

Energy Becoming Love

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This essay develops the metaphor of energy to address the meaning of God. It does so by drawing upon aspects of Buddhist thinking and certain findings in contemporary science. It approaches energy as the activity of inter-relying, pregnant with the possibility of emerging as spirit, in a manner that heals, especially becoming the highest quality within relatedness: that of care and love. Love as we understand it may not have been at the beginning; but it does emerge from the giving forth of the beginning; and it does emerge from the activity of inter-relatedness that occurs in and as world. Such is the divine impulse that has given birth and empowers world. Those are the activities within which God, world, and humanity most express one another, most are synonymous with one another.

1. *Energy as Relatedness*

Buddhism is not God-centered, and that distinguishes it from most other religious traditions. Especially within the Madhyamika tradition and the thinking of Dogen and Nargajuna, Buddhism emphasizes dependent co-arising (*Pratitya Samutpada*).¹ According to this teaching, nothingness and emptiness are at the core of being. However, contrary to Western thinking in which nothingness tends to be seen as meaningless, Buddhism finds nothingness rich with implication. This is stated so simply in the eleventh chapter of the *Tao Te Ching*, a tradition of early China that influenced Buddhism in the third century.² The Tao notes that the useful part of a cup is the empty part into which something can be poured and then poured out to drink. Similarly, the useful part of a room is the space enclosed by the walls within which people gather to meet, work, etc. In other words, nothingness and emptiness are understood not just as negating, but also and more importantly in terms of what they make possible and allow for.

Furthermore, within the Eastern paradigm, nothingness and emptiness are understood as a way of affirming the fundamentally inter-dependent nature of the world. What is negated is that anything exists merely as itself outside of the context and interplay of relatedness and inter-connectedness that is world. If from one point of view this appears to diminish the significance of anything by denying its subsistence, from another point of view it accomplishes the opposite and affirms the mutual

openness of each toward all, thereby expanding the parameters of each to universal proportions. In offering a world with no center at all, it offers a world in which each and all are as centers to one another.

The apparent a-theism within this teaching would seem to establish an unbridgeable divide between Buddhism and theistic traditions, even in spite of some recent dialogues initiated between them by Masao Abe. Nevertheless, I would like to explore the possibility that reflecting on a meaning of God by using the metaphor of energy might help provide a few links in building a bridge between these seemingly contradictory traditions of religious thinking. I believe this link is possible because the inter-dependent nature of the world that Buddhism affirms would seem to imply an activity of inter-relatedness within world that involves energy.

We know from Einstein that the material universe is an expression of energy in a myriad of manifestations, and that matter and energy are constantly converting into one another. As such, we might consider energy as the potential for all that is eventually material, as activity assuming material form. This suggests that the appearance of permanently solid objects within the world is somewhat illusory; and to the keener eye, the world exists fundamentally in terms of process and activity rather than permanent states.

It also seems to be a fundamental characteristic of energy that it epitomizes connectivity. It is amazing that we find everywhere in the universe the activity of connectedness. Whether we penetrate into the ever receding dimensions of the sub-atom (especially as understood in Quantum Physics), or probe the infinitely expansive horizons of inter-galactic space; whether organic or inorganic, whether chemical or biological, whether the living systems of plant and animal, or the various networks of human existence; everywhere, we find relatedness.³ This fundamentally inter-connective nature of energy is manifest most strikingly in the complex structures of molecular organization at work in the in-formational activities of genes, DNA, and proteins out of which emerge an incredible diversity of living forms.⁴ Even the evolutionary process of natural selection and adaptation can be seen as a manifestation of inter-relatedness giving rise through an intricate web of inter-actions (both through struggle and cooperation) to ever more complex living structures. More recently, we witness the potential of this power of connectedness in the modern age of electronic information technology that is bringing about an inter-dependent world order that is emerging toward global proportions.

