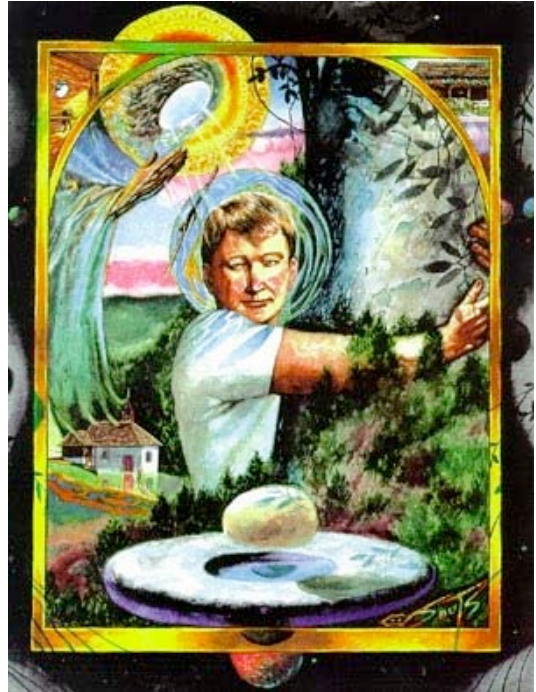


# Opened to Radiance

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In 1989, only a few days after the fall of the Berlin Wall, I was in a two-week workshop with the legacy children of World War II. The group was primarily composed of Germans, Japanese and Americans with a sprinkling of other Europeans. Though “The Wall” was in Berlin, I felt internal walls collapsing, catalyzed by the symbolism. I vowed to make my first trip to Europe the next year. I was ready to expand my world.

Many Europeans had casually invited me to visit. Now that I was committed to go there, I sent out letters asking if they had a place for me to stay for a month. Theo and Leta were the first to offer me a space. They invited me to Luzern, Switzerland for September 1990. I made few preparations except to buy a ticket in April for the September trip in order to get a low fare. I was open to whatever would occur. The trip just felt important.



As my plane circled Zurich to land, it was the break of dawn after a storm and the sun cascaded in a panorama of Jacob’s ladders. Hollywood could only hope for such an angelic scene. I was anxious about language, money exchange and other first time jitters. Soon, I was rescued by my friend Barbara who found me on the way to buy a ticket. She took over for several hours showing me Zurich and putting me on the right train to Luzern.

I rested a day in my host home and then Theo invited me to go with him to the Alps where he was to work that morning. He recommended that I walk in the mountains and meet him in the early afternoon. He dropped me off on a dead end road and my adventure began. I was ecstatic with the sun, sky, and remote alpine environs. I met him for coffee as scheduled quite under the spell of wonder and over loaded senses from the scenery.

He said, “There is a little place in the woods near here that I’d like to share with you. It is a very special place to me. Would you like to go?” “Yes!”

We ate at a mountainside restaurant and then drove to Fleuli Ranft near Sachsein, the home of Saint Nicholas von Flue, formerly Bruder Klaus. All of these places and people were unknown to me. As we arrived I saw a souvenir stand, not at all impressive when compared to my morning sojourn in the Alps.

We parked and Theo led me to the home where Bruder Klaus had lived with his wife and ten children until he was age 50. We entered and looked around not saying much. Then we went into a room where I was greeted by a woman who asked if I was aware of the prayer that the Saint had written in that room. I said no and then she offered to read it to me. Saying yes to that reading was a gateway beyond anything that I have ever experienced.

She began to read. Theo had come close. As she spoke slowly and deliberately in English, not her own language, my eyes began to water. I lost my breath. My head began to swim. I wasn't sure that I could remain standing. I was speechless, lost, bewildered. I struggled to regain control. She finished reading. Part of me wanted to leave quickly. I got halfway out of the building and stopped. "Theo, would you please take my camera? I have to go back." He nodded and took it.

