

What is Enlightenment?

An inquiry into the most important spiritual questions of our time

Can enlightenment save the world?

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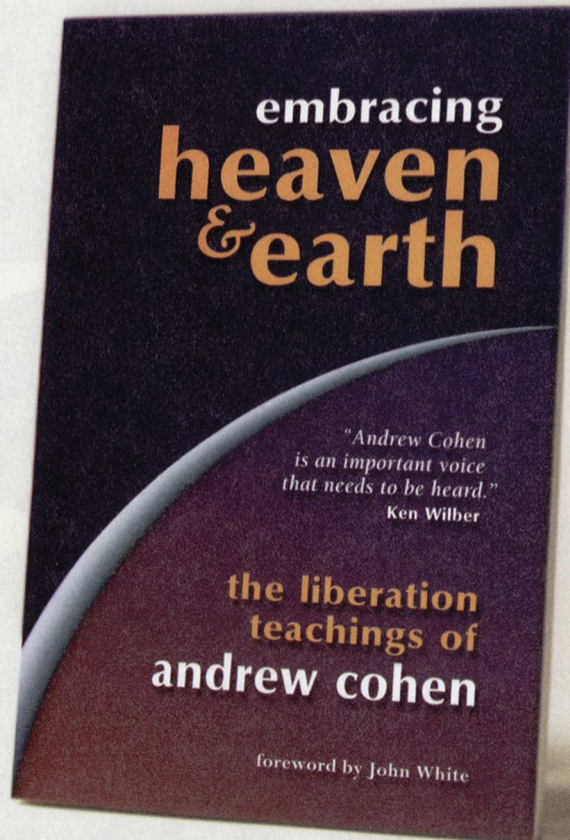
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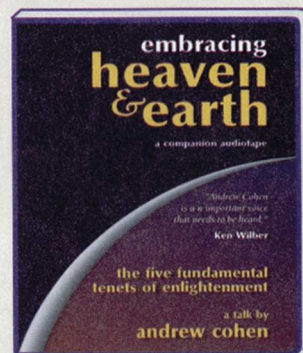
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can enlightenment save the world?

I an evolutionary crisis?

Duane Elgin

26

The Breaking Point

An evolutionary activist warns us that the fragile systems of our biosphere and global human community are rapidly nearing "the breaking point."

Interview by Carter Phipps



Brian Swimme

34

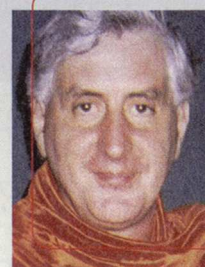
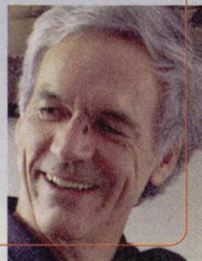
Comprehensive Compassion

A visionary cosmologist explains why this may be the most critical yet potentially transformative time on the planet in 65 million years.

The Divinization of the Cosmos

A captivating exploration of the work and vision of Christian mystic and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Interviews by Susan Bridle



departments

10 readers' forum

16 from the editors

18 introduction to this issue by Andrew Cohen
Come Together

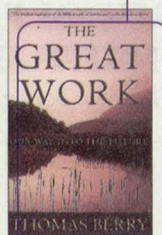
III what do you think?

Can an Avatar save the world? Does the world even need to be saved? From the teachings of modern Advaita to the role of the divine Avatars, this issue's "What do you think?" section presents some radical perspectives on our global crisis.

120 book review

The Great Work

Susan Bridle considers eco-theologian **Thomas Berry's** resounding call to our ecological conscience.



What is Enlightenment?



2 the spiritual activists

Rabbi Michael Lerner 50

From What Is to What Ought to Be

"The spiritual power of the universe is *not* a morally neutral force," declares revolutionary spiritual activist Michael Lerner in this provocative dialogue with Andrew Cohen on Judaism, enlightenment, and saving the world.

Interview by Andrew Cohen

Brother Wayne Teasdale 58

Transforming the Seeds of Corruption

A Christian 'lay monk' and interfaith activist discusses the future of religion, the tragedy of Tibet, and why the ecological crisis is the most pressing global issue we face.

Interview by Amy Edelstein

Roshi Bernie Glassman 66

Is That Me Bleeding?

An American Zen teacher and world-renowned social activist speaks about the compassionate action that arises out of emptiness.

Interview by Andrew Cohen

Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati 66

Don't Ask Why – Just Do Something!

"I have such passion about what could be done!"

A fiery Brooklyn-born guru and AIDS activist speaks out on suffering, detachment, and what it means to truly care.

Interview by Andrew Cohen

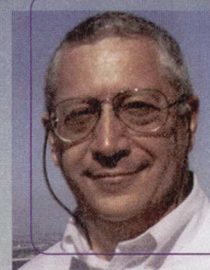
3 envisioning the future

John White 84

Toward Homo Noeticus

An evolutionary thinker gazes into the near future and sees the advent of a new kind of human being.

Interview by Craig Hamilton



Joe Firmage 90

I'm Optimistic

This Internet entrepreneur and philanthropist has a dazzling vision of a 2050 society and some bold ideas to get us there.

Interview by Carter Phipps



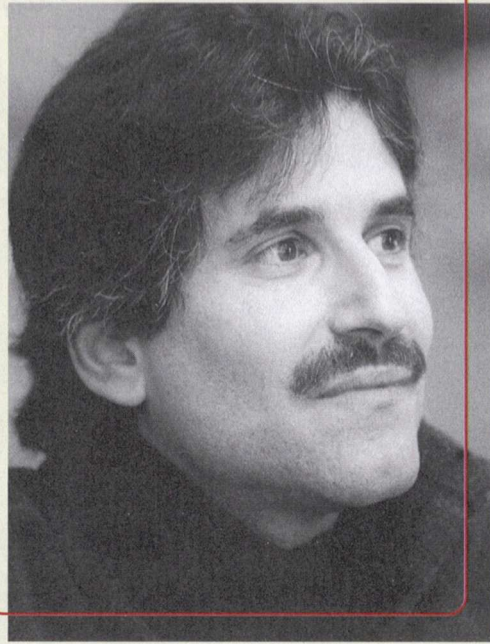
4 the enlightened perspective

Vimala Thakar 100

Awakening to Total Revolution: Enlightenment and the World Crisis

"Spirituality is the seed, and social action is the fruit born of it," writes Indian spiritual master and social activist Vimala Thakar in a compelling essay exploring the true meaning of wholeness.





andrew cohen

founder of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine

Andrew Cohen is not just a spiritual teacher—he is an inspiring phenomenon. Since his awakening in 1986 he has only lived, breathed, and spoken of one thing: the potential for total liberation from the bondage of ignorance, superstition, and selfishness. Powerless to limit his unceasing investigation, he has looked at the “jewel of enlightenment” from every angle and given birth to a teaching that is vast and subtle, yet incomparably direct and revolutionary in its impact.

Through his public teachings, his books, and his meetings with spiritual leaders of almost every tradition, he has tirelessly sought to convey his discovery that spiritual liberation’s true significance is its potential to completely transform not only the individual but the entire way that human beings, as a race, live together. In sharp contrast to the cynicism that is so pervasive today, yet with full awareness of the difficult challenges that we face, he has dared to teach and to show that it is indeed possible to bring heaven to earth. This powerful message of unity, openness, and love has inspired many who have heard it to join together to prove its reality with their own lives, igniting an ever-expanding international revolution of tremendous vitality and significance.

Andrew travels extensively every year giving public talks and intensive retreats. Communities dedicated to living his teachings have formed throughout the world, with a network of centers in the United States, Europe, India, and Australia, including an international center in the Berkshire mountains in western Massachusetts, where he now has his home.

As well as being the founder and guiding inspiration behind *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine, Andrew Cohen is the author of several books, including *Enlightenment Is a Secret*, *Freedom Has No History*, *An Unconditional Relationship to Life*, *Autobiography of an Awakening*, and the recently released *Embracing Heaven & Earth*.

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What is Enlightenment? Magazine

"I have found and continue to find that there is so much confusion, misunderstanding, and misinformation as to what enlightenment actually is and what it really means. That is why we publish this magazine as a vehicle to present our ongoing investigation into this question, and to share our discoveries with those who are also interested in this vast and most subtle subject."

Andrew Cohen, Founder

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readers' forum

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Issue 18, Fall/Winter 2000

SAY IT AIN'T SO, KEN

I rarely find myself in disagreement with Ken Wilber, but his essay in the Fall/Winter 2000 issue ["Integral Transformative Practice: In This World or Out of It?"] contains a passage that does not rise to his usual high standards of clarity and penetrating insight.

He states, "... when you awaken to the absolute truth, that does nothing much to help the relative vehicle." I understand Wilber's intent in making a strong distinction between integrative technologies that develop aspects of the individual self and those which aim at direct experience of the nondual Self. I have known hundreds of serious seekers, myself included, who mistakenly believed that transcendence would not only

bring about enlightenment, but also a radical transformation of the mind, body, and emotions, the better to carry us through life in the so-called real world. For the most part, it turned out to be wishful thinking. But Wilber's statement, and the subsequent declaration that "One Taste simply bypasses all of those relative vehicles and leaves them much as it finds them," seems too extreme, too dismissive, too (no pun intended) absolute.

The sacred literature seems clearly to indicate that transcendence can indeed "help the relative vehicles," and that it does not, in fact, simply leave them "much as it finds them." Have we not all read of luminaries who not only achieved the heights of spiritual attainment but also, as a direct result, underwent major personality shifts, living their subsequent lives in a radically different manner? And on our own minor-league level, haven't many of us found that even fleeting glimpses of absolute, nondual Truth have altered the way we think, feel, and act in the world—perhaps not the total overhaul of the "relative vehicle" we hoped for, but surely some repair, adjustment, or upgrade?

Wilber writes, "You can perfectly awaken to radical Spirit and pure Self, but that will not allow you to perform graceful athletics with your body." True enough. But that's such an extreme example as to be virtually meaningless. It seems reasonable, and consistent with experience, to expect that some measure of physical grace would result from bliss-producing Grace. Better health

for one thing. Everything we've learned about mind-body medicine implies that breakthroughs in awareness can have physiological consequences.

And Wilber says that neither will awakening to the Self "allow you to understand quantum mechanics with your mind." No, but to the extent that even a glimmer of realization quiets the mind and enhances the ability to concentrate and think clearly, it just might make it easier to grasp the complexities of existence—and certainly we can imply from the literature and our own experience that it can open the door to greater intuitive insight as we make our way through the relative realm.

And no, realization will certainly not "turn your personality from a nerd into a sophisticate" or "get you a new job." But, it no doubt has a salutary effect on desirable qualities such as compassion, empathy, and the ability to love and a reductive effect on negative traits such as fear, worry, regret, and anger. Of course, we all know long-term spiritual practitioners—and even purportedly enlightened masters—who can't be trusted, whose egos are gargantuan, whose personalities are so off-putting as to ruin any dinner party, and who might even do harm to others. But what about those who had their hearts opened by awakenings large and small? Did the saints and *bodhisattvas* leave such powerful marks on the earth solely as a result of their particular version of psychological training and behavior

modification? Or was it also the result of a transformation that flowed directly from realization of the Ultimate?

It seems one-sided and incomplete to say that integral transformative practices can "polish the relative vehicle, lighten its density, make it more transparent to the Divine" and not also acknowledge some degree of reciprocity. Surely, the membrane is permeable from both sides. Surely, direct experience of the Divine can, in turn, contribute to the growth and development of the relative vehicle. It may not do so to the extent promulgated

by various teachings, but that it can and does at all should be acknowledged, not blithely dismissed. At the very least it should be considered an open question, one worthy of serious debate and objective research.

I have the feeling that Wilber would agree with me. His use of qualifying terms such as "does nothing much to help the relative vehicle" and "leaves them much as it finds them" indicates something less than an absolutist stance. But I fear that his statements might be construed in unequivocal terms, i.e., that working on the mind, body, and emotions can grease the wheels

No Capitulation to Ego

I finished my copy of the new *WIE* – always a delight to dig into the Dharma. I loved the book review section about "plateau spirituality" ["A Call to Mediocrity"]. It's a desperately needed criticism – how true, how true. We need more people willing to stand in the radical position of no compromise, no conciliation to majority mind, no condescension or capitulation to ego and its allies.

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of transcendence, but transcendence does nothing whatsoever for the mind, body, and emotions. I somehow doubt that Wilber would go that far, but his choice of words leaves the impression that the relative value of absolute awareness is negligible or inconsequential, maybe even nil. Say it ain't so, Ken.

Philip Goldberg
Los Angeles, California

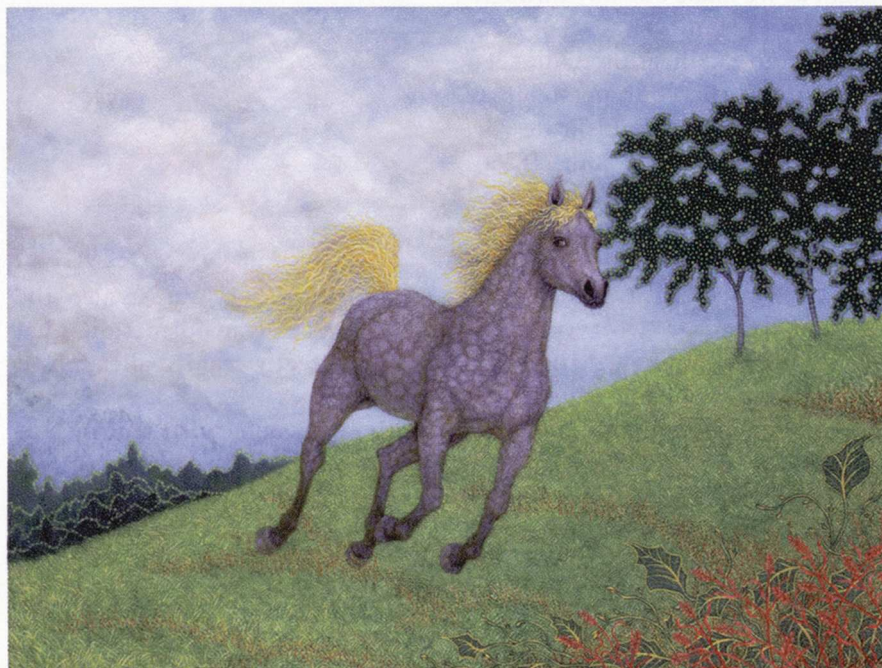
THE MALL OR THE CLOISTER

The general tone of your last issue "What Does It Mean to Be in the World But Not of It?" was that the paths of the householder and the renunciate are mutually exclusive. Allow me to make a few points.