This all could allow us to consider that there is a potentiality within the structure of relatedness itself that is open-ended and acts as a fertile source from out of which the world evolves through the transformation of energy as a universal force of connectivity that bears the potential to develop and emerge in ever more complex and intensive activities of inter-relatedness: from the sub-atomic, through further structures of organization and in-formation that occur within the electromagnetic, chemical, molecular, biological, organic....., and eventually human dimensions of world. Throughout the inter-relational context of world there is energy in one form and another, as the activity of connecting in the between of relatedness, as the between of relatedness.⁵

Though it would clearly represent a more poetic than scientific way of thinking, could we think of energy as a pregnant verbal power bursting forth out of the singularity of its infinite emptiness and need (German: *nee*: emptiness: need) with the potentiality to emerge and develop through all the ensuing forces and fields that empower and become world? The open-endedness of the potentiality that is energy could represent the aspect of emptiness we find in Buddhist thinking; its verbal power would be the inter-active nature of relatedness that occurs within the inter-dependent network that is the world; and its pregnancy would represent the potentiality that is source of all that eventually becomes. While it would seem quite anthropomorphic to refer to energy as pregnant, nevertheless pregnancy implies the power by which birth and life come forth, and so energy may well be the most pregnant potentiality of all.

Nevertheless, it could be misleading to refer to energy as pregnant. We generally think of pregnancy as bringing forth that which is genetically prepared to come to term; and pregnancy does not generally give birth to what is structurally or genetically new. From a strictly evidence-based perspective, it would not be appropriate to suggest that energy has intention or purpose to emerge as it does; nor that there is a pre-design or set intentionality of direction. Nevertheless, I believe we might appreciate the potentiality of energy as perhaps creative in nature, in the sense that its activities of inter-relatedness are open-ended and emerge through ever more complex and intense structures of attractedness-in-between. Therefore, if we understand energy's potentiality as bearing a creative and emergent openness toward what can be new, then referencing its pregnancy has merit.

Certainly, the energy of attraction between atoms and molecules, etc, does not manifest in the same form as emerges in later and much

more complex structures of organization as we find among ourselves as humans who are able to think and care, etc. Nevertheless, I would like to suggest that even what we might consider as more spiritual activities are expressions of energy.⁶ While this might seem strange at first glance, nevertheless, these certainly represent activities taking place within the network of inter-relatedness that is our world; and as such are expressions of energy at work in some manner or other. Indeed, the manifestation of energy in the care between humans may well be of an intensity and power that is greater than we find within the merely physical or electromagnetic dimensions of world.

Referencing a dimension of spirit within energy is a way of acknowledging a form of activity and relatedness that, while emerging within the physical, is not completely engulfed or encompassed by the physical. Especially emergent activities that involve awareness or feelings of empathy, or care imply a subjective and internalizing dimension of experiencing that are not to be completely equated with what is merely physical. They imply a manner of openness and opening-up in the between of one another and world that constitutes a manner of inter-acting and connecting that is not strictly measured in terms of physics, biology, chemistry, genetics. Exactly how and why this realm emerged as it did is probably not something that can be clearly known; and even the greatest of scientists, Einstein, admitted he found mystery at the core of it all. All we can legitimately say is that it happened as it did. Nevertheless, there may well be something about the dynamics of relatedness and the activities of in-between that bring forth somehow from out of themselves the possibilities that have become world. If reflecting on this process, with all its fits and turns, we see what appears as directionality, we can be grateful.

This perspective allows us to see a continuum to world in which the material and spiritual realms of being are not distinctly separate, but rather involve, include, and grow out of one another. It understands even the most personal dimensions of human relatedness, as family, friends, neighbors, etc., as expressions of energy and intensifications of activities of inter-relating that have been emerging from the beginning. If the atoms and molecules had not 'learned' to do as they do, we would not have become capable of the dimension of spirit that is fundamental to being human. This does not mean there is no difference between human relationships and those occurring within atoms, molecules, genes, etc; nor that our relationships are to be explained strictly in terms of those prior forms of

energy in some reductionist manner. However, it does suggest that there is a continuum and inter-connectedness to it all. As the Buddhist might suggest, everywhere there is relatedness, beginningless and endless.

