



*The Kiss*  
*Le baiser*

1969, oil on canvas, 97 x 130 cm  
Musée National Picasso, Paris

## **Picasso's "The Kiss:" A Little Contemplative Essay Regarding the Mysteries of Intimacy**

**George Viney, Psy.D.**

Yesterday, Picasso's painting, "The Kiss," powerfully presented itself in my memory, conjured up by the psyche's magician as a psychic mover, an image to nourish my soul...So I humbly receive Mnemosyne's gift and invite her daughters, the Muses, to sing the song of my heart sounding in this image as it lives within me so that I might make an offering of words to the mysteries of Love. I dedicate this little essay to my beloved, Anahit, and the tender soul-closeness we have been graced with and care for and are constantly being initiated into. And I dare to share these musings with you who finds yourself

reading these lines; I offer them as a gift reflecting the kind of friendship I value most and seek to always cultivate with those I love. And I invite your own reflections and feelings as you contemplate Picasso's image and these imaginings that have flowed up from the divine and silent spring within...

Picasso's capacity to create images that compensate the collective consciousness and stir our psyches: how this nourishes my heart! Real intimacy arrives through the liturgy of the wound, the soul-ritual of daring to reveal our humanity to one another. We encounter each other authentically, unprotected, unmasked, and courageously exposed to love, out of love. Intimacy, so fragile, so easily crushed, is here so tenderly cared for, so honestly invited, our undignified shadows we try to keep hidden away so people see us as strong, perfect, healthy are here, in Picasso's image, the source of the sacred encounter. The cave-mouth shrouded in the darkness of our wounded black-and-blue soul-emotions, our sorrows, our unanswered life-laments: the very doorway between the Divine and us, between the Lover and the Beloved, between two communing friends...Yet here is a paradox: entering these tenderest of feelings, exposing these tenderest of woundings, and sharing these tenderest of flaw-filled aspects of ourselves lead us to the most beautiful and exquisite connections within the so-sacred precincts of true intimacy! Here we encounter so much melancholic beauty! Such display and disclosure: so melancholic and fragile that beauty fills our love chambers, our private encounters, and imbues the atmosphere between us as incense, as Presence, as Joy! We witness and are witnessed, and we are all healed!

When kisses and other love exchanges are made as a grasping-after, as a desire to possess, as a commodity owned, bartered, and sold, when we connect to each other through will and power, the kiss becomes potentially a means of emotional anesthetization, of soul damage, of heart-stunting...and the third eye of the heart can go blind by the wrong sort of fire, that of bluntness and a lack of imagination.

For me, one of Picasso's gifts to us is his prolific production of images around a similar theme. His psyche is ruminating all around it as if to discern, tease out, and distinguish all the various possibilities of a psychic constellation of experiences, feelings, and ideas as they can gather and shape human experience. To contemplate variations on a theme, one can train one's psychological/spiritual retina to detect different attitudes, approaches, and arrangements within our consciousness. In this case, we are attuning to all that is evoked in a "kiss" contemplated in its full poetic, metaphorical, archetypal, spiritual and embodied echoes within our human experience.

This pencil drawing variation of "The Kiss" heightens the feeling of grasping at, seeking to dominate, possess, and satisfy an insatiable appetite. To kiss in this

manner, poetically speaking, is to approach the other with such attitudes. We hunt, we seek our prey, we approach the Other with demand, force, brute will. As a background image to “The Kiss” image which is the inspiration of this essay, we are able to detect the subtle differences of the two, noting that this pencil drawing emphasizes an earthier, gross, instinctual experience and approach to the Other. Here we attempt to contemplate in our feeling-experience what this approach’s effect is on our experience, what this attitude’s impact is on our loving, our knowing, our relating, and our understanding.



*The Kiss*  
*Le baiser*  
1967, pencil on paper  
Tate Collection, London

As another way of giving some imaginal context to Picasso’s psyche-exploration of “The Kiss,” here is an image of a kiss from Gustav Klimt. In his version, one feels the incredible beauty of the kiss and the feelings experienced are radiant and splendid...We are entering the Grail Castle and lose our breath in the golden light of perfection. Venus graces the moment with her Primavera and emotions flow and flower!