The only place where one becomes enlightened is Here and Now. The circumstances of one's enlightenment are irrelevant; the important thing is *being* in those circumstances. This is also the key

to happiness—being where one is. Unhappiness is wishing one were somewhere else.

Some of your interviewees seemed to suggest that the renunciate path is essential to enlightenment and that the distractions of the world prevent it from occurring. Everywhere is "here and now" whether in the mall or the cloister. Renunciates for ages have done a successful PR job for their way, have belittled other paths, and have tended to ignore those who have been both married and enlightened such as Marpa the Translator and Lahiri Mahasaya. Veda Vyasa fathered children, and many ancient sages were married with children. Marriage is founded on religious vows, not of "Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience" but of Responsibility for maintaining the context in which the search for enlightenment may flourish. Marriage is entirely about



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from the editors

*The more deeply I search
for the roots of our global
environmental crisis, the more
I am convinced that it is an
outer manifestation of an inner
crisis that is, for lack of a better
word, spiritual.*

— Al Gore
Earth in the Balance

It's 2001. Sixty-five million years since the day when a wayward asteroid slammed into the earth's surface, promptly extinguishing eighty-five percent of life on the planet. That event marked the end of the dinosaurs and the beginning of the Cenozoic era, an era that eventually gave rise to an upright primate called *Homo sapiens*. And now, forty thousand years after *Homo sapiens* arrived on the scene, many scientists from around the globe are telling us that these upright primates, that is, human beings, are responsible for engulfing the world in a crisis unequaled since that cataclysmic collision so long ago.

As we enter the third millennium, there is little doubt that this third rock from the sun that we call home has, ecologically at least, seen better days. With the increasing threat of global warming, a rapidly accelerating species extinction rate, diminishing fossil fuel reserves, massive deforestation, unrestrained pollution, and numerous other environmental problems, the fragile biosphere of planet earth is under siege. Yet the challenges we face hardly stop there. As a hurricane of globalization brings together six thousand distinct

civilizations from around the world—economically, politically, socially, culturally—we find ourselves living in a global village that is changing and rearranging itself like never before, in a brave new world precariously poised between prosperity and poverty, new visions and ancient hatreds. Scientists tell us that twenty-first-century technology will soon render nuclear warheads the least of our worries as advanced weapons reach unheard-of powers. A few even say that we are fast approaching the point of no return, that we must renounce the comforts of modern civilization or go the way of the dinosaurs. And the upright primate that engineered the whole mess is projected to increase its present population by more than fifty percent in the next fifty years. Like it or not, we live, as Jim Garrison, president of the State of the World Forum, put it recently, in a world that is burning.

Faced with issues of such overwhelming magnitude and scope, there is a growing recognition that humanity is today at a crossroads, a critical juncture in our evolutionary history. Indeed, many are claiming that the decisions we make in the next few decades will reverberate for hundreds if not thousands of years down through time. So where, then, are we to look for a vision that can help us to understand and respond to this crisis, a vision that is truly global in the largest sense of the word—universal, all-embracing, whole? Recognizing, perhaps, the unprecedented challenge of our moment in history, a number of bold futurists, social theorists, and evolutionary thinkers are beginning to use a word not often heard in the policy think tanks of global decision-makers: *spirituality*.

Across the country and around

**Are we quietly
meditating on the
upper decks of the
Titanic, we wondered,
debating finer points of
spiritual insight while
the ship founders
around us? Fiddling
with Nero while
Rome burns?**

the world, it seems that a new movement is afoot. From the spiritual ecology of Thomas Berry to the integral vision of Ken Wilber; from the higher human potential research of the Institute of Noetic Sciences to the voluntary simplicity movement initiated by Duane Elgin; from Gorbachev's State of the World Forum to Michael Lerner's "Politics of Meaning"; from the Millennium World Peace Summit of the United Nations to the recent reconvening of the Parliament of the World's Religions—an unusual intermingling of the spiritual and the social is finding its way into the affairs of the world. Unwilling to leave the fate of the human experiment solely to disciplines whose approaches fail to encompass the whole human condition, these pioneers of the spirit share a conviction that only a spiritual perspective has the breadth and depth of vision to strike at the core of the multifaceted crisis that confronts us today.

But what does it really mean to bring spirituality to bear on the problems of modern society? While it is true that spiritual enlightenment has, throughout most of human history, been seen as the ultimate solution to the human predicament *in the individual*, what exactly does that mean about the responsibility of the individual for saving the species itself, or for saving other species, or for protecting the life systems of the planet? As eco-theologian Thomas Berry points out in his book *The Great Work*, the major wisdom traditions of the past and the spiritual values that arose from their teachings were formed and shaped in a world that simply never had to contend with the kinds of global issues that we must confront today. So can enlightenment save not only the individual but the world as well? And if so, what does that mean about the nature of the spiritual path at

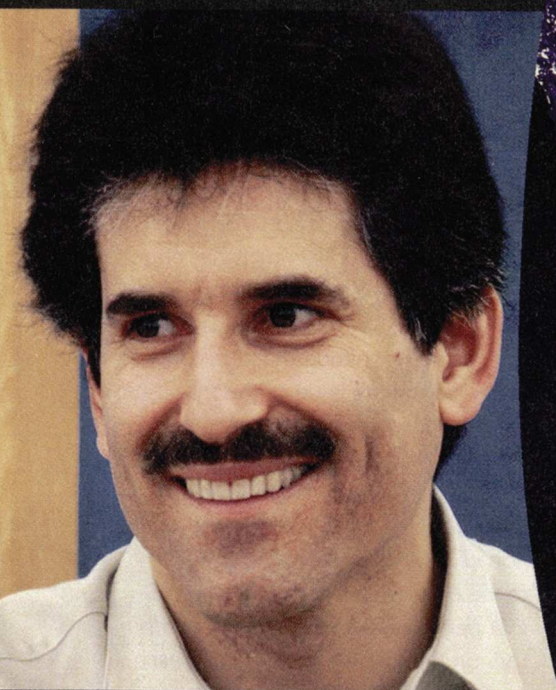
this moment in our evolutionary history?

These are some of the questions that we began to ask ourselves as we started our research for this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* And as always, we began the inquiry by taking a closer look at our own lives. For us, as for many seekers, the decision to follow a spiritual calling was driven largely by the conviction that the ultimate solution to the problems that face our society lies in a transformation of human consciousness, and that the spiritual path is, in fact, the most direct way to confront the egotism and selfishness within us that seem to be at the root of just about every problem that exists in the external world. But as we began to read about the stark reality of our ecological crisis, as we studied the patterns of climate change and learned of the massive extinctions taking place within the rich diversity of the world's ecosystems, there were some difficult moments when we began to wonder if it wasn't time to throw in the spiritual towel altogether and trade in our spirit-first faith for some Earth First radicalism. Evolutionary biologists tell us that our primate minds are ordinarily not conditioned to think beyond our local circumstances, but as we gazed directly at the uncomfortable truths of our collective situation, the profound global consequences of our current course of action did, in fact, come crashing in. Are we quietly meditating on the upper decks of the *Titanic*, we wondered, debating finer points of spiritual insight while the ship founders around us? Fiddling with Nero while Rome burns? Maybe we should simply give everything we've got to saving the environment, we thought, drop it all and join the battle. After all, the higher levels of human evolution may not mean very much if the most basic levels of our biospheric life support begin to fail.

While we did not, in the end, abandon everything and move to the rainforests, we did begin to discover just how deeply unnerving it can be to place your own spiritual journey within the context of a world crisis, especially one of the magnitude that confronts us today. So for this issue of the magazine, we set out to speak with individuals who could address both the question of how enlightenment can save the world and the equally important question of what the meaning and significance of enlightenment is in a world that needs saving. Indeed, the contributors on the following pages have each explored crucial questions about the nature of the spiritual path at this point in history, and many have arrived at some challenging and unexpected conclusions. They bring insights from science, technology, evolutionary theory, spiritual traditions past and present, and from their own compassion, blood, sweat, and tears. From the courage and grit of the spiritual activists to the new perspectives of the evolutionary theorists, from soaring visions of the future to the harsh realities of a suffering society, their words implore us and inspire us to look at our own spiritual lives within the urgent and overwhelming context of a world that is burning.

—Carter Phipps

*introduction
to this issue
by andrew cohen*



come

"In unity there is strength," the great Swami Krishnananda declared to the audience sitting before him in the satsang hall of his guru's ashram. It was 1984 and I was visiting Rishikesh, the holy pilgrimage town in the foothills of



together

the Himalayas on the River Ganges. As the swami spoke, I was drawn into another dimension, beyond time. As this diminutive man gave his afternoon discourse, an extraordinary power entered the room; it was as if Krishna was revealing his true face to us, if only for an instant. "From the beyond there is a whisper," he said to us, "and if you listen closely enough, you will hear that whisper become a raging chorus, imploring all those who have the ears to hear its call to 'Come together—in unity there

is strength.'" He repeated the message again, "In unity there is strength. Come together, come together, come together. In unity there is strength, come together." I was stunned, overwhelmed, not by what he said but by *how* he said it. Indeed, by where those words had come from. I had never heard anything like it. It was so simple, and yet, it was everything. It was as if the swami had lifted the veil of illusion, however temporarily, allowing us all to hear the voice of God, or more importantly, the *wish*

of our Maker: to come together in Her form; to come together as ONE.

It has always seemed obvious to me that the inevitable response to the spiritual experience should be the awakening of the impersonal desire to come together with others as one. The spiritual experience that liberates is the revelation of perfect nonduality, that glimpse of ultimacy that awakens in us the recognition of our own true nature—one without a second. Yet that awakening, for too many of

come together

continued

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us, more often than not remains only an inner experience. But, in the end, doesn't the fulfillment of that inner revelation of wholeness, of nonduality, have to be the outer manifestation of nonseparation? Ever since I began teaching fifteen years ago, I have never been able to separate one from the other. And when an individual's experience of revelation was not followed by a spontaneous and ever-deepening experience of communion with others, I always doubted the depth and ultimate significance of what had occurred. Coming together, as Swami Krishnananda proclaimed, is what it's all about.

All the experts that we spoke to for this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* made it very clear that the solution to the current world crisis of globalization, overpopulation, grinding poverty, pollution, and desecration of the natural environment, not to mention the spread of weapons of mass destruction, is not political or technological but *spiritual*. In fact, they were unanimous in their conviction that this was the case. But what they seemed to be not so clear about was *how*. And "How?" of course, is the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question.

The solution is spiritual, and that solution inevitably requires us to find a way to come together for the sake of everyone's survival, including all of life on the planet. But coming together seems to be the greatest challenge for the individual and for us as a

species. In times of intense crisis like natural disasters or war, we do find reasons to come together, but interestingly enough, when the need to come together arises from a deeper calling, a spiritual calling that emanates from a more delicate and subtle place in our own selves, it is much harder for us to find the willingness or even the interest to do it. I have been doing battle in this arena for a long time now. Endeavoring to inspire human beings to try to come together for the highest of reasons: so that the spiritual revelation can become manifest here on mother earth. So that we can actually manifest that recognition of nonduality or perfect nonseparation as *ourselves together*. That is, after all, the ultimate fulfillment of the spiritual vision—where the inner revelation has become the outer reality. Where we all have become empty vessels, transparent manifestations of that one Self as many, free from any need to see ourselves as being separate, free from any and all ego motivation to create separation on *any* level, gross or subtle. Then and only then will heaven become manifest right here on *this* earth.

But we don't want to do it. We don't want to go that far. Not yet. Not now. *Never* now. We have to begin to recognize that as long as the desire to be separate—to see ourselves as standing outside of or separate from others, from the world, from the *whole universe*—remains intact, it is inevitable that

we will always find some reasonable justification to act out of ignorance or selfishness in ways that will cause harm. And it is that very desire to remain separate and to see ourselves as being separate, standing outside of and apart from the whole, that is, from the perspective of enlightenment, the manifestation of ego—the separate sense of self that can and will do almost anything to not have to surrender. Surrender for the sake of love, surrender for the sake of truth, surrender for everyone else's sake.

What motivates us to come together for a larger purpose is rarely more than survival or a mutual self-interest that caters strictly to the fears and desires of the separate sense of self. I remember, one day during the Gulf War, seeing on television row upon row of tank battalions moving forward in the desert, as the news commentator was explaining how many thousands of men and women had had to come together in a rare and highly refined degree of organization in order to support this extraordinary display of cooperation. In that moment, I was overcome by emotion; I was moved, deeply and profoundly—not by what they were doing, but simply by the recognition that that many people had truly been able to come together, if only momentarily, as one.

If we do manage to pull ourselves together for the sake of our very survival, for the survival of our

sons and daughters and of all the plants and animals and of the biosphere itself, will the sacrifices have been enough to catapult us into a completely different relationship to life and death? A relationship to life and death in which what would motivate us toward self-sacrifice would no longer merely be the preservation of life but would in fact be the *evolution* of life? What is evolution? From the spiritual perspective, evolution is the movement from a self-centered relationship to life to one that is based upon the direct apprehension of the inherently undivided nature of life itself. It is that knowledge alone, directly perceived and recognized, that will have the power to completely transform our relationship to what it actually means to be a citizen of Spaceship Earth. Our evolutionary potential is so extraordinary, and yet now everything hangs in the balance. It's up to each and every one of us—not for our own sake, but for the sake of life itself.

... In unity there is strength.