2. Energy as Metaphor

I think this notion of energy as activity of inter-relatedness and the manner in which it emerges through a continuum of possibilities, even within a dimension of spirit, can act as a fit metaphor in helping us reflect on the meaning of God. The strength of such a metaphor is that it offers a holistic understanding of God and world, and overcomes the dualistic tendency we often find in religious thinking that sets god off as separate and apart from world. Energy is not a power that stands above or in control of world, but is rather the empowering potential that is and becomes world. Presented in these terms as potential and emergent energy, God and world, God and humanity become much more in-volved with and mutually part of one another in a very holistic manner.

However, this metaphor can be problematic, at least for some, because it does not present God as a person who wields the power to create a world and direct its events, someone to worship and believe in, someone who saves us from the ultimate mortality of our humanness. Rather, it presents God as the creative and empowering energy, the vital force within, the potentiality that bursts forth to allow and become world, the pregnant emergence of ever more intensive modes of attractedness in the between of relatedness. Rather than understanding god as a transcendent power apart from world, it understands God and world as including and included in one another, to the point of no separation. In doing so, it presents a God who shares in the vulnerabilities and limitedness of all that is world, not as merely a moment, but ultimately.

This understanding of God can create uneasiness among those who share in traditional religious views. It does seem to reject the notion of God as a person. Although there is an aspect of personalness to energy, especially as it emerges into spirit, the metaphor does not present God as person. Nevertheless, I would not aim to discredit the prevailing images of God that we find in most religion as a personal being. With its poetic images, stories, and symbols, religion serves and arises out of a very real need within the human spirit. It allows humans to address and reach out in ways with which we are familiar and comfortable toward that which

we experience as greater than ourselves, that which we acknowledge in appreciation for the gift of world, that before which we feel accountable and responsible. However, if it is inevitable that we put a human face to God, it is important that we recognize these as ways to approach the unapproachable and make manifest that which can not be fully manifest. Even the notion of god as energy represents but another human attempt to say what the Tao understood long ago cannot be said adequately in words.

There is a further problem posed by the metaphor because energy is intricately bound up with forces that are negative and even destructive. Energy manifests not just in activities of drawing-together and attractedness, but also in repelling and drawing apart. In doing so, it releases forces of power in the between of world that can be destructive in nature, perhaps even need to be. However, and in spite of this, as suggested by eastern paradigms, energy itself is neither positive nor negative, yin nor yang, neither good nor bad, male nor female. For both better and worse in the world that is, the emergent nature of energy occurs through the interaction and balancing of those opposing forces. Apparently, there cannot be one without the other. It is as though conflict were essential to emergence.

Nevertheless, especially at its later dimensions of development, this activity of balancing and empowerment within world manifests what we might consider a quality and propensity for healing at work within the process of relatedness. With this notion of healing, I believe we begin to address the emergent potential of energy in its most complex and intense expression. Healing fosters the coming-back-together into balance of what has suffered some form of shattering and disruption. Healing is real and takes place in spite of so much that is threatening within world and puts all at risk. The manner in which we find this happening throughout the natural world can be astounding. There is something about the body that works toward healing when wounded; and even in the wake of its most violent events, nature does seem able to restore itself to balance.

Healing occurs as an activity of wholeness, and represents the way in which things belong together, come together, and hold together. The paradox is that wholeness not only gives place to, but needs the negative, needs the conflict of diversity, needs the dislocations from out of which further wholeness can emerge. Wholeness arises out of contrast and through contrast. We see this occurring constantly not only within the natural realm but equally within the realm of human existence. Many things do not seem to fit. In fact, we witness much too often events that seem to defy any semblance of a meaningful whole, events that seem symptomatic

of an ultimately shattered and fractured world. And yet, humans have been known to do their best even in the midst of the most tragic, even in response to what is most destructive. Here too, there can be healing, and the possibility of wholeness, arising not from events themselves, but rather from our responses to them.