*The Kiss*  
Gustav Klimt  
1907, oil on canvas

In Klimt, the preciousness and delicacy of the kiss is experienced in all its tender intimacy, the clutching and grasping, the dominating and controlling, are surrendered to the exquisite alchemy of the moment and we follow the woman into her rapture of being sensitively held and contained. Returning to Picasso, though, we find another variation on the experience of the kiss, but to get there we must pass through the inhuman, instinctual, unreflective Minotaur who rapes. The Minotaur's journey within Picasso's oeuvre is one of humanization and maturing consciousness. Picasso offers us insight into the darkest, most blunt and obscure instinctual complexes of the human psyche over the extensive metamorphosing Minotaurs he depicted in profound subtlety and variety:



*Dora and the Minotaur*  
1936, China ink, colored pencil, grattage on paper  
Musee Picasso, Paris

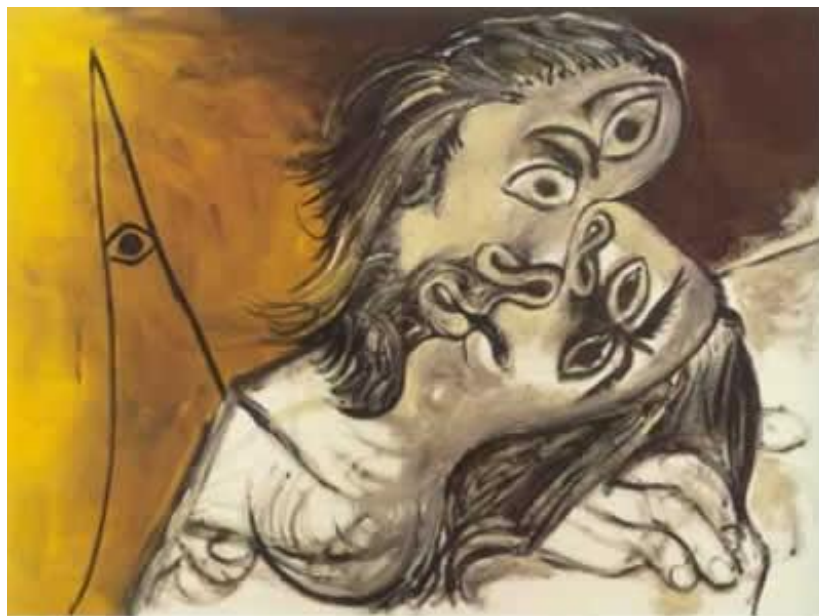


In the following image, one sees that the Minotaur has become blinded like the ancient Greek sage, Tiresias, and is guided by the young soul-figure with dove towards the cave of gnosis and the ladder of consciousness...ideas Picasso consciously incorporated in the series on the theme of the Minotaur:



*Minotauromachy, state IV colored*  
1935, etching, added work with scraper and burin and colored inks  
Private Collection

With these images before us, we can now return to this image of “The Kiss,” also from 1969.



*Le Baiser*  
1969, oil on canvas  
Gilbert de Botton, Switzerland

Here we see psychic movement of the base, instinctual, Minotauresque experience humanizing, developing a consciousness within an instinctual knowing: an obelisk with an eye thrusting into the heart of the man, emanating out of it, with a corresponding penetration entering the heart of the woman. A profound, deeply human feeling as lived in our psychic body is in movement here. A certain abstraction, a kind of alchemical separation is occurring in which the subtle is developing within and out of the gross, as the two opposites kiss more honestly, less instinctually, more consciously, more anxiously, with greater self-awareness and self-consciousness, together the lovers are creating an alchemical retort of mingling confusion. However, this is a wonderfully human, deeply-felt, psychological movement towards a greater capacity for tragic feeling, for a more fully-embodied awareness of the tragic aspects of living, loving, and dying. This is in contrast to the current Zeitgeist that abstracts our experience out of the living historical moment; the collective spirit leaves us disconnected and distant from our experience in the moment, keeping us skating over emotions, surfing the web and never deepening into the living emotional waves, no longer really aware of our psychic bodies, or our psyches as emotionally felt in our bodies moment to moment.