*Come together,
come together,
come together.*

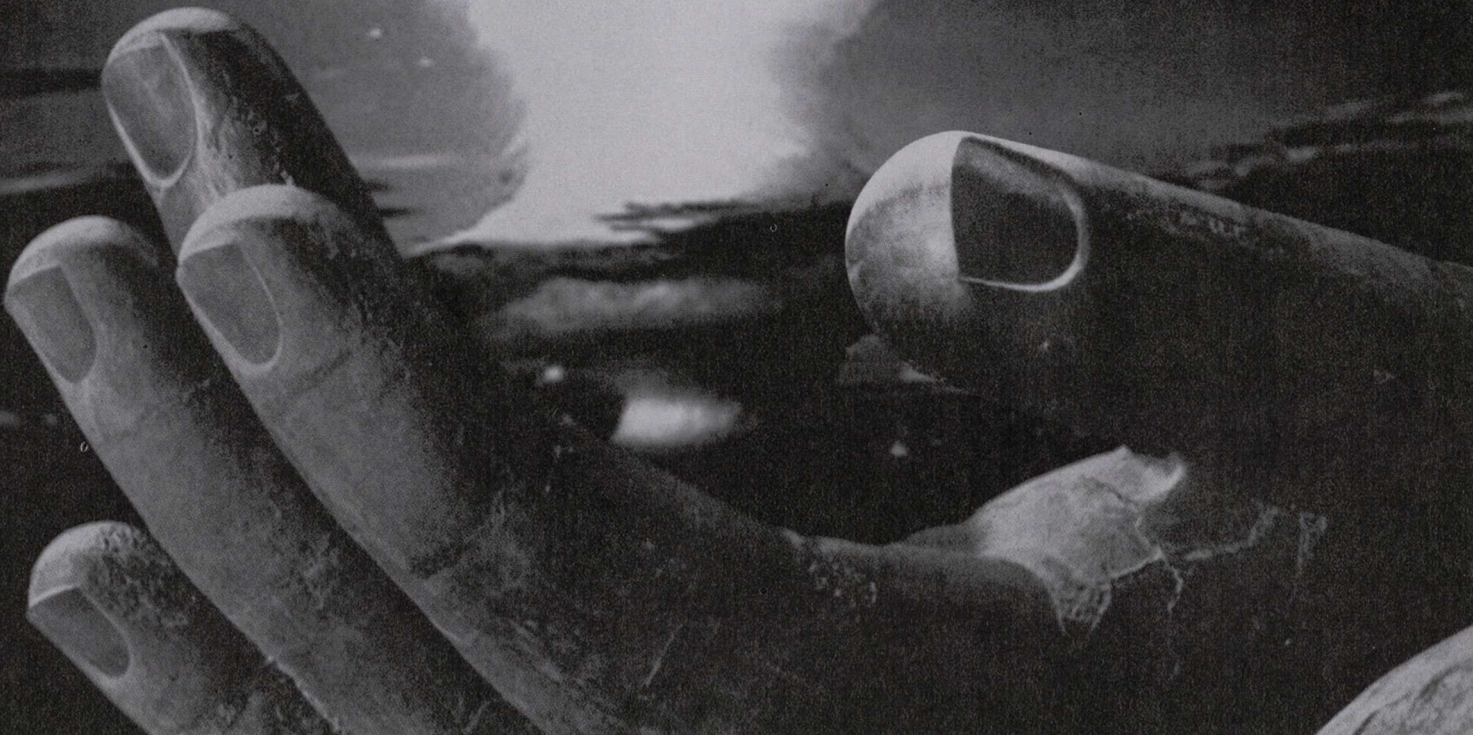
an evolutionary crisis?

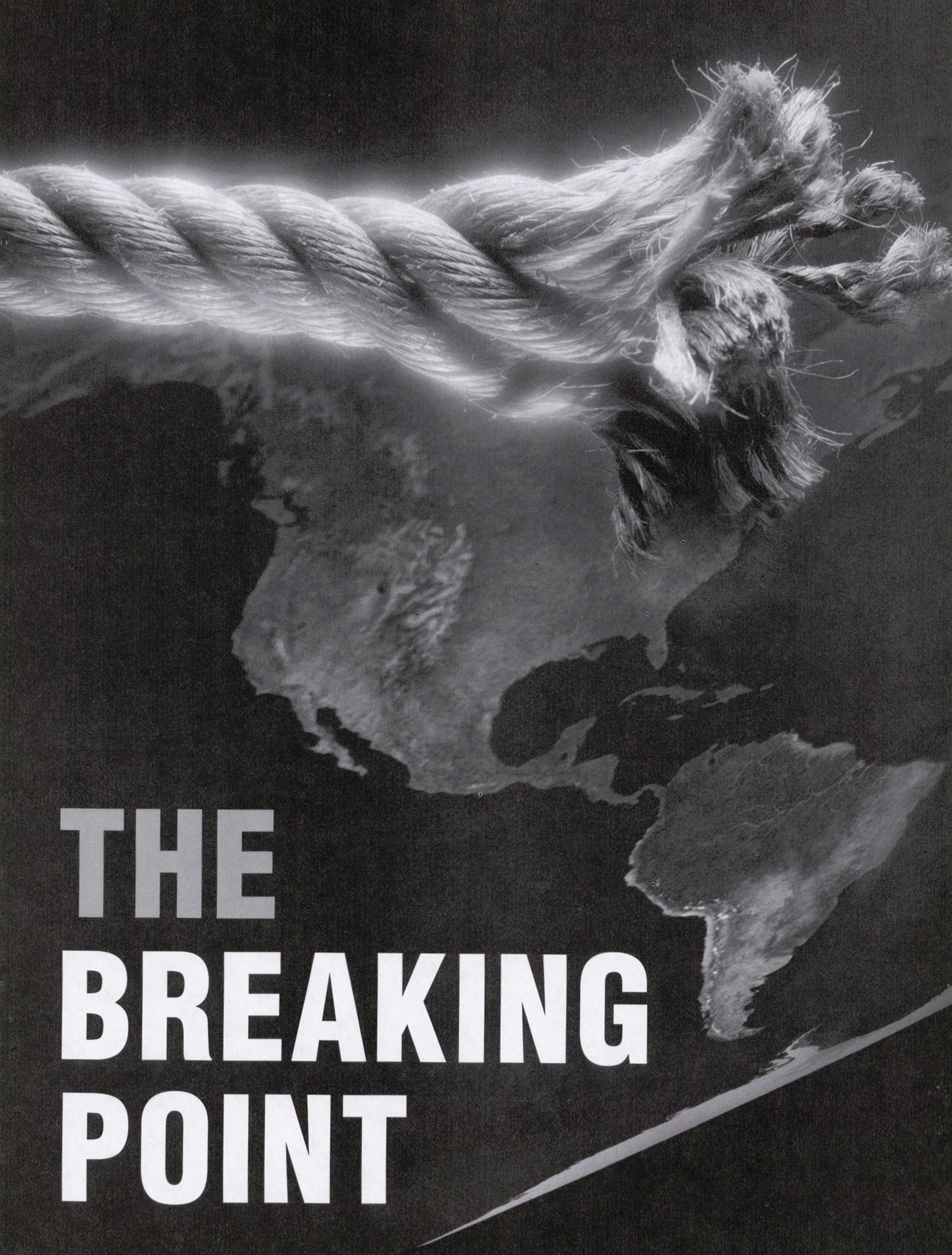
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*“If we, the generation
that faces the next
century, don’t do the
impossible, we shall
be faced with the
unthinkable.”*

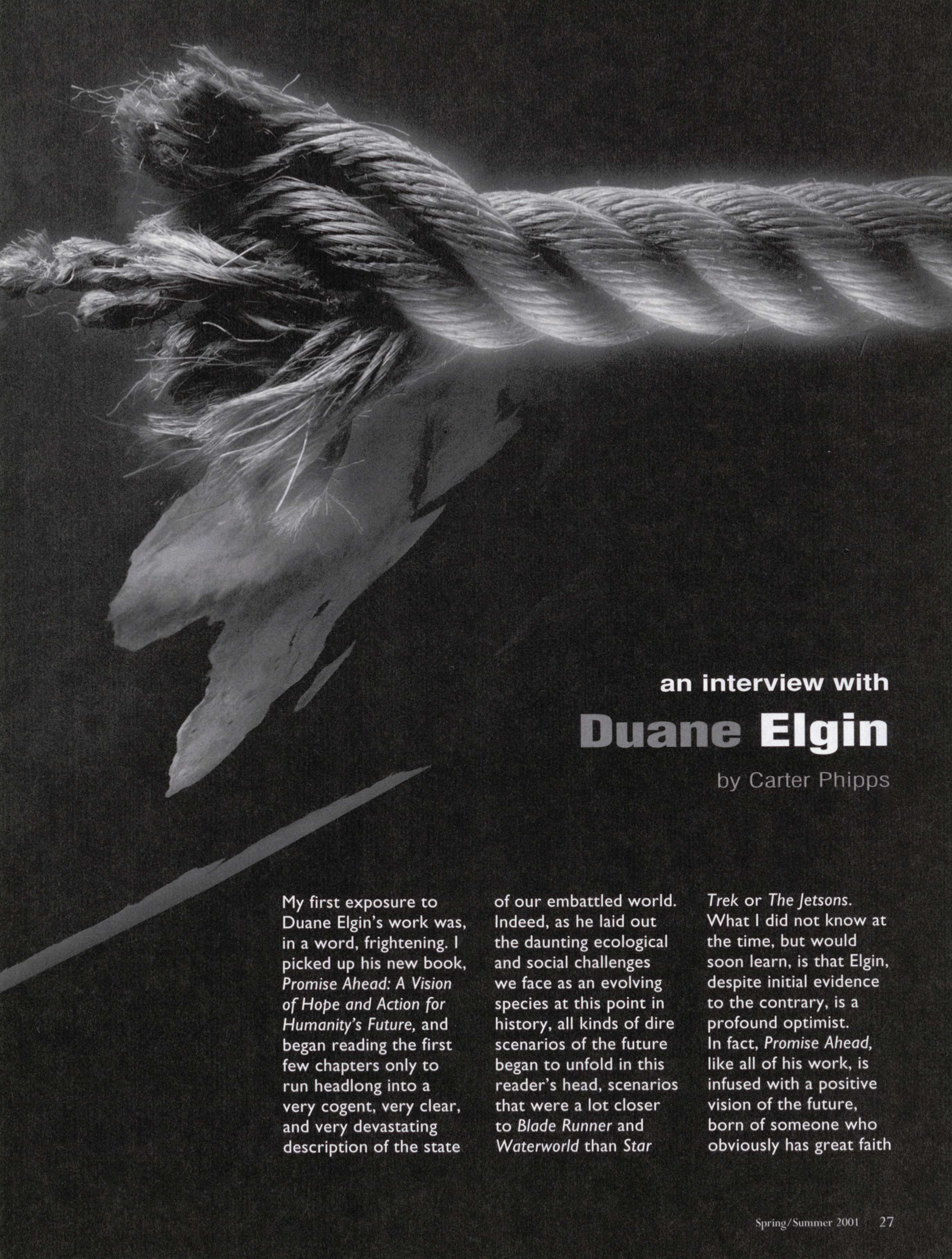
Petra Kelly

Co-founder of the
German Green Party





THE BREAKING POINT



an interview with
Duane Elgin

by Carter Phipps

My first exposure to Duane Elgin's work was, in a word, frightening. I picked up his new book, *Promise Ahead: A Vision of Hope and Action for Humanity's Future*, and began reading the first few chapters only to run headlong into a very cogent, very clear, and very devastating description of the state

of our embattled world. Indeed, as he laid out the daunting ecological and social challenges we face as an evolving species at this point in history, all kinds of dire scenarios of the future began to unfold in this reader's head, scenarios that were a lot closer to *Blade Runner* and *Waterworld* than *Star*

Trek or *The Jetsons*. What I did not know at the time, but would soon learn, is that Elgin, despite initial evidence to the contrary, is a profound optimist. In fact, *Promise Ahead*, like all of his work, is infused with a positive vision of the future, born of someone who obviously has great faith

in the possibility and promise of the human endeavor. Yet Elgin knows that if our optimism is to prevail in the world of tomorrow, the price that we must all pay today is realism. And for over twenty-five years, he has been taking a realistic look at the human condition and trying to awaken our slumbering species to the truth of our situation so that we can begin to consciously evolve.

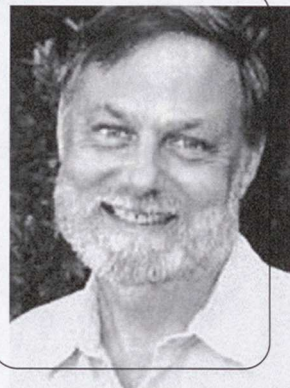
Elgin first burst into the public eye in 1981 with his now-classic book *Voluntary Simplicity*, a book that helped to identify a new movement toward more simple and balanced ways of living. At the time

he was working as a senior social scientist for the Stanford Research Institute, which gave him an unusual opportunity to observe and document emerging trends in society, and he used that work as the basis both for *Voluntary Simplicity* and for his 1991 book *Awakening Earth: Exploring the Evolution of Human Culture and Consciousness*. The latter book was an attempt, in his words, to “understand the deeper nature and direction of the human journey,” and it explored the awakening process of the human species as we move toward building a mature global civilization. It was in *Awakening Earth* that Elgin

first began to address our current global crisis within the context of the larger evolutionary journey of the species—a critical theme that has been a fundamental part of his work ever since.

Today, as a renowned author, speaker, and activist, Elgin has an approach that might best be described as carrot and stick, encouraging individuals and institutions to begin to honestly reflect on both the extraordinary opportunities and the sobering dangers of our moment in history. And while he sees the spiritual journey as crucial in coming to terms with the issues we face, for Elgin, that journey must,

now more than ever, be both individual *and* collective. When we received a copy of his book *Promise Ahead* last summer, we found within it a short note he had attached that contained a simple but important question: “What does awakening look like as it moves into the world?” Indeed, Elgin knows that our entire future may depend on how we answer this question, on how effectively we are able to bring a spiritual perspective to bear on the urgent global challenges faced by our awakening species at this decisive juncture in our evolutionary journey.



Duane Elgin

wie: Many of today's leading thinkers, futurists, scientists, and visionaries are warning us that the

next twenty to thirty years will be a testing time for the human species, a time of evolutionary crisis that will entail great, and potentially even catastrophic, change. Could you please describe what you feel are the key factors precipitating this crisis? What will we be facing in the coming years?

DUANE ELGIN: What we're really facing is the convergence of a number of powerful trends—climate change, species extinction, the spread of poverty, and the growth in population. All of these factors could develop individually, but what's unique about our time is that the world has become a closed system. There's no place to escape, and all of these powerful forces are beginning to impinge upon one another and reinforce one another. Our situation is something like a set of rubber bands that you stretch out and out and out until

they reach the limit of their elasticity, which is the breaking point of the system. My sense is that we still have a fair amount of elasticity in the world system. It's going to be another couple of decades until we reach the breaking point.

WIE: How would you respond to someone who said, "What crisis are you talking about? There may be a lot going on, but things aren't that bad. I'm sure we'll deal with it. No problem, we'll be okay." What would you say to that person to convince them that the situation is urgent and that we have to face it directly?