Such is the healing of the human spirit that is able to rise above and move on even in the face of the most disastrous and catastrophic events. Frankl, who wrote after surviving years in the Nazi death camps, refers to this as the uniquely human capacity to turn a tragedy into a personal triumph, a predicament into a victory.⁷ There is a healing that works to restore trust and care in relationships that have been touched with pain and hurt; and there is the healing brought by the support to be found in relationships that allow one to do what, if left to oneself alone, might otherwise seem not possible. There is the healing of care from empathy toward the pain and suffering of others (note the Gothic root of care: *Kara*: to grieve and feel the pain of); and the healing that is able to recover and restore peace to our human world in spite of the ever-recurring violence.

Energy, the activity of inter-relatedness, pregnant with the possibility of emerging as spirit, in a manner that heals, especially becoming the highest quality within relatedness: that of care and love; that is the meaning of God the metaphor presents. Energy becomes love, and love heals. So many over the years has testified that ultimately there is no higher form of inter-relatedness than the commitments and care offered through love; and there may well be nothing more healing (note that the Buddhists prefer the term Compassion: *Karuna*). Love as we understand it may not have been at the beginning; but it does emerge from the giving forth of the beginning; and it does emerge from the activity of inter-relatedness that occurs in and as world. Such is the divine impulse that has given birth and empowers world. Energy as spirit, healing energies, energy becoming love: those are the activities of spirit and the activities of world itself in its most far-reaching potentialities. Those are the activities within which God, world, and humanity most express one another, most are synonomous with one another.

3. A Hopeful Future

The emergence of energy as spirit with healing qualities has particular implications at present for what many see as a particularly critical juncture in the human condition. We hear increasing concerns about looming

threats and dangers, whether those we pose to one another or those we pose to the earth itself. If this has likely always been the plight of the world's condition, it has become particularly aggravated in our time by the manner in which so much is possible, so much available. While the world has always been at risk and dangerous, never before has there been the potential for unleashing such forces of power as we have become capable of. There is a strange twist of events occurring in our time: the very means those with power have put in place to secure themselves have now become our biggest threat; the very technologies we develop to expand our control over the world act to increase our vulnerability. It is as though the human itself has become its own greatest danger.

Nevertheless, Heidegger once said, quoting Holderlin, "Where the danger is, there is as well the saving."⁸ We might understand this to mean: there, precisely where the disruption and risks are so high, there as well can we find the hope of healing. Indeed, the hope arises precisely out of the increased danger as the very technological world that threatens us also affords opportunities and possibilities for inter-relatedness never before possible, possibilities that are all the more desperate to emerge in light of increased risks and dangers of our time.

The very forces putting the earth so much at risk, also open up and foster a network of inter-dependencies that is becoming global in scope. Whether one considers economic or political issues, the various peoples and nations of the earth are being gathered together and have impact on one another as never before. Prior to the technological age, global networks of peoples working to address common issues that affect everyone was simply not a possibility. Within the technological era, however, it is become quite obvious that the very future depends upon the emergence of such networks. What was not possible a century ago becomes necessary in our time. The very ramifications of increased violence and war, and the backlash from those, are making diplomacy and dialogue all the more necessary and all the more possible.

The paradox is that the dangers and risks that threaten our time are helping bring about a newly emergent sense of closeness among the people of the earth. They provide an opportunity for a level of awareness concerning the state of the earth and the fate of one another that simply could not have occurred previously. They provide the dynamics for the emergence of a sense of inter-dependency upon the earth that would be genuinely healing in nature. What is not yet clear, because not yet decided, is whether what is taking place will work to benefit the human

condition, or work against it. There evidence for both is growing. As has probably occurred often throughout the process of evolution, what does emerge depends. However, in our time it depends on matters that clearly fall into human hands: involving new levels of awareness and choice and a willingness to accept the global scope of commonality gathering us together as human with one another and nature.