Perhaps now we are in a better contemplative position to approach Picasso's specific version of "The Kiss" that is at the heart of our reflections here. Picasso's compensatory image of "The Kiss" has a powerful, yet compassionate, animal feeling...The way one feels the suffering, loving, and profound feeling in a little donkey when one looks with an open, receptive heart into his eyes.



I reflect on moments of deep intimacy as I gaze at Picasso's two lovers: they are not looking straight into each other's eyes as one would expect, together flying off into the oneness of union beyond the threshold of being previously two separate beings. Picasso's image is not one of rapture into Paradise. And if one trusts Picasso's genius of offering psychic images that deeply compensate our collective ideas and consciousness which are so often one-sided and superficial, then perhaps there is a value to meditating on this deviation from collective expectations encountered in "The Kiss."

How often a dream does the same, deforming and shifting an actual person, object, place, relationship, or perspective to release a metaphorical and profoundly poetic soulful image to help us witness and connect with the subtle, often-imperceptible life of the soul and the spirit hiding within the literal aspects of our lives and experiences. The dreams take our literal stuff and make images that reveal and nourish the soul...and Picasso, as creative artist, does the same. Picasso's image, like dreams, thwarts our efforts to remain outside the image in a dualistic stance of "me" versus "image," and "meaning" versus "object" achieved through remaining detached and distant, casually curious and not fully involved. If we want to know the insights living in the image, we must submit to it as we do when we surrender to love. This is the only way. This is the price one pays to enter the knowing found through the heart: non-dual knowing and perception of the mystery not understandable through the mere intellect. We are not seeking *information*, we are seeking *transformation!* We must submit to being transformed by the Other we are contemplating, with and through love.

We might even imagine that "The Kiss" as a psychic image, one lived experientially within the embodied psyche, has been seeking to articulate its unique speech and gnosis through Picasso's artistic capacity. The image-as-Divine-Other is seeking incarnation within Picasso's psyche-stuff, his dreaming. And since this artist is moving so deeply within his own human experience, he is touching on, experiencing, and expressing images that resonate within *us* deeply...reaching us within our shared humanity.

Picasso's psyche offers us here another image of "The Kiss" and explores this poetic experience we describe as a kiss now in the grey coolness which discloses subtleties in the artistic space between pure line and full color:



*The Kiss*  
*Le baiser*  
1969, oil on canvas  
Sotheby's, New York

In the above image, I have the reverie that I discern in this version the hints of the Sphinx and the geometry of the pyramid...The male lover is still animal, yet mingling with the riddle of loving, with the mystery of one's inner experience, esoteric and initiatory. Picasso was aware of the esoteric tradition deeply steeped in symbolic transmission of ancient mysteries, often using images from this spiritual stream. One has the sense that Picasso creates these images within the tension of opposites: the spiritual and the instinctual, the abstract symbol and the lived-in-the-body experience. Again hearkening back to the primitive and instinctual, the male lover covers his lover's ear and it seems perhaps that this "holding" of her neck borders on choking, recalling echoes of the Minotaur's aggressive approach of taking and dominating, of controlling and clutching. Yet, with the draining-away of vivid color, a subsequent cooler developing consciousness is arising, one that is self-reflecting on this instinctual impulse and forming a psychic image slowly standing up on hind legs and striving to leave the mere instinctive and unreflective life behind.

What I am lovingly attempting to do is "read" these variations of the central image and certainly my own history, personality, culture, and experience—my complexes, as Jung would say—are informing and transforming my perception, imagination, experience, and reflection of these images. I don't seek to prove that any of these reveries here are objectively "true," but merely to lovingly imagine



and approach these works of art as Sacred Other I long to kiss and possibly, through a kiss mutually occurring only by grace between me and these works, *understand* the Beloved Other within them more profoundly, *more intimately*. And, there is the subtle relationship occurring between me and you, the reader, which I care about and am seeking to attend to where perhaps our psyches will be gracefully brought together in singing-resonance and non-dualistic knowing if Picasso's paintings-as-Eros will deign to pierce us through-and-through with love.

