communicated with the hotel staff before our arrival and there was a bottle of champagne waiting for us in the room and flowers strewn on our bed. The staff was very excited about our arrival and our stay. We were able to spend time together, enjoy the beach, and just rest.

JP: *It sounds like paradise, particularly when the weather here in the northern U.S. is so cold!*

MK: Yes, it was great but there was also another side to it. The taxi ride from the airport to our hotel took over an hour which gave us time to see a great deal of the island. That is when the poverty on much of the island really hit home. I wished I could have had a magic wand to change all of that. I wanted to figure out a way to help

and asked members of the hotel staff where there was a church in the area. I was hoping that somehow I could establish a connection with someone to send shipments of clothes or other needs to them. We are so blessed in this country, but also wasteful and insensitive to others' suffering. How could I do my part in changing that? We were unable to locate a church in the immediate area, but I would like to keep trying. We were able to be extra generous with tips. We encountered a young boy on the beach who made an origami-like angel fish out of palm fronds which he gave to us to use as a bookmark. He was thrilled with the large bill I gave him. It provided both him and me with much joy.

JP: You do a lot with supporting young artists. I know that each summer in Chautauqua you participate in a program to "adopt" a couple of the young artists that are studying there.

MK: There are various programs at Chautauqua where you can host students involved in all disciplines. We chose the School of Art and decided to adopt one student, but the next year we decided that it would be more fun to have two students, so they could get to know each other as well. It's a wonderful thing for the kids - they can come over, have dinner, interact with their host family, get a different perspective on Chautauqua, and see much more of it. We're very involved with the students. I go up to the art school every couple of days to see what they're doing and if they need anything. Some of the kids don't come from perfect situations, and it helps them to have someone here while they are at Chautauqua. We had a student a couple of years ago who always told us that everything was fine, but about halfway through the summer we found out that he was having trouble paying his tuition. It was a bad situation and it looked like he would have to leave. Also, he was spending his time trying to earn money instead of doing what he was there to do - study painting. I found out how much he owed, and went up to see him one afternoon while he was painting. When I gave him a check for the money he owed he was overwhelmed; he couldn't understand it, but he was able to pay off his tuition and ended up having a great year.

JP: A lot of people don't understand how much joy giving from the heart can bring to the giver.

MK: I know, but that is the best part. It's double sided: it is great for them and even better for me. I grew up with my grandmother and she was a lot like my Aunt; she lived from the heart - but was more of a disciplinarian. They were such important role models for me. They gave so much to me as a small child in post-war Germany; it is now my turn to live the way they did.

JP: So how has knowing your Soul Mission and living it changed your life?

MK: It has given me the permission to be "me" at the highest level I can be and I don't ever question or even think about it. I learned in class to get back to my stillness and ask, "What can I do today?" Things happen when I get still and many times opportunities to do something for someone appear to me. I have learned to trust these occasions. If I think too long about helping or analyze it too much, the opportunity is gone and I feel very unhappy. I need to live it NOW which is very exciting for me. I believe I have always been this way, but since my class experience, I don't let any limitations hold me back. This does not mean that it is always easy. I have to observe and listen and I have to get quiet and ask, "What can I do to help?" It is becoming second nature to me.

JP: What is a specific way that your Soul Mission has come into play recently in your daily life?

MK: A friend of ours lost his wife last January; she was one of my best friends and was an antique collector. She had lots of antiques in boxes in the basement which she had wanted to have me sell for her but we never got around to it. After her death, her husband had to sell their house and asked me to help him clean out. He was happy with whatever I did and that was wonderful. The other day, I saw beautiful roses and was reminded that he likes roses. Since he is very lonely, I felt he would enjoy them. While in the shop I encountered a lady looking at the same roses. She complainingly said, "I wish I knew someone in the hospital so I could buy them for her." I said, "Why does someone have to be in the hospital before you

give him or her flowers? Anyone would love these roses." I hope she took my advice. Our friend loved the bouquet I took to him.

JP: *Those little acts of kindness can make a huge difference to someone's day.*

MK: Love is about paying attention to the needs of others. Our beloved cat, Orville, died last August; he had been a part of the family for 17 years. I loved him very much and was very centered on him and his needs. After Orville left us, I realized the enormous need to help the cats of Chautauqua – both wild and domesticated. I heard about a lady who is 85 years old and doesn't drive. She has been known to take care of as many as 27 cats inside and outside her house at any one time. I started shopping for cat food and kitty litter on her behalf. I also put an article on the "Grapevine" – an email list at Chautauqua – introducing her to the community and telling about her work in cat rescue. Amazingly, she had great response with both money and physical assistance.

JP: *What has been the greatest challenge to living your Soul Mission?*

MK: Time seems to be one of the most difficult things. Often, there aren't enough hours in the day. There have been times in my life when I have exhausted myself giving, which diminishes a good thing. Since taking the class, I have been keeping a careful eye on that fact. It is important for me to recharge myself, which happens very easily while I lose myself in my favorite hobby – painting. Sometimes this activity makes me feel a little selfish but it helps to refresh me and more deeply enjoy living from the heart.

JP: *As you encounter challenges, doubts, or setbacks, how does knowing who you are at the soul level help you get back on track?*

MK: Getting still always helps me get back on track. In 1984, I had a very bad bout with a back problem. My Aunt had died two years before and my mother had had a stroke and could not speak. But I called her three times a week to talk with her – even though she could not respond. We were scheduled to go to Germany for a visit in the

summer but I knew we needed to go sooner. Unfortunately, she died before we arrived. After that trip my back went out and when I went to see a stressologist, he suggested I take time for myself in the morning each day to read the Bible. That was of incredible help to me. It is also very helpful to me just getting still and opening up.

JP: *What is the most important thing you've learned about yourself since claiming your Soul Mission?*

MK: That one person can do a lot especially when she does it from the heart. You always hear the phrase, "Oh, I'm just one person, what can I do?" Even if you do a small deed it can open other people's hearts and have a ripple effect that could change the world a little. I try to instill in other people how much joy *they* can get out of doing things for others. So many little things need to be done for so many people.

JP: *What would you say to someone who is considering doing Soul Mission * Life Vision?*

MK: If you are really interested in finding out why you were put in this world and what you are meant to do with your time here, I highly recommend you take this course. You will be very happy you did.



Marianne and Dick Karslake at their 50th Anniversary Dinner on St. Lucia