DE: Let's take a look at these trends one at a time. First of all, climate change. I think it's clear that, by itself, this could change the entire situation in the world. If you look, for example, at carbon dioxide levels, they are very closely correlated with temperature levels over thousands of years. The carbon dioxide levels have fluctuated between 170 and 300 parts per million for the last twenty million years. And we are now outside of that range. We are at nearly 380 parts per million in CO₂, which means that we have created a situation that's beyond what has existed for the last twenty million years, a period in which there have been enormous fluctuations in glaciation on one hand and global warming on the other. And we're still shooting out the roof in terms of the amount of CO₂ we're putting into the atmosphere.

Now let's look, for example, at the Greenland ice cores and the way they indicate how quickly climate changes can occur. They show that the last great ice age, about 120,000 years ago, descended, scientists believe, in a period of two decades. It wasn't centuries; it was roughly twenty years. So we are creating



a very critical situation. But my concern is not simply with warming and the oceans rising, but it's rather with changing weather patterns, precipitation patterns—how much rain and when. If it shifts radically, we will not be able to adapt global agriculture to respond to the new climate circumstances.

At the same time that climate change is under way, in the same twenty-year period, we're going to add roughly two to three billion people to the earth—that means the equivalent of another Los Angeles every month. We're going to be adding enormous numbers of people to the earth at the very time the climate is beginning to shift and make food growing more precarious. It is also estimated that, in terms of resources, 40% of the people in the world will not have access to enough water by the 2020s to grow their own food. *Forty percent of the world will not have enough water to grow their own food.* And most of those people are going to be in the poorest parts of the world, in developing countries where they have moved to mega-cities and are living in the slums.

We can then factor in other impacts, like species extinction. It's estimated that as many as 20% of all plant and animal species could be extinct in the next thirty years, and half could be extinct within the next hundred years. Now let's put that into even more specific terms. It's estimated that roughly 25% of all mammals are threatened with extinction, 12% of all bird species, 25% of all reptiles, and 30% of all fish; this is the World Conservation Union's recent report. We are beginning to tear at the fabric of the biosphere at the very time that we're stressing it with climate change, at the very time that we're stressing it further with population, at the very time that we're

diminishing the availability of critical resources like water. And then we factor in a final force, and that is poverty, which is so extraordinarily massive in the world. I really had no idea until recently traveling in India and seeing the magnitude of it. In the United States, the poverty line is about \$11 a day per person. If we cut that poverty line by three-quarters, and set it at \$3 a day per person and ask what percentage of the world lives on less than \$3 a day, it's 60% of the world! And that means that whether it's a pair of shoes or a book to read or glasses, aspirin, vitamins, etcetera—the basics of life that must be purchased at world market prices are not accessible to 60% of the world's population. But if you walk into the villages in India and Brazil, you see that even the poorest people have a television set. They are seeing, in living color, lifestyles that will never be accessible to them. And historically those are the ingredients for revolution.

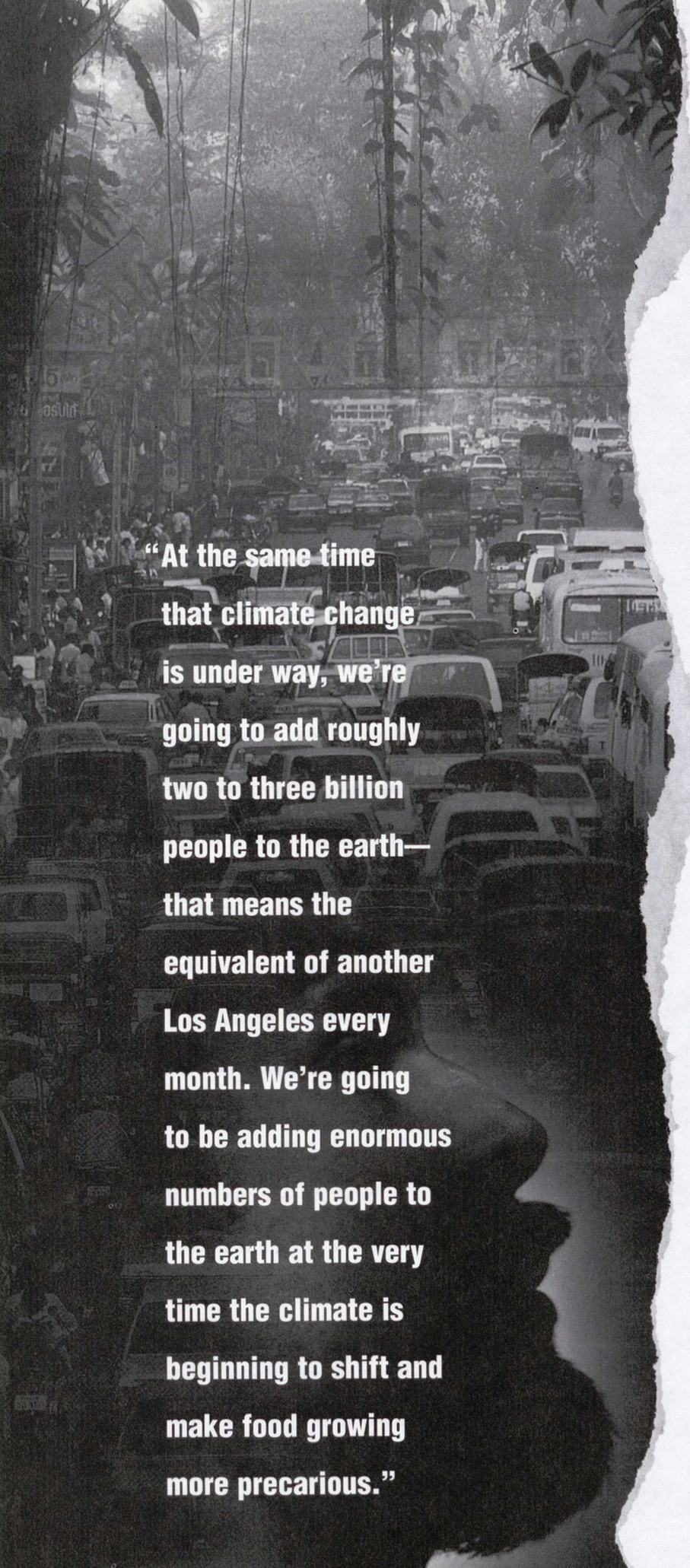
So there we have what I call the adversity trends, and we could talk about many others: ozone depletion, ocean overfishing, deforestation, and on and on. And it's utterly clear that not only are these critical individual trends, but that, as you look at the dynamics of their convergence, we are facing an unprecedented whole-system crisis within the next few decades. Something powerful is going to begin happening at that point, and while right now we can turn away from this, in another twenty years a systems crisis will be an unyielding reality that we will have to deal with. And we will either deal with it by pulling together as a human family to produce what I would call an "evolutionary bounce"—or by pulling apart to produce an evolutionary crash. If we pull apart, it will be an evolutionary dark age.

WIE: In your book, you also mention several trends that potentially herald new opportunities for our collective evolution. What are those trends, and how do you see them impacting us in the near future?

DE: I feel that there are a number of equally powerful opportunity trends that are cooking away in the world that have the power to transform what could be an extraordinary evolutionary crash into an evolutionary bounce. The first is the power of perception, the capacity to see the universe as a living system. The second is the power of choice, the power to choose different ways of life. The third is the power of communication, the power to use these incredible tools of communication for purposes way beyond commerce. And the fourth is the power of love, the ability to bring a spirit of reconciliation into relationships of all kinds. We could speak about each of these, but collectively they are an extraordinary force for transformation in the world.

WIE: Could you give a brief overview of each one?

DE: First, there is the idea of a living universe. Science has traditionally regarded the universe as nonliving at its foundations, but it's extraordinary that now, at the frontiers of science, we're beginning to find out that the universe itself is functioning as if it were a living system. For example, the physics theory of non-locality tells us that the universe is connected with itself, despite its enormous size. And physicists say that there are enormous amounts of energy at the foundations of the universe, the so-called zero-point energy. Also, consciousness appears to be present at every level of the universe, from the atomic scale (and the behavior of electrons that seem



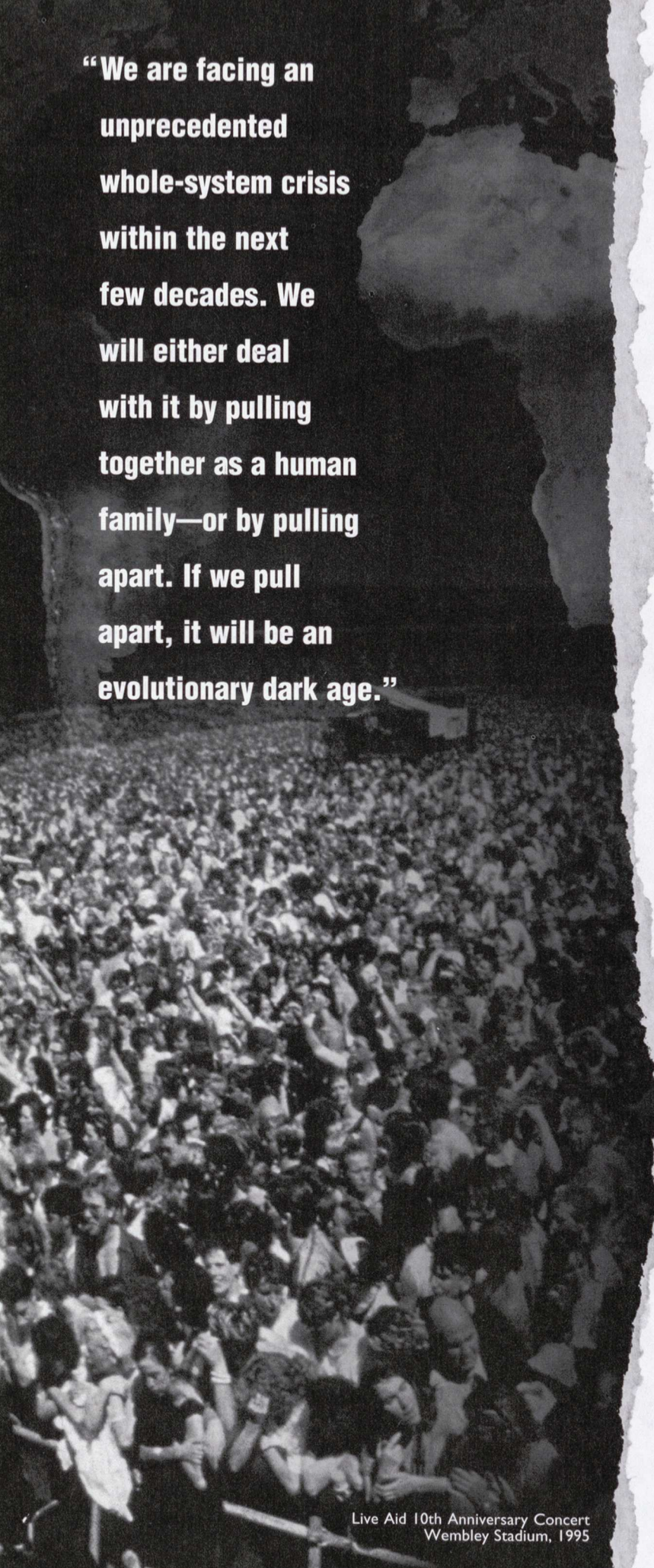
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to have a mind of their own) on up through the human scale. So the universe has the properties of a living system; life exists within life. This is an amazing miracle, and as we discover this, I think that it is going to begin to shift who we think we are and what we think our life-journey is about. It's transformative. The idea and the experience of a living universe is a powerful recontextualization of who we think we are and where we think we're going.

The next opportunity trend is the emergence of simpler ways of living that put less stress on the earth. These lifestyles of simplicity are not so much driven by sacrifice as they are by a new sense of where satisfaction is to be found. What I see emerging in the world now is what I call the "garden of simplicity." There are some people who are practicing a more frugal simplicity by cutting back on their spending and decreasing the impact of their consumption on the earth. They're choosing to live simply, in Gandhi's words, so that others may simply live. Someone else may be practicing a "political simplicity," feeling that we have to organize our *collective* lives in a way that enables us to live lightly and sustainably on the earth—and that means changes in our transportation, education, media, and so on. There's also an approach that I call "soulful simplicity," which means approaching life as a meditation and cultivating our experience of intimate connection with all that exists.

The point is that there is a whole shift in mind-set now occurring. In the United States, for example, a conservative estimate is that about 10% of the American adult population, or twenty million people, are making a shift on the inside toward a more experiential spirituality and on the outside toward a more ecological approach to life. Taken together, these could transform the adversity trends into a great opportunity.

Opportunity trend number three is the communications revolution, and it is also a very powerful trend. We can



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already see it transforming the world. Whether we're going to use this for positive transformational purposes or whether it's going to use us and just transform the entire world into consumers, I don't know. It depends upon us as citizens to see that the power of these communications technologies is used for higher purposes.

WIE: *In your book, you connect the history of human evolution with our ability to communicate.*

DE: Yes, I think it was our ability to communicate that enabled us to get from hunter-gatherers to the verge of a planetary civilization. And it will also be our ability to communicate that will get us to a sustainable species civilization.

The fourth opportunity trend I see is reconciliation. If you look at the nature of violence and conflict in the world, I think it's actually shifting out of the adolescent reactive mode into the adult interactive mode of negotiation. We're recognizing the enormous cost of hostility. In South Africa, for example, there has been a shift away from apartheid to their new government. What an extraordinary transformation. In Northern Ireland, they are attempting to achieve some degree of peace, and it's coming along. Look at what's happened in the Middle East. They came close, and now they're seeing how painful it is to have missed that opportunity. And so there's a more mature consciousness that seems to be growing in the world—seeing that the power of love, of reconciliation, is fundamental to our future if we're going to live on this small earth together. And it's not only about ethnicity, gender, and race, but it's also about issues of income distribution, generational reconciliation, even other species that we're divided from—there are many dimensions of reconciliation.

WIE: *You have also stated in your book and elsewhere that you believe our current crisis is a crisis of spirituality or awakening. Could you explain why you feel the spiritual journey is inextricably linked to our collective success or failure as an evolving species?*

DE: We are not simply hitting an environmental wall, or the limits to physical growth, but we are hitting an evolutionary wall, which is the limit of our traditional image of who we think we are as a species, and the limit of that form of growth. And we are also hitting the limits of our life stories as nations, as races, as ethnic groups. We need to find our larger story as a human family. So when we look at our sense of identity as a species and our need for a larger story, then that invites us to look into the so-called spiritual realm.