George Kuhlewind writes:

Every human, in fact every being, is a mystery. This means that we cannot understand them through a discursive thinking that moves from concept to concept. A being can only be understood through intuition, a flash of enlightenment, or meditation. The relationship between two beings requires an even higher capacity in non-dualistic knowing and perception.

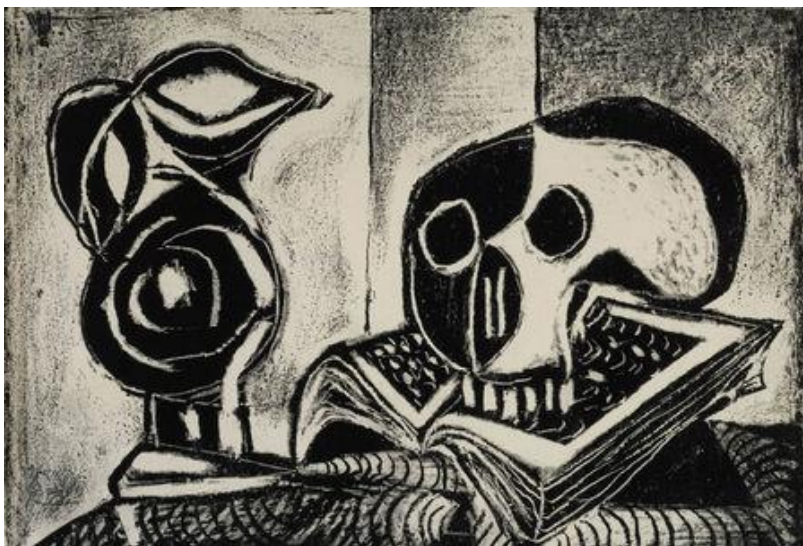
To understand his reflections here within the context of Picasso's image of "The Kiss," we must leave the grasping at knowledge through concepts and become Mary receiving the annunciation of the angel, surrendering her separateness to become the living womb which conceives the divine epiphany and offers it a tabernacle home in which to indwell and manifest. We must surrender our intellect and open our heart to the mystery of this being, this living Picasso image, and *love* our way, that is, *through* a loving contemplation which brings together the seer and the seen, into an *experienced* receptivity which can offer to the Divine Creative Presence our life-stuff "that dreams are made on." This way, Picasso's vision is conceived from within us, within and through the psyche, and appears as an experienced flash of intuitive knowing that is one with the originating vision that appeared to Picasso and which is now re-announced within us anew.

So here are these two awkward figures, deviating in their display from our collective standards of "beautiful," connecting in their shape-and-perspective-shifting display. Not looking at us or each other, these lovers offer us no direct way of approach; we cannot directly and simply take meaning from the image and go about our day unchanged. Such a kiss does not enter the psyche when we connect with each other exclusively through casual conversation, short text-messages, brief and passing moments of contact. Such a kiss is not found in psychological articles I run into within my practice as a psychologist, articles supposedly educational about the psyche and yet which begin always with "an abstract" summarizing what one "can take away" from the article. Love gives! Love loves particulars! Conscious love doesn't simply abstract and seek to

generalize, or seek to possess. No, this image and these lovers are only found when one takes time to create the proper, sacred receptivity, when one dares to slow down and expose one's feelings and nature not in public, but in the intimacy found in the private and vulnerably honest encounter with another experienced as "Thou."

Soul-intimacy: lovers do not have to be literalized. The kiss of which we are speaking can make its epiphany between any two, two that are not literalized into human beings nor depersonalized into abstract notions of objects. These two wherever they appear meet intimately in the embodying, personifying, individuating, memory-infused imagination and feeling of the psyche. And as Jung said: psyche is not in us, we are in the psyche. But this happening of intimacy, so profoundly Dionysian in feeling and experience, so deeply felt in the psychic body, requires an initiatory acquaintance with such moments! One must feel one's way into very personal and intimate "happenings" within one's experience and this is very hard to do when our current collective Zeitgeist is about Titanic excess, manic speed, jargonized concepts, and an obsessive focus on efficiency and productivity.