This would mean embracing inter-dependency; and that could bring a turn-about that is truly healing in nature. It is doubtful that such order will emerge easily; nor without pain, as is often the case with healing. Nevertheless, it would represent the activities of inter-relatedness reaching toward their highest levels of effort. It would open possibilities for living with one another upon the earth for which the human itself could own full responsibility, possibilities arising from the power of care, and even love, at work within and among us. In doing so, they would manifest the healing energies of spirit as integral to world.

The energy of that possibility, the energy of that hope, the energy of those efforts to bring this about express the meaning of God for and within world. Ultimately it presents us not some greater power to worship who will ultimately save us from ourselves. Rather, those energies offer us the potential to bring forth a genuinely human community upon the earth, perhaps for the first time. Thus, they offer us a world that as though “beckons” to emerge, perhaps “wants” to emerge.

4. Similarities and Differences

There is a definite similarity between the approach this metaphor offers and the process theology developed by Hartshorne.⁹ There too, at least the consequent nature of God, God as actual, is ever in process of becoming, ever included within and including all that is world. In Process thinking, God and world participate intimately in one another’s being, each contributing mutually to each; and this would seem similar to how God would relate to world as energy. Nevertheless, Process thinking understands God as Dipolar in nature. It acknowledges a luring, persuasive, and envisioning agency to God that transcends world in a manner akin to Plato’s eternal forms, an aspect that of God that remains abstract, absolute, and independent from the world process.

Therefore, in spite of an apparent similarity, I do not think the metaphor of emergent energy presents God with a dipolar nature. As the emergent potential within the activity of inter-relatedness, energy would

be completely synonymous with the world, leaving nothing other than the process. The metaphor presents God in a very pan-theistic manner; while process thinking is more pan-en-theistic.

Nevertheless, we might consider the activity of energy within inter-relatedness as similar to what process thinking means by the primordial and abstract nature of God. I am understanding inter-relatedness as somehow primordial, original, and originating as suggested by the Buddhist notion of dependent co-arising. However, the activity of relatedness can only occur where there is world, and arises in its possibilities out of the essentially inter-dependent nature of world; and this would seem to leave no dipolarity between energy and its activity of relatedness. Therefore, I see the metaphor of emergent energy presenting God as more synonymous with world than we find with the eternal and abstract nature of the dipolar God in Process thought. However, I am open to the possibility that a more careful analysis might see this differently.

Instead, I propose that the understanding of God offered with the metaphor of energy is closer to that taken by the contemporary Buddhist thinker, Masao Abe. Abe has initiated a dialogue that attempts to bridge what must seem to be the biggest impasse in religious thinking, that between theism and atheism. At first, this might seem impossible, for either there is God or not. Nevertheless, Abe enters squarely into that apparent impossibility and attempts to find some common and fundamental points of convergence between the absence of God in Buddhism and the understanding of God suggested at least by certain Christian symbols. I think his approach represents a complete immersion and immanence of God within, and perhaps even as, world; and this would be very consistent with the metaphor of God as energy.

Abe's reflections are very much rooted in biblical imagery. He takes as his starting point a theme in one of Paul's writings to the Philippians that describes Jesus as having set aside the aura of God and become instead one of us, indeed a servant and the lowliest of all.¹⁰ Abe interprets this to mean that Jesus represents God among us as abdicating any claims of divinity for self, and by abandoning the position of authority and power usually associated with God-being. Abe asks what might this self-giving, self-effacing, and self-emptying (Kenosis) of Jesus manifest about God if taken seriously. He answers that the symbol of Incarnation that presents Jesus as manifesting and embodying God reveals God as self-effacing, whose meaning exists in self-emptying. Jesus represents god as abandoning

the God-being that transcends world, and giving forth of self into world. Accordingly, God is displaced from the center and negated as separate from world, not by human claim, but by God's own original self-displacement and investment of God-self within world.