WIE: *What do you mean by “our larger story as a human family”?*

DE: I mean, who are we? What are we doing here and where are we going? My sense of our larger story is beautifully summarized in the name that we’ve given ourselves as a species: *Homo sapiens sapiens*. “Sapient” means to be wise; “sapient sapient” means to be doubly wise. We’re the species, by our own definition, which knows that it knows. So to fulfill our self-given name as a species, as *Homo sapiens sapiens*, to fulfill our capacity to be doubly wise, is to discover our place in this living universe. It utterly transforms the nature of the human journey. Then we can ask ourselves: Are we serving our capacity for double wisdom, for knowing that we know—in other words, for awakening? And can culture co-evolve with that awakening of consciousness? And if so, how can we best evolve the culture and consciousness in a way

that really serves our collective awakening? Then that becomes the agenda, and at that point, all of these issues that we’re struggling with now are put into a completely different context.

WIE: *What do you think has to happen practically to make these changes? How do we pass this evolutionary test?*

DE: I think there are different things that need to happen, obviously, but what it *finally* comes down to, I feel, is conversations. The tissue of our lives is our conversations and our stories. As individuals, whether it’s in the living rooms, boardrooms, or classrooms, we need to be having conversations about these adversity trends and opportunity trends, about the initiation that we’re going through. We have to wake up to what’s happening. We need to have face-to-face conversations that really anchor this in our personal lives. At the same time, we need to be having conversations in our public lives, through our mass media, that support people in seeing that in addition to a consumer world, there’s another world happening out there that we have to pay attention to as well. With these, what I would call “reflective conversations,” happening both at the local scale and the societal scale, I think we could rapidly reach a working consensus for moving along a very different track toward sustainability and a much more satisfying future for ourselves. But consciousness is the key. Waking up is the key.

WIE: *How do we create the sense of urgency that is so critical in terms of our collective consciousness?*

DE: We can either wait for the circumstances to impinge upon us so harshly that we wake up, or we

can magnify the input regarding, for example, species extinction or climate change, or poverty, or resource depletion. We can magnify the input by putting those things into our consciousness via the mass media. And right now all those factors are excluded from the mass media. We’re regarded not as citizens who want to be informed but as consumers who want to be entertained. So a very powerful way to transform this would be to open up more time in the airwaves—which is really opening up our species mind, our collective consciousness—for these kinds of concerns, as well as for the wonderful opportunities that are out there for us.

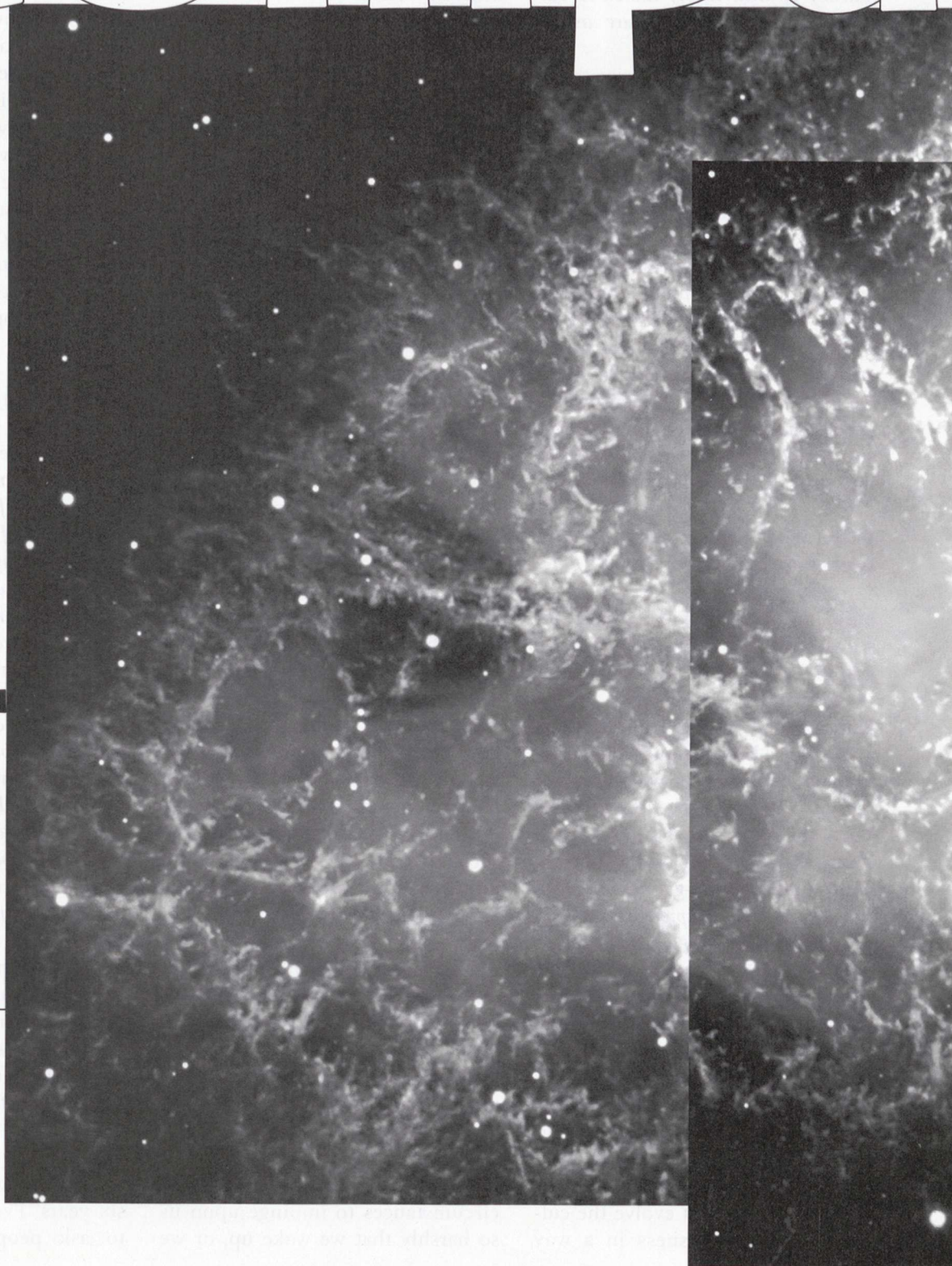
WIE: *One way to look at the spiritual path is to see it as a journey from an egocentric, self-centered perspective on life to an ever-increasing care and concern for greater and greater dimensions of life as a whole. However, traversing the deeper dimensions of the spiritual journey in a way that truly frees one from an egocentric view of the world has long been considered to be a very arduous undertaking, involving a profound commitment on the part of any individual who would take up the path of transformation. While there is no doubt that the world is in dire need of spiritually mature individuals, the genuine article seems to be a rare commodity. So, given the urgent demand of our collective crisis, and yet at the same time the profound challenge of real spiritual transformation, what gives you confidence and hope that the transformation you envision will take place in a significant enough number of individuals and/or institutions? How can enlightenment save the world?*

DE: Let me say that as I’ve gone around the world in the last five or six years, I’ve had the opportunity to ask people in very different

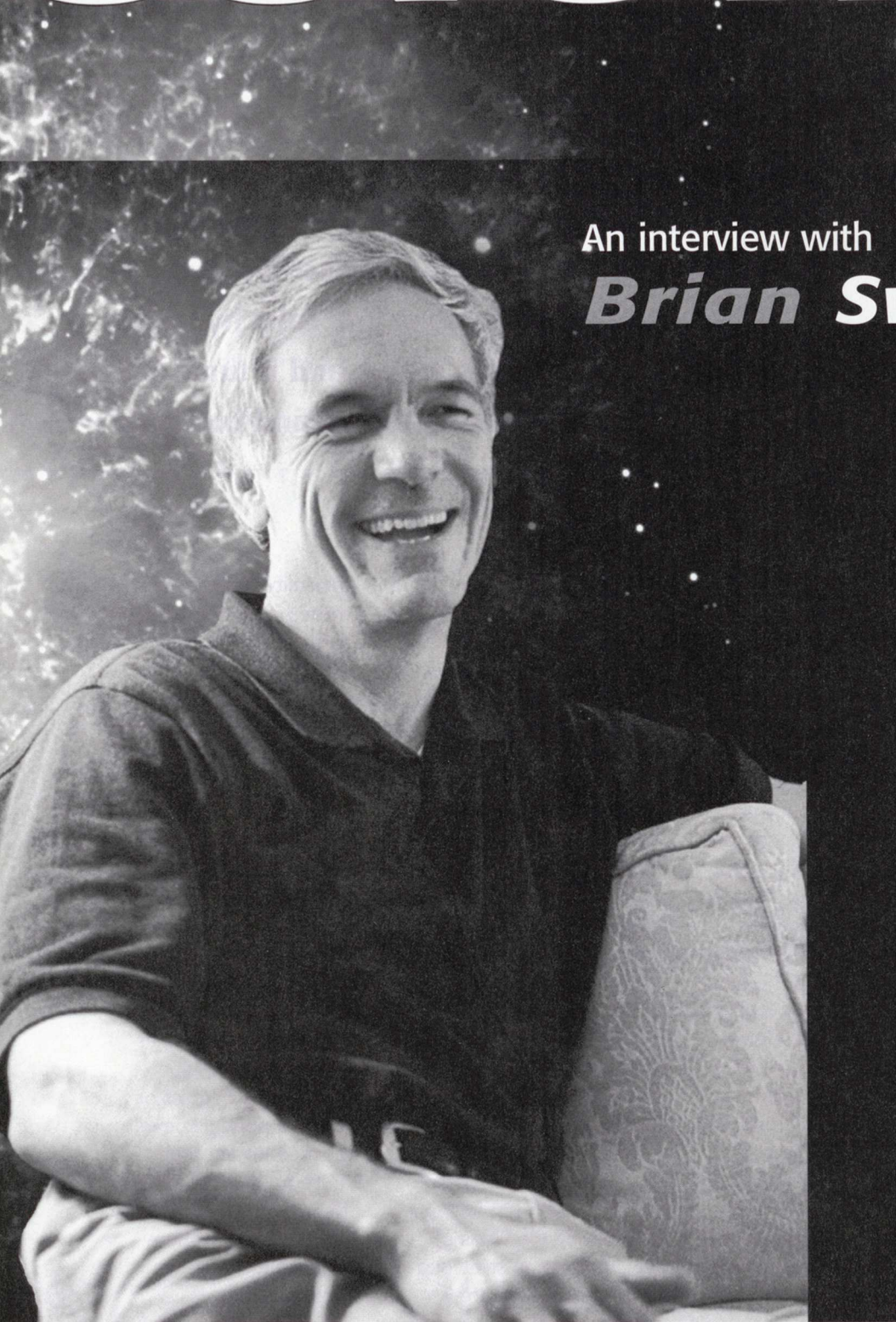
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An interview with

Brian Swimme

by Susan Bridle

For mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme, the universe is a continuous, radiant, numinous revelation. Contemplating the wonders of the unfolding creativity of the cosmos is a mystical, ecstatic, awe-inspiring event. And if you speak with him, read his books, or watch his educational video series—it's contagious. A specialist in the evolutionary dynamics of the universe, Swimme has made it a central aim of his work to convey the new story of the universe—the mind-stretching story of our fourteen billion years of cosmological evolution that has been revealed by the scientific discoveries of recent decades. In 1989 he founded the Center for the Story of the Universe

"It's really simple. Here's the whole story in one line. This is the greatest discovery of the scientific enterprise: You take hydrogen gas, and you leave it alone, and it turns into rosebushes, giraffes, and humans."

at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), where he is also a professor of cosmology. Swimme tells the story of the universe in the hope that this vast vision will catapult us out of the myopia of our narrow primate minds. The story of the universe, across the sweeping expanses of space and time, he believes, is the deepest story of ourselves. Swimme is particularly interested in the unique potential of our present moment in the march of time—for now is the moment, through the evolution of the unique self-reflective capacities in human consciousness, that the universe can become conscious of itself. And, most significantly for our

current planetary crisis, now is the moment in which we can begin to consciously "reinvent the human as a dimension of the emergent universe" and evolve into a mode of being human in which we are deeply in touch with, and experience a comprehensive compassion and responsibility for, all of life.

Swimme received his Ph.D. in mathematical cosmology from the University of Oregon in 1978. He taught at the University of Puget Sound for a number of years before moving to New York City to study with Thomas Berry at his Riverdale Center of Religious Research. Swimme and Berry then began a longtime collaboration, the fruits of which

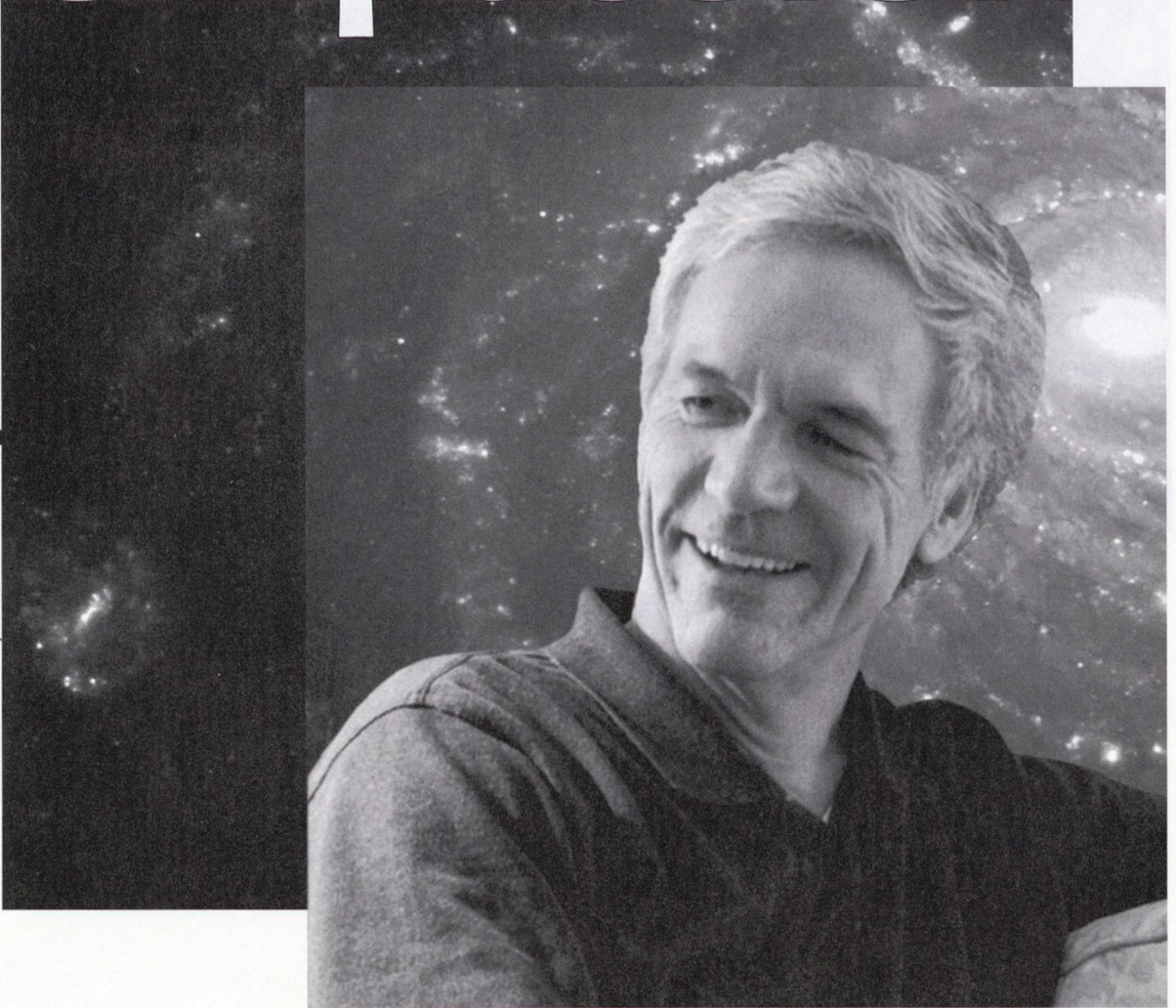
include *The Universe Story*, co-written in 1992. Swimme returned to teaching at Holy Names College in Oakland, California, where he taught for seven years and co-wrote *Manifesto for a Global Civilization* with Matthew Fox before joining CIIS. He is also the author of several other books, including *The Universe Is a Green Dragon*. Swimme travels regularly to speak on cosmology and ecology at conferences and organizations, including the United Nations, UNESCO, and the State of the World Forum.