We must slow down our tempo to the rhythm and timing of own psychic constitutions, to the slowness proper to the psyche's capacity to incubate and brood, to sit "with" an event long enough that a feeling, an image, an experience hatches. And this is not an achievement of heroic power or puerile flight, but a weakening, a loosening, a nursing, a full-bodied offering of one's feeling to the living moment. To evoke Dionysos, one must break through our deadened state homeopathically with a dose of feeling – *really!* – death. To still our speeding life, we must contemplate Still Life as Picasso presents it:



*Black Jug and Skull*  
1946, lithograph



Head of Man  
*Tete d'homme*  
1969, oil and ink on paper

If one gently holds the two above images and notes similarities, one can discern that perhaps the black jug is the Dionysian mask that once animated the skull and, together, they were an embodied, living being. Perhaps the living face we see so full of melancholic feeling in the second image is the Dionysian theatrical mask that holds the bony, harsh truth of our mortality in the container of deep feeling, watering tears, and tender, vulnerable emotion. Dionysos was imagined as pure mask by the ancient Greeks. There was no “behind the mask” for this God, only the here-and-now given moment, fully-felt. And yet there was an

initiatory mystery only disclosed by one's encounter *in experience, held secretly in the precincts of sacred feeling, of death.*

Federico Garcia Lorca wrote of this experience at once melancholic and vitalizing, destructive yet vitally creative, as a deeply emotional and feeling experience which only appears when death is present and possible, when the wound is felt deeply, and nothing less is required than a full response of the wholeness of our being. A contemplation of this black jug and saturnine skull alongside of this man's melancholic face intimates—constellates—a certain Dionysian *happening* that can be registered in our feeling as a soul-kiss.

Rafael Lopez-Pedraza, Jungian/Archetypal therapist and beloved mentor, propitiated a profound experience of my own moving encounter with Dionysian feeling through many meetings with him accompanied by red wine, deeply-feeling conversation, and a tremendous psychic-slowness. Within the encounters with this utterly Dionysian man, I experienced what he had written in his marvelous book, *Cultural Anxiety*, about the experience of what Spaniard aficionados of the bullfight called in Spanish: "temple." Rafael's words that follow are profound if one feels one's way into them, feels how such "temple" can occur between two people, between us and Picasso's images, between ourselves and our psyches, between any two that become the place where and the moment in which the God makes his epiphany:

But let us say a few more words about bullfighting; let us try to approach the mystery which makes the appearance of the Duende in the bullfight possible, referring to Don Luis Bollain and his treatise, *El Toreo*, and reduce a whole book devoted to the essence and aesthetics of tauromachy to the conception of the *temple*. "I understand *templar* as meaning to harmonize, attune and impart the same rhythm to the movement of the lure (the cape *ormuleta* held by the bullfighter) and the charge of the bull so that the bull always has the cloth within reach, but never manages to reach it." A difficult art, infinitely more complicated than can be imagined from the lines quoted here, and a dynamic essence propitious the Duende's appearance.

I should like to expand on the concepts and intuitions that other writers have expressed when trying to describe the *temple*. *Temple* is slowness, but that does not mean that it is uniquely and exclusively slow. I prefer to describe it as an enormously animated slowness, a slowed down state of being, the psyche being adequately prepared. *Temple* is a slowness of movement that may appear in some bullfighting *suertes*, in singing or dancing flamenco and—why not



say it?—in life itself: it pertains to its essence. We can also feel it at times when we are listening to essentially Dionysian music, when the jazz or blues singer or black spiritual choirs sing in those dark sounds to which Lorca refers and with a *temple* matching their tempo they require to transmit their emotion and their Duende. *Temple* is the central nerve and its appearance in psychotherapy points to Dionysian constellations, tells us clearly about the psychic element of inner movement and about the classical constellation of the Dionysian body, even more so if we know and accept that tradition has assimilated Dionysos and his wife Ariadne to the couple Eros and Psyche. **Thus, when there are a few seconds of temple between patient and psychotherapist during treatment, they are more nourishing, more important and say more to the psyche than hours of reductive interpretations, inflationary amplifications and endless associations.**" [bold added]