Many theologians have welcomed the dialogue initiated by Abe and even find much meaning in what he says. Nevertheless, several have responded that for Christian thinking the Trinitarian understanding of God allows for an aspect of God (as Father) that remains transcendent even with the self-emptying Jesus. Abe answers in turn that if self-emptying truly occurs without reservation, and if Jesus truly reveals God without reservation, there is no part of God left in reserve to remain God.¹¹ Jesus either does or does not fully manifest God. If he does, then the meaning of God is no longer to be identified with anyone left to be referenced as God. God-meaning is no longer to be associated with God, but with the mutual and reciprocal interplay of self-giving and self-emptying that constitutes the inter-relatedness of world into which God has embodied self.

I believe the metaphor of God as emergent energy is quite consistent with the self-emptying interpretation Abe develops. Energy would be what God has become in self-emptying and giving of self into and as world. Indeed, self-emptying would seem to represent the activity of inter-relatedness that is energy quite well (however poetic it clearly is). As self-emptying, God is embodied as the activity of relatedness in the between of the world's inter-dependencies; God becomes the potentiality within energy that bursts forth, empowers, and emerges, as world. As self-emptying, God would be synonymous with the process that is the world in its activities of inter-relatedness. As the energy that empowers and emerges as world, there would be nothing left as God that is other than world. I think the metaphor of God as the emergent potentiality of energy presents something similar.

5. Healing in Death

Finally, we need to consider how this notion of energy becoming spirit, becoming love, may offer clues about the potential for healing even in the experience of death. There is no escaping the all-encompassing reach of death; and if healing energies represent the meaning of God within and for world, they must be as far-reaching and all-encompassing. However, in addressing this issue, I believe the paradoxical understanding

of emptiness and nothingness within Buddhist thinking can be helpful in presenting a perspective toward death that is different from that found in most western cultures. From a Buddhist perspective, death is not an interference disrupting being, but is an integral part of the process that is being.¹² It is not understood as something that should not be (compare Genesis' suggestion that death is the result of sin); nor as something to overcome, nor as that from which we must be saved. There can be no living without dying; and life can continue only with and through dying. Within this perspective, we are invited to accept the living—dying continuum as essential to the manner in which we exist at all. Furthermore, dying manifests our fundamental finiteness and vulnerability, thus our own inner emptiness and non-sufficiency; and also represents our ultimate belonging together within the continuum of living—dying—relatedness that is world. Dying represents the negation of self, but in a way that affirms the essentially inter-dependent nature of our lives to begin with.

From this perspective, healing would not represent overcoming death with the hope of immortality, nor the comfort of an eternal heaven that we often associate with God. Rather, healing would occur by nature of our participation within the ever-present process of the continuum itself wherein all we are and have done, all that is of meaning, is let go and carried forth beyond ourselves. There would be healing in the hope that what we have given to one another, lives, not in self or as self, but within the continuum of living—dying—relatedness that is world. Being is not ours to have or keep, not ours at all. Only what we let go and give forth can live, precisely by no longer being identified with and as ourselves. Nor is it let go simply into memory. What we truly offer and receive from one another goes beyond the mere surface of remembering; and much that matters is seldom remembered.

Granting the fundamentally inter-dependent nature of world, the meaning of who we are and what we have done is not contained within the shell and confines of self. The meaning of self involves and is involved with (in-volvere: circles along with), includes and is included within (in-cludere: takes within) so much more than self. We share a world we essentially offer and receive from one another. However painful it may be that we are but for a while and experience loss; however difficult it may be to let go and let pass; nevertheless, there can still be healing at work as the energies of our own being enter into the energies of the continuum of living—dying—relatedness that gathers the meanings of our lives into the on-going spirit of world, where it matters and makes a difference.