I had the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Swimme and having the vistas of my imagination stretched to infinity at Harvard

University last October, where he was participating in a conference on ecology and religion. As we sat down to begin the interview, he told me he had just that minute returned from a conference event at Thoreau's Walden Pond. As Swimme brought the grandeur and majesty of the cosmos to life, speaking about the birth of galaxies with the intimacy and amazement and eloquence of the Transcendentalist poets when waxing ecstatic about leaves of grass or a Concord pond, I knew I was meeting another nature mystic, but a nature mystic of the twenty-first century, whose sphere of nature includes the farthest star.

compassion

comprehensive



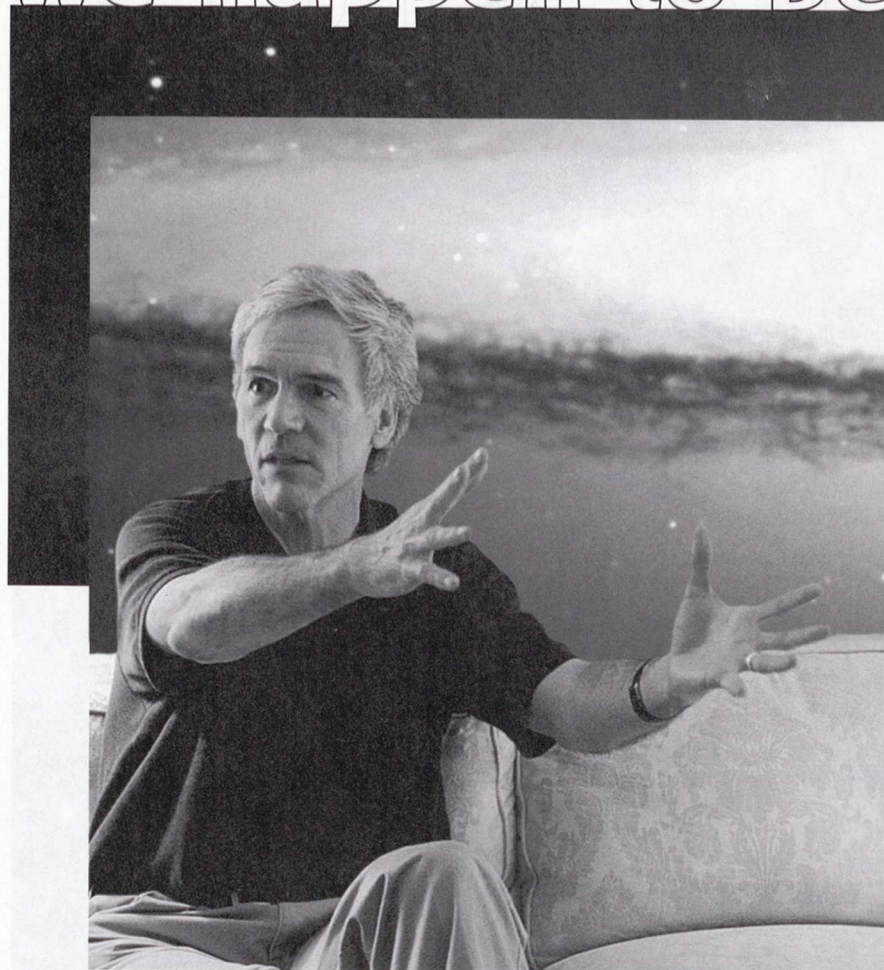
wie: What do you feel is the most pressing crisis facing humanity today? What are the planetary issues we most need to wake up to and address?

BRIAN SWIMME: I think the fastest way to wake up to what is happening on the planet is to think in terms of mass extinction. Every now and then, the earth goes through a die-off of the diversity of life. Over the last half-billion years, there have been five moments like

this. We didn't know about this two hundred years ago; we didn't have the slightest idea that the earth did this. Now we've discovered that around every hundred million years, the earth went through these amazing cataclysms. And just within the last thirty to forty years, we've discovered that the last one, which eliminated all the dinosaurs and ammanoids and so many other species, was caused by an asteroid hitting the earth. This happened sixty-five million years ago. There was no awareness

we happen to be

in that moment when the worst thing that's happened to the earth in 65 million years is happening now. That's number one. Number two, we are causing it. Number three, we're not aware of it.



of this any previous time in human history. You look through the Vedas, you look in the Bible—it's nowhere. But at the same time as we're discovering this, we're discovering that *we're causing one right now*. Two years ago, the American Museum of Natural History took a poll among biologists. They asked a simple question: Are we in the middle of a mass extinction? *Seventy percent said yes*. A mass extinction. You can't open your eyes and see that. It's a discovery that involves the whole. Our senses have evolved to deal with the near-at-hand, and *this* is a conclusion that involves the whole planet.

So now we're *just* discovering that we're in the middle of a mass extinction. We happen to be in that moment when the worst thing that's happened to the earth in sixty-five million years is happening now. That's number one. Number two, *we* are causing it. Number three, we're not aware of it. There's only a little splinter of humanity that's aware of it. The numbers are this: At the minimum, twenty-five thousand species are going extinct every year. And if humans' activity were otherwise, or if humans weren't here, there would be one species going extinct every five years. We've pushed up the natural

extinction rate by the order of something like a hundred to a thousand times.

The point is that we haven't been prepared to understand what an extinction event is. We've had all these great teachers. We've had tremendously intelligent people, going back through time, but you can look, for example, through all the *sutras* or Plato's dialogues, and they never talk about an extinction. As a matter of fact, I don't think that Plato or the Buddha were even capable of imagining an extinction. First of all, at that time we weren't aware of evolution. We weren't aware of the whole process,

so the idea of extinction didn't make sense. When every now and then scientists or other humans would find these bones, they would assume that these creatures were actually still in existence elsewhere, you know, on another part of the continent. So there wasn't the conception of extinction. We're only now having to deal with what it means to actually eliminate a form of life.

I have a new idea for a way to help people understand this. Christians have been reflecting upon Jesus' crucifixion for two thousand years. If you had happened to be around back then, for example, in Alexandria, it was a cosmopolitan world and they had news of what was going on, and you heard about some Jewish rabbi being killed—big deal. It wouldn't really have had an impact on you. But then, for two thousand years afterwards, Christian theologians are thinking about it. So my latest thought is, maybe for the next *million* years, humans will be reflecting on what it actually means for the earth to go through this extinction process. It may take us that long to fully take it in, with all of its ramifications. I don't understand it. It's vastly beyond my mind. I think that we're not prepared to really understand what it means. Right now, just to get a glimpse of it is tremendous. That's all I'm hoping for. If we just get a glimpse of it, we can begin to think at the level that's required to deal with it effectively.

WIE: *What do you believe is the solution to this crisis?*

BS: It would be to reinvent ourselves, at the species level, in a way that enables us to live with mutually enhancing relationships. Mutually enhancing relationships—not just with humans but with

all beings—so that our activities actually enhance the world. At the present time, our interactions degrade everything.

You see, the cartoon version of our civilization is that we're all materialists, so we don't have a sense of a larger significance beyond us. In our materialistic Western culture, our fundamental concern is the individual. The individual, and accumulation—of whatever it might be. Is it fame? Is it money? We put that as the cornerstone of our civilization. That's how we've organized things. Now there are mitigating factors, but I'm giving a cartoon version. What's necessary is for us to understand that, really, at the root of things is community. At the deepest level, that's the center of things. We come out of community. So how then can we organize our economics so that it's based on community, not accumulation? And how can we organize our religion to teach us about community? And when I say "community," I mean the whole earth community. That's the ultimate sacred domain—the earth community.

These are the ways in which I think we will be moving. How do you organize your technology so that as you use the technology, the actual use of it enhances the community? That's a tough one. So long as we have this worldview in which the earth itself is just stuff, empty material, and the individual is most important, then we're set up to just use it in any way we like. So the idea is to move from thinking of the earth as a storehouse to seeing the earth as our matrix, our fundamental community. That's one of the great things about Darwin. Darwin shows us that everything is kin. Talk about spiritual insight! Everything is kin at the level of genetic relatedness.

Another simple way of saying this is: Let's build a civilization that is based upon the *reality* of our relationships. If we think of the human as being the top of this huge pyramid, then everything beneath us is of no value, and we can use it however we want. In the past, it wasn't noticed so much because our influence was smaller. But now, we've become a planetary power. And suddenly the defects of that attitude are made present to us through the consequences of our actions.

It's amazing to realize that every species on the planet right now is going to be shaped primarily by its interaction with humans. It was never that way before. For three billion years, life evolved in a certain way; all of this evolution took place in the wilds. But now, it is *the decisions of humans* that are going to determine the way this planet functions and looks for hundreds of millions of years in the future. Look at an oak tree, look at a wasp, look at a rhinoceros. The beauty of those forms came out through this whole system of natural selection in the past. But the way they'll look in the future is going to be determined primarily by how they interact with us. Because we're everywhere. We've become powerful. We *are* the planetary dynamic at this large-scale level. So can we wake up to this fact and then reinvent ourselves at the level of knowledge and wisdom that's required? That's the nature of our moment. Our power has gotten ahead of us, has gotten ahead of our consciousness. This is a challenge we've never faced before: to relearn to be human in a way that is actually enhancing to these other creatures. If you want to be terrified, just think of being in charge of how giraffes will look a million years from now. Or the Asian elephant. Biologists are convinced the

Asian elephant will no longer exist in the wild. Even right now, the cheetah can't exist in the wild. That means that the Asian elephants that will exist in the future will exist primarily in our zoos, likewise cheetahs. So the kinds of environments we make for them are going to shape their muscles and their skeletons and all the rest of it. I'm talking over millions of years. This is the challenge that is particular to this moment, because this is the moment the earth goes through this major phase change—the dynamics of the planet are beginning to unfurl through human consciousness.

That's why I'm thrilled by your asking these questions. You see, I *do* think that waking up, enlightenment, *can* save our world, *can* save the planet. Because we're doing things that none of us wants to see happen. And we're doing it because we're unaware. So if we can wake up and train all of our energies around this, then I have deep confidence that tremendously beautiful, healing things will happen.

WIE: *You often speak about the fact that we are at a unique juncture in human history because we now have knowledge of the fourteen billion years of cosmological evolution that brought us to this point—and that this knowledge carries with it a responsibility that we never before imagined. Can you give a basic outline of the vast scope of this evolution?*

BS: It's really simple. Here's the whole story in one line. This is the greatest discovery of the scientific enterprise: You take hydrogen gas, and you leave it alone, and it turns into rosebushes, giraffes, and humans.

WIE: *That's the short version.*

BS: That's the short version. The reason I like that version is that hydrogen gas is odorless and colorless, and in the prejudice of our Western civilization, we see it as just material stuff. There's not much there. You just take hydrogen, leave it alone, and it turns into a human—that's a pretty interesting bit of information. The point is that if humans are spiritual, then hydrogen's spiritual. It's an incredible opportunity to escape the traditional dualism—you know, spirit is up there; matter is down here. Actually, it's different. You have the matter all the way through, and so you have the spirit all the way through. So that's why I love the short version.

Okay, the longer version: Thirteen billion years ago, according to the most recent guess, the universe comes forth as elementary particles, screaming hot. It's not only trillions of degrees hot, it's also a million times denser than lead. So the universe doesn't begin as fire. It begins as this incredible dense, hot—we can't even imagine it. We just know it as some numbers. And then it begins to expand. After three hundred thousand years, it cools enough to form atoms. Those are the hydrogen atoms. And as the matter continues to cool and expand, it also begins to draw itself together into these huge clouds that we call galaxies.