With this evocation of Dionysian experience, with this recollection of Dionysos and Ariadne and Eros and Psyche as a living mythological and archetypal imagination of what might be experienced with Picasso's initiatory image of "The Kiss," we are ready to return to its contemplation.

These two Picasso lovers shake us up and we must find our own way to lovingly kiss and engage this image! We must enter the image's imagination with genuine regard, love, and respect—not casually—and let "The Kiss" enter us, transform and shape us in its strangeness so that our imaginal and embodied senses can help us find and feel our way emotionally into this experience, this gnosis, these inspiring perspectives, *this* moment of *this* kiss...a tender, authentic, imperfect, beautiful kiss! Then, if we are graced, we have the *experience* of this image's kiss and receive the initiatory knowing of what such a kiss means to the soul. A subtle greenness becomes apparent in the left corner of the image, entering our awareness also indirectly, surprisingly, heralding and hinting that a Dionysian, embodied, life-affirming, natural and plant-like growth is entering into our loving, within all this disillusionment of our ideas that our beloved is perfect, that our loving is always successful and glorious, that our masks of who we are could possibly be enough to arouse the Other's love and desire for us...Ah, the underground and initiatory germination in the soul, the invisible and silent sprouting of seeds of love within, sending vulnerable roots of greenness into our soul-soil made moist and receptive by our vulnerably-shed tears! Spring is gathering strength within the sadness of the wintry sharing of our most-honest selves, indeed *because* of this journey *through* our psyche-nature's seasonal ebb-and-flow cyclical depths, because of the descent *through* this colder introverted path between one another whereby we gather and gestate our libido and life

force, our friendship, our spiritual communion, our tender embraces and touch, our loving!

Is it not in the really honest, gentle kiss – when we are *not* consumed with desire or want, when we are not lost in emotion, when we are most plainly offering our genuine being to fully attune to our companion and love our beloved without demands, without expectations, without ego – that a subtle blossoming of the soul quietly occurs? Is it not at those offhanded and offbeat moments of catching a sideways glimpse of our beloved and feeling an unexpected epiphany of profound feeling for this very human Other before us when we truly feel and experience beauty radiating in her or him? As in Yoga, when one leaves the literal outward gaze and begins to attune inward, Picasso's two lovers are not taking the straight, direct, literal path to each other from outer eyes to outer eyes; they are meeting and loving through the indirect, peripheral, deeply inward sense...They go within themselves and sense the Other *through* their souls and their spirits...as poets and mystics...and Picasso Lovers do.

And perhaps you know and have experienced what I have: to genuinely meet another in this way, to engage in the fullness of a soul-kiss, raises that acute melancholy that this is a passing moment, a moment like a fresh-cut glorious and humble flower surrendering to death to bloom love, knowing that death is present and ever-arriving, ever-entering our emotions in this here and this now, *THIS KISS!* We cannot hang on to it, we cannot remain in it, and we must surrender to the wilting of time. And yet, precisely because of this ever-arriving losing, this ever-surrendering instant, we blaze in a blue fire and burn out of this underlying presence of lamentation-blackness. Precisely because of this sudden *conunctio* of living-dying we transform into the white inspiration of "The Kiss" with its striped, alternating heat-cool blues-rhythms and its jagged-edged emotion-cuts. It is the *initiatory experience* of just such a kiss which creates a specific love-wounding and love-opening within our psychic body out beyond the ecstatic reds and oranges of blood-pumping passion...What endures past the reddening moments when we are flushed and focused in our love-embraces? The answer lies in the liturgy of the wound within the temple of the heart.