I walked back to the same room. Again, I began to lose my equilibrium. I was fearful of falling to the floor in the midst of others. I caught a glance of an adjacent bedroom. I used my last conscious control to get through that door and to the chest at the foot of the bed. I dropped to my knees sobbing. There were no longer thoughts of anything, only feelings of utter sorrow.

How long I stayed there, I do not know. I am eternally grateful to Theo for protecting my space when I could not. He allowed my surrender to go uninterrupted. I finally got up off the floor and made it outside the building. I couldn't speak. Theo said that we should now go down the hill into the ranft to go into the Saint's anchorite cell. He led me slowly and safely, as I was not steady.

We entered the cell. On one wall is a hole to look outside. On another wall, at its corner, is a window into the attached chapel. On a third wall is a crucifix. There is a bench and a stone upon the bench. The fourth wall displays a replica of his prayer mandala. That is all there is. This was his home for twenty years.

I sat on the bench, looked out the round hole, and then kneeled on the floor and began to gaze upon the mandala. I was again transformed into a totally surrendered posture. At first I wept without sound as I turned inside out with feeling. People moved in and out of the area, but I was barely aware. Again, Theo watched and waited like a guardian angel. Not once did he interrupt. He allowed me to be in my experience.

After a while, I moved from the center of the floor to the window that permitted a view into the chapel. At this time the sobbing moved from quiet waves to audible sobs and my body shook as I looked upon the crucifix in the chapel below. At some point, I became aware of my surroundings, but my body would not move for the longest time. When it could move, I held onto the wall, steadied myself and moved gently out the door, down the steps and outside to a small altar near the fence.

I was again drawn into abject surrender. I hung onto the fence from my kneeling posture. My tears were sheets and mucus reached from my nose to the ground. I was emptied out. Of what and why, I did not know. When I could walk, Theo took me to a gift shop next door and bought

me a replica of the prayer mandala. I was without ability to do much but stand and say, “Thank you.”

As we left this place, I felt a message to leave by a path different than we had come, but I couldn't give voice to it. As we approached a fork in the path, Theo suggested we return another way. I smiled inside with gratitude. I had gone a very short distance up the path, when knowing came into my mind. I was asked to stop at a tree, to hug that tree, to open and close my eyes three times, all of which I did without question.

On the third closing of my eyes, a numinous light and figure appeared as if it had risen out of the cell behind me. The light where a face would be was too bright to look at directly, but I was given an outline of a form to focus upon. A voice began to speak. And, when the voice ended, I moved away from the tree to the path.

Then the voice asked that I pick up a small white stone and carry it with me up the path. I did. Very slowly, I moved up this steep alpine incline, my physical energy nearly exhausted. Every step was deliberate.

As I neared the top of the path at the edge of the woods, the voice directed me to put the small white pebble into the center of a black, hollowed out stone that appeared in the path. I did. The last message was that I had chosen to do the will of God not my own and I could now go back into the world. It was quiet. I was surrendered.

Theo had waited at the top of the steps. I related very briefly that I was not yet willing to talk. I needed to stay in silence. I wrote down the messages. Theo drove me to Luzern. I slept. The next day a friend from Germany was to drive me to the Italian speaking part of Switzerland.

I assumed that this was the end of this experience. It was only the beginning. For three days, I was to be in the presence of the Divine in ways that defy description.

After the mystical openings, here and in Ticino, I returned to Fleuli Ranft. I went apart from the others and walked to the stream that flows at the bottom of the ranft. I wanted a staff similar to that of Saint Nicholas of Flue. I searched the woods along the stream to no avail.

I turned to leave. A voice: “Go back. Look again.” I turned and saw a staff floating in the current. It stopped on a rock in the middle of the stream opposite me. Off with my shoes and into the water I waded. As I grasped the staff, I could see that it was blackened by fire at its middle much as Saint Nicholas had felt lightning in his side as he began his fullest retreat into God.

I brought the staff to America and now it is my prayerful companion as I sit in the open hillside field near my apartment and repeat the prayer of the Saint. And, I add one line: “My Lord and My God, make me an instrument of Thy will.”