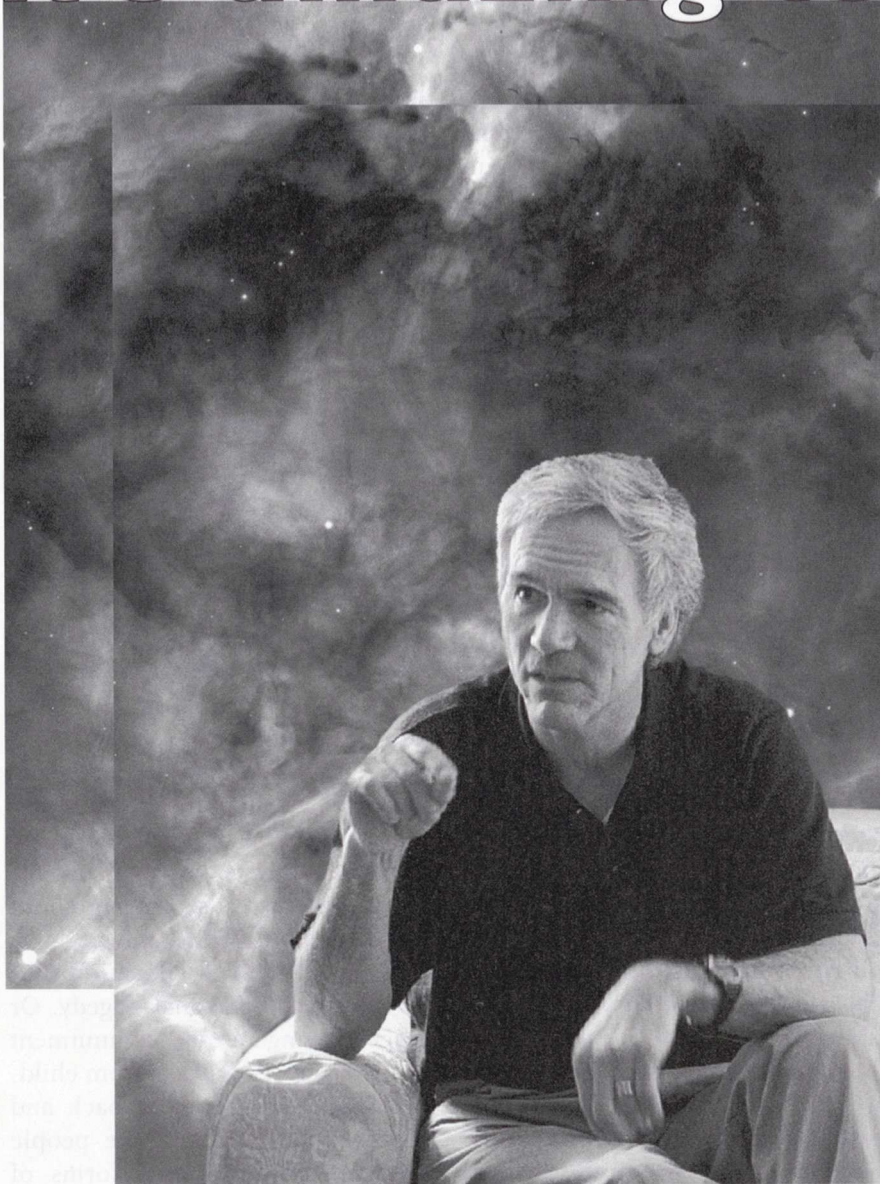
When the universe is about a billion years old, the galaxies flutter into existence, *whooshhh*, like snowflakes falling—one hundred billion galaxies. It was an incredible moment because that was the *only* time in the history of the universe when galaxies could form. Before that, it was way too dense and hot. After that, it's too thin and spread out. Stephen Hawking discovered something incredible. If you look at the

expansion of the universe, there's all this energy, right? It's just exploding out, and also, at the same time, you have this bonding force, gravity, that's holding it together. You've got these two opposing forces. If the gravitational force would have been slightly stronger, it would have crushed the whole universe into a black hole within a million years. Or, if the gravitational force had been weaker, it would have exploded apart and it wouldn't have formed galaxies. It's an incredible balance. The difference is one part in 10^{59} —which is a trillionth of a trillionth of a trillionth of one percent. That's how delicate it is. It's more delicate than dancing on the edge of a knife.

Later on, the galaxy is complexified in that the stars themselves burn, and the stars, to burn, transform the elements in their core. So the hydrogen is transformed into helium. And later on, it gets a lot hotter, and the helium is transformed into carbon, and so forth. All of the elements are created in the middle of the star, which then explodes. So the next star that's formed is formed out of these more complex elements, and then you have the possibility of planets. All of the elements of our body, every one of them, was forged out of a star. Walt Whitman had an intuition about this when he said, "A leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars." And you think, how did he come up with that? Well, that's called self-knowledge. In other words, a star gave birth to the elements that then assembled themselves in the form of Walt Whitman. So you could say that Walt Whitman had a deep memory of where he came from.

WIE: *That's an amazing intuition.*

it's amazing to



realize that every species on the planet right now is going to be shaped primarily by its interaction with humans. It was never that way before. For three billion years, evolution took place in the wilds. But now, it is *the decisions of humans* that are going to determine the way this planet functions and looks for hundreds of millions of years in the future.

BS: Isn't that something? How could he write that down? Likewise, when Einstein discovered the general theory of relativity, he discovered it from within. There was no data on the expansion of the universe or anything else. He said he just went into his own visceral movements—a strange way of thinking about creativity—and he paid attention to what was going on within, and he gave birth to the

gravitational equations we use now. This is what I think Whitman did. He penetrated the depth of his own bodily reality and had this intuition about stars. And we've now discovered the empirical details about this. I just love that—everybody comes out of the stars.

So, to continue with our story—in certain planetary systems, life forms. That's a *huge* transformation. Life begins around three and

a half billion years ago, and then it begins to complexify around seven hundred million years ago. And then, one strange little lineage forms—the worms. The worms actually develop a backbone and a nervous system. We're so impressed by brains. The worms created the brains. You see the theme I'm developing here? Hydrogen. It becomes *us*. All of matter is spiritual. And if the worms can

create the brains, then creativity is everywhere!

Then we have the advanced life-forms—more advanced in the sense of more complex. There are the various stages of humanity that we've gone through; our consciousness has developed. And then: We have *this* moment. Now we're discovering ourselves in the midst of this story. And you see, all that went before was *necessary* for us to actually discover ourselves in the universe right now—all of the development of mind and instrumentation and so forth.

But the way I want to connect the story for you is to go back to the birth of the galaxies. There was one moment when the galaxies could form, not before or after. That's like our moment right now, I think. See, this is the moment for the planet to awaken to itself through the human, so that the actual dynamics of evolution have an opportunity to awaken and to begin to function at that level. It couldn't happen before, you know. And the amazing thing is, it probably won't happen afterwards. If we don't make this transition, most likely the creativity of the planet will be in such a degraded state that we won't be able to make that move. The chilling thing is that, in the universe, the really creative places *can* lose their creativity. We talked about the birth of the galaxies. There are two fundamentally different forms of galaxies, spiral galaxies—galaxies with spiral arms—and elliptical galaxies, which can be larger or smaller, but which don't have any internal structure. The galaxies that have spiral arms have the creativity to create new stars. So stars form. They create these elements. They disperse. Then they form another one, another star system, and it keeps going. But in elliptical

galaxies, they can't. In our current understanding, spiral galaxies have collided at certain times and have destroyed their own internal structure and become elliptical galaxies. Elliptical galaxies are just sitting there, and the stars go out one by one, and that's it. So you can actually move off from the mainline sequence of creativity in the universe.

Now here we are in the middle of the Milky Way galaxy. There are two hundred billion stars. Lots of them have planets. Maybe a lot of them have intelligent life. There are approximately one hundred billion galaxies in the known universe. Obviously, lots of stars; most likely, lots of life. Who knows? But if you think of it in terms of the creativity of the universe, it may be that a lot of planets will go through the transition that we're facing now. And if they don't make it, they'll die out—like the elliptical galaxies. So the challenge before us as humans is to see that what we think of as small is immense. The very form of our consciousness has a cosmological significance that we didn't know about before. I've talked about it in an evolutionary sense, in terms of the animals and so forth, but it may go beyond that. It may have immense implications for the galaxy as a whole.

So that would be a way of thinking about the past thirteen billion years of the story—to think of the challenge before us as being a cosmological challenge. We've gone through transitions in the past that *could* have gone the wrong way. Then our planet would maybe still be alive, but certainly not at the level of complexity we see about us today. I don't want to suggest in any way that what's taking place is somehow engineered to happen. It's more of an adventure.

WIE: *This new knowledge of the history of the universe certainly stretches the limits of your imagination.*

BS: Yes. That's just it. Imagine what it was like when Copernicus showed up in town and told people for the first time, "Hey, you know what? The earth is going around the sun." Try to take that in. We failed to. We couldn't handle it. And so we split: The scientific venture went one way, and the religious/spiritual another. In one sense, we're at this same juncture. Can we find the resources to take this in and move with it? It is a challenge for the imagination.

WIE: *What is the most important catalyst for the kind of change of worldview you've been speaking about?*

BS: You know, that's a great question. I wish I had an adequate answer. I've thought about it, and my conclusion is that there are multiple catalysts. For some people, it's knowledge, just *hearing* about this new story of the universe—so that's what I do in education. But for others, it's personal tragedy. Or maybe having an early commitment to the beauty of a place, from childhood, and then coming back and seeing it destroyed. Some people awaken through varied forms of meditation; other people use drugs. I see multiple catalysts. I don't have an adequate answer perhaps, but the catalyst for *me* was knowledge. It was just being completely amazed at what we now know. So that would be my own particular path, but I don't privilege one over the other because I've met so many people who are beginning to get a sense of this and they come from a variety of directions.

WIE: *You often speak about the importance of activating what you*

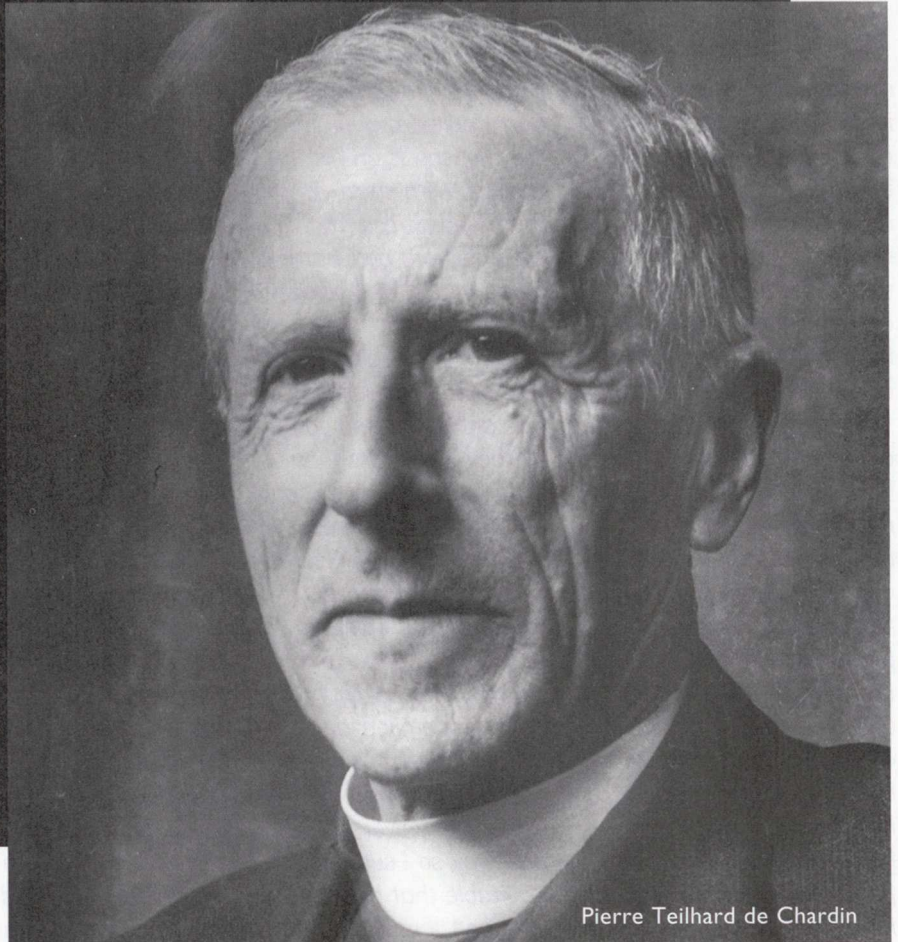
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of the cosmos

the divinization

An Interview with Brian Swimme on Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

by Susan Bridle



Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

In our reading and wide-ranging research for this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?*, we found the name of the mid-century French Jesuit priest and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin popping up again and again. His visionary writings, we discovered, have been an important source of revelation and inspiration for many scientists, ecologists,

futurists, and theologians who are now grappling with critical questions about the state of the earth and the human being's place within it. When we read excerpts from Teilhard's *The Human Phenomenon*, *The Divine Milieu*, and *The Future of Man*, we immediately understood why.

Brian Swimme has been a student of Teilhard's work for

many years. Himself a scientist with an abiding interest in the interface of science and spirituality, Swimme's own passion and understanding have been deeply influenced by Teilhard's ideas. Who better to bring to life Teilhard's vision, we thought, than he? Swimme describes his discovery of Teilhard in his Foreword to Sarah Appleton-Weber's

new translation of *The Human Phenomenon*:

There are days in New York City where you never see the sun but only feel its presence in the blasts of hot air that sweep through the concrete canyons and in the heat waves that radiate up from the asphalt. When my clothes finally became heavy with my own sweat and I was lost for the third time I was tempted to hide out in some air-conditioned hotel, but all I had to remember was my own misery and that was enough to keep me going. I had recently resigned as a professor of mathematics and physics and was now on a search for wisdom, and a number of people had pointed me toward New York, most notably [Aurelio Peccei], the founder of the Club of Rome, that seminal gathering of planetary thinkers and visionaries. On his deathbed, when asked who of all the brilliant minds he had worked with he would most recommend, Peccei had said simply, "Our best hope is Thomas Berry."

By the time I made it to Berry's Riverdale Research Center and was invited into his library, I could not have had higher expectations. He listened carefully as I tried to

explain my misery and confusion over the destruction of the planet and what to do about it. After a long pause, and without saying a word, Thomas Berry pulled a book from the thousands on his shelves. With stern visage he tossed across the table Teilhard de Chardin's great work, *The Human Phenomenon*.

My disappointment was instantaneous. This was old stuff. I had come all the way across the continent to receive a book I had read back in my Jesuit high school? Even worse, some famous scientists had objected to Teilhard's ideas, and I brought that up. Thomas Berry just smiled, and broke into easy laughter.

"Teilhard was the first to see the universe in a new way, so I suppose it's inevitable that he would be criticized. If you're bothered by what a few scientists have to say you should read some of the theologians! Fundamentally the difficulty is one of scale. Any attempt to understand Teilhard that does not begin with the entire complex of civilizations as well as the vast panorama of the evolutionary universe is doomed to failure, for it is simply too small to grasp what he is about. Surely, similar situations have

occurred in the history of science?"

My mind raced with thoughts of Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr and the revolutions they initiated and how these could not be contained in the world of classical physics, but he had only asked the question in a rhetorical way. He was soon to bring our brief meeting to a close, but not before he uttered a most unforgettable statement: "To see as Teilhard saw is a challenge, but increasingly his vision is becoming available to us. I fully expect that in the next millennium Teilhard will be generally regarded as the fourth major thinker of the Western Christian tradition. These would be St. Paul, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Teilhard."