Emily Dickinson arises here within the blue-tinged spring of Mnemosyne as a fountain flowing with these moon-white and spirit-warmed words:

### **VII. The White Heat**

Dare you see a soul at the white heat?  
Then crouch within the door.  
Red is the fire's common tint;  
But when the vivid ore

Has sated flame's conditions,  
Its quivering substance plays  
Without a color but the light  
Of unanointed blaze.

Least village boasts its blacksmith,  
Whose anvil's even din  
Stands symbol for the finer forge  
That soundless tugs within,

Refining these impatient ores  
With hammer and with blaze,  
Until the designated light  
Repudiate the forge.

Picasso, wielding soul-hammer and working with emotion-shifting blaze, painted these alchemical images approximately four years before his death and they echo the soundless and finer forge tugging within. In his old age, he was very conscious of death's approach and forged ahead into deeper and deeper reflections illumined by an increasing, designated light. What sort of psyche-light endures beyond the reddening moments in the winter of our lives? What sort of consciousness becomes Presence in the wintry moments *throughout* our lives when the libido-sap runs deep into the hidden Persephonean realms, those realms where memory gathers and abides and produces the soul's white heat? Here we approach the mystery which – under the right heart conditions, with the right soul-preparation, and when there is grace – we can experience when we kiss!

Each of us is left to approach this Sphinx and attempt to articulate an answer we can only ultimately find within...But Picasso, the great explorer and artist of the psyche offers an emotion-full, embodied psychic image which helps us kiss our soul's experience with exquisite tragic and tender feeling: the lily-whiteness of felt-memory, of our pure, honest, and humble humanity, of the melancholic string-songs of viol and cello and violin moaning and sighing out our deep, deep, open-eyed awareness that we are here for a moment on the side of life and that our loving must be a soul-making offering to all that forever endures beyond death...For me this is Love individualized into the uniqueness of our loving encounters...These are the enduring living memorial images of Divine Love shaped in the particularities of our own faces and of those we love and have loved.

Picasso has given us images to mark the psyche's journey: violent instinctuality moves through violating realizations within our psychic life regarding death, power, and love into a more fully psychic consciousness sounding within us like a viola da gamba creating the tenderest and most exquisitely-loving music within a deeply-known and experienced liturgy of the wound. To love this way, out of this initiatory psychic progression and preparation known through kissing—again understood in its full range of meaning—is to perhaps become capable of being a living tabernacle into which the Divine can descend for a moment into this world, in which the Godhead can experience what Love is when human consciousness has become aware of the soul within us and within all that is radiating through the particulars of this world we are part of. And perhaps within this tabernacle of individuated humanity, the Divine can experience what love is like when shared between two human beings who have the honesty and courage to surrender to the awesomeness of imminent intimacy, hold on within the enormous tensions of opposites always present, and *kiss this way!*

Picasso's "The Kiss:" an education of the heart, a medicine and tonic for the casualness that can so often permeate our contacts, our friendships, our loving! These words arise out of an intimate dialogue between what imagines within me and what Picasso has dreamed into being, together now forming my own sacred experience in this indirect conjuring, connection-making, and mingling of memories and intimate moments, mine and Picasso's own. These imaginings arise out of the in-forming "daimons" of the psyche, those angelic inspirational presences who appear as invisible guests now here, now there, now between us, always shaping our psyches with incredible poetic revelation!

Now word and image are perhaps invited into your care to be given attentive contemplation and reflection within your own experiences and heart. May all of us, as soul-friends, cultivate our connections between each other so that this sort of consciousness—this loving, honest Presence—is always here/hear between us, even as we share the quotidian aspects of our days and lives with each other. It is my wish that our relationships be tabernacles for the Sacred! We have all met in this moment in time and history and we are all here, right now, together! What a happening! What an event! And I so wish that our relationships reflect the sacredness of what our connections mean to our souls as we lovingly pass our way through this world, walking, talking, and sharing in each other's company!

*Written in Los Angeles, July 29, 2010*

[https://www.theweddingoferosandpsyche.com/george\\_viney-psychotherapy](https://www.theweddingoferosandpsyche.com/george_viney-psychotherapy)