He smiled again, aware of so much that needed to be said by way of explanation, but also aware that I would be incapable at this time of taking it in. He pointed to the book he had put in my hands. "Begin with Teilhard. There's no substitute for a close reading of his work."

I would read on my own and once a week discuss the ideas with Thomas Berry; I would be regularly amazed by how much of the world's intellectual history it seemed necessary to refer to. He

drew constantly not just from physics and biology but also from philosophy, poetry, linguistics, music, and above all world history and cosmology. As the months went by I began to suspect that the fundamental categories of my mind were undergoing some sort of change. The unexamined assumptions that had been organizing my experiences in the world were now writhing under the pressure from Teilhard's massive and penetrating cosmology...

Swimme's intense contemplation of Teilhard's work culminated in a profound spiritual experience that overcame him one day while walking with his four-year-old son in a forest just north of New York City. It was an epiphany of the mystical fire at the heart of Teilhard's vision, a timeless moment of living recognition of the creative, blazing, flaring forth of the cosmos—a vision that remains very much alive within him today. At the end of our conversation about Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and his ideas, Swimme admitted with a laugh, "Good old Teilhard. I've never recovered from that day."

wie: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a great thinker who had a profound influence on your own understanding. Can you tell us a bit about Teilhard—who he was, and what you believe his most significant contributions were?

BRIAN SWIMME: He was a French Jesuit paleontologist who lived from 1881 to 1955. His most important achievement was to articulate the significance of the new story of evolution. He was the first major thinker in the West to fully articulate that evolution and the sacred identify, or correlate. Teilhard de Chardin in the West and Sri Aurobindo in India really arrived at the same basic vision, which is that the unfolding of the universe is a physical evolution and also a spiritual evolution. I think that's his principal contribution. On the one hand, you have this awesome tradition about God or Brahmin, and on the other, you have this tradition about evolution—and adherents of each view tend to be very critical of the others. Christians said, "Evolution, that's horrible!" And scientists said, "Theism, that's horrible!" Aurobindo and Teilhard brought them together. So I think of them both as geniuses who synthesized the two visions. Teilhard attempted to get beyond the fundamental subjective/objective dualism in much of Western thought. He began to really see the universe as a single energy event that was both physical and psychic or even spiritual. I think that's his great contribution: He began to see the universe in

an integral way, not as just objective matter but as suffused with psychic or spiritual energy.

Also, in my thinking, the central idea of Teilhard is his law of "complexification-consciousness." He identifies this as the fundamental law of evolution. He sees that the whole process is about complexifying and deepening intelligence or subjectivity. The entire movement of the universe in its complexification is simultaneously a movement further into the depths of consciousness, or interiority. He saw the whole thing as a physical-biological-spiritual process. He was the one who saw it all together. You could summarize his thought simplistically and say that the universe begins with matter, develops into life, develops into thought, develops into God. That's his whole vision, right there. Now clearly, this God that develops—it's not as if God is developed out of matter. God is present from the very beginning, but in an implicit form, and the universe is accomplishing this great work of making divinity explicit.

WIE: What was Teilhard's vision of the nature and role of the human being in evolution?

BS: His view was that the birth of self-reflexive consciousness in the human was a crucial moment in the earth's journey. And he stated that the discovery of evolution by humans represents the most dramatic change in human mentality in the last two million years. You think of the Bill of Rights, the journey to the moon, the great religions, all of these incredible things—he thought all of these were secondary compared to this discovery of evolution by human consciousness. He saw it as "the universe folding back on itself." There

are all these creatures that live in nature, and then suddenly you have this one creature that looks nature back in the eye and says, "What exactly are you up to?" That switch he saw as fundamental.

He explored this idea further by speaking of—and I love this idea—the earth as a series of envelopes. First you have the lithosphere, or the surface layer of rock, and then the atmosphere develops, and the hydrosphere, and the biosphere. But his understanding is that in our time, there's another layer being added, and that is the "noosphere"—a layer generated by human thought. It's not possible to understand the earth unless you see it in terms of these layers. The way in which this has captured the contemporary imagination is in the development of the Internet—it's almost like the sinews of the noosphere.

WIE: Wired magazine did an article on Teilhard a while ago that makes this point. But they went a bit too far and seemed to equate Teilhard's noosphere with the Internet, suggesting that his vision was simply a precognition of the Internet.

BS: Yes. I guess there are different ways to reduce his thought down and miss parts of it, and one would be to say the noosphere is the Internet. But of course, Teilhard would say that, like everything else in the universe, it has a physical as well as a spiritual dimension.

WIE: What is the significance of our becoming aware of the process of evolution?

BS: Teilhard gave a great analogy. Our moment of waking up as a species is very much like what happens in the individual at around two

years old. I don't know the exact time, but there comes a moment when the young child gets depth perception for the first time. So in their phenomenal field, there's a rearrangement of the phenomena into the third dimension as opposed to a two-dimensional map. He said that the species is going through that right now—we're discovering a depth of time. Before, we saw everything in terms of this much smaller space, and now, "Wham!" the universe as a whole opens up in the depths of time.

Teilhard also had this phrase called "hominization." Hominization is the way in which human thought transforms previously existing practices and functions of the earth. Let me give you an example. The earth makes decisions all the time; it makes choices. And in a broad sense, this is called natural selection. But when you throw human thought in there, it explodes into all of the decisions we're making all over the planet. Human decision has "hominized" the natural selection process—for good and ill. Everything that has existed up until now is going through this process of hominization. Another example would be—look at young mammals and the way they play. They mess around with each other and hide and chase, and we hominize that by creating this whole vast industry of sports and arts and entertainment. Everything seems to go through this explosion when it's touched by the human imagination. Teilhard's ultimate vision of what is taking place with the human is the hominization of love. You see, he regarded the attracting force of gravity as a form of love, and the way in which animals care for one another as a form of love, and so the hominization of love would be focusing that and amplifying it to make it a monumental power in the future evolution of

the earth. That is his most famous phrase: "The day will come when we shall harness for God the energies of love. And, on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, the human being will have discovered fire."

WIE: *How does our becoming aware of the evolutionary scale of time help the "universe develop into God"—as you said earlier—or further the invocation of God through human consciousness?*

BS: He had this sense that a deep change at the level of being—a change of heart, a change of mind, a change of actual body—can take place in the human who learns to see the universe as suffused with divine action. And he made a huge deal out of this word—"see." His sense of spiritual practice would be to develop those qualities that are necessary for us to *truly* get it, to truly see where we are. One thing he would speak about is how we tend to be overwhelmed by large numbers, and so he would say we have to develop a capacity to see the patterns in the large numbers. As we develop this capacity, rather than being crushed by the immensity of the universe, we'll suddenly, instead, resonate with the universe as a whole as the outer form of our own inner spirit. That was his cry, for humans to develop these capacities.

He also had an interesting view of spiritual traditions in general about this. He seemed to say that eternity is easier than evolution. The idea of awakening to eternity he regarded as very, very significant in human history—but not as difficult as awakening to the time-developmental or evolutionary nature of the universe.

WIE: *What do you mean by "awakening to eternity" in this context?*

BS: How at any moment we arise out of eternity, moment after moment. To escape the illusion of transience and to see into the absolute moment—Teilhard regarded this as a great mystical event in the life of an individual, as well as in the human journey. But he said that a deeper and harder achievement and challenge before us is to awaken to the time-developmental nature of the universe. The whole journey is this moment—it's not just the year 2000—this moment is also the birth of the universe itself. But more significantly for this particular discussion, it's also the moment of the "absolute future." The challenge before us is the absolute future calling to the present. This is really his mysticism. He would say that by learning to see, by becoming alert and awake in this universe, you feel the call and the presence of the unborn God asking for, or guiding us into, the type of creative action that gives birth to the next moment in a process that he called "divinization."

WIE: *This is something that we've been thinking about a lot in putting together this issue of the magazine. Often in the Eastern traditions, the focus is solely on the "awakening to eternity" that you were just describing. Yet in Teilhard's work, there is another call. There is a call for the perfection of the Absolute to be manifest in form—for there to be greater and greater complexity, greater and greater order, greater and greater perfection, in form, in time, in space, in matter. Teilhard seems to bring together the absolute and the manifest in a truly nondualistic vision that does seem unique.*

BS: That's right. I love his orientation and his view of the traditional religions. He says that the future of the spiritual traditions on our planet will be determined by the degree to which they enhance the divinization

continued on p. 136

only by uniting

we can progress

Gloriously situated by life at this critical point in the evolution of Mankind, what ought we to do? We hold earth's future in our hands. What shall we decide? In my view the road to be followed is clearly revealed by the teaching of all the past.

We can progress only by uniting: this, as we have seen, is the law of Life. But unification through coercion leads only to a superficial pseudo-unity. It may establish a mechanism, but it does not achieve any fundamental synthesis; and in consequence it engenders no growth of consciousness. It materializes, in short, instead of spiritualizing. Only unification through unanimity is biologically valid. This alone can work the miracle of causing heightened personality to emerge from the forces of collectivity. It alone represents a genuine extension of the psychogenesis that gave us birth.

Therefore it is inwardly that we must come together, and in entire freedom.

But this brings us to the last question of all. To create this unanimity we need the bond, as I said, the cement of a favoring influence. Where shall we look for it; how shall we conceive of this principle of togetherness, this soul of the earth? Is it to be in the development of a common vision, that is to say, the establishment of a universally accepted body of knowledge, in which all intelligences will join in knowing the same facts interpreted in the same way?

Or will it rather be in common action, in the determination of an Objective universally recognized as being so desirable that all activity will naturally converge towards it under the impulse of a common fear and a common ambition? These two kinds of unanimity are undoubtedly real, and will, I believe, have their place in our future progress. But they need to be complemented by something else if they are not to remain precarious, insufficient and incomplete. A common body of knowledge brings together nothing but the geometrical point of intelligences. A common aspiration, no matter how ardent, can only touch individuals indirectly and in an impersonal way that is depersonalizing in itself.

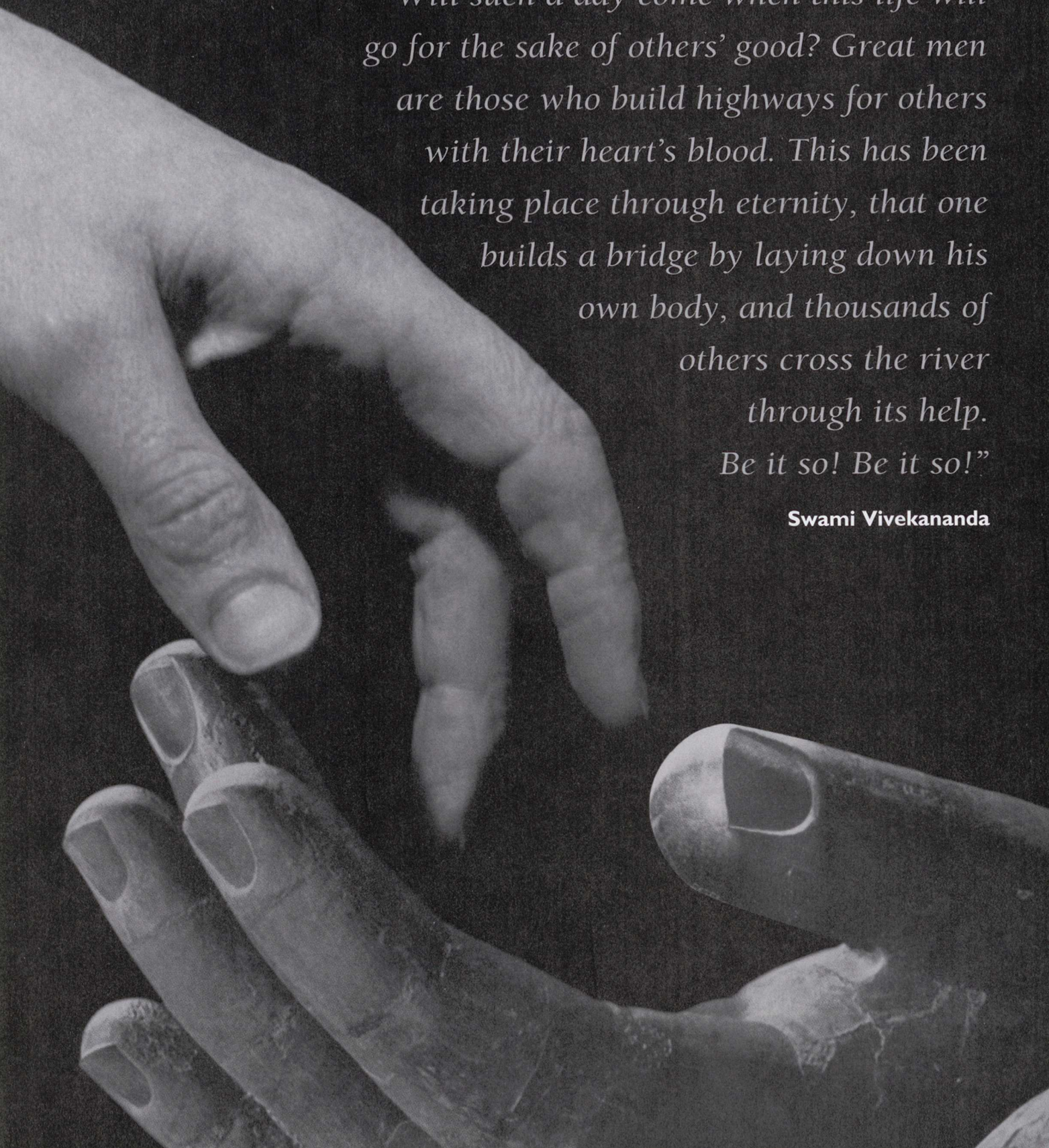
It is not a tête-à-tête or a corps-à-corps that we need; it is a heart-to-heart.

This being so, the more I consider the fundamental question of the future of the earth, the more it appears to me that the generative principle of its unification is finally to be sought, not in the sole contemplation of a single Truth or in the sole desire for a single Thing, but in the common attraction exercised by a single Being. For . . . if the synthesis of the Spirit is to be brought about in its entirety (and this is the only possible definition of progress), it can only be done, in the last resort, through the meeting, center to center, of human units, such as can only be realized in universal, mutual love.

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin
The Future of Man

“Will such a day come when this life will go for the sake of others’ good? Great men are those who build highways for others with their heart’s blood. This has been taking place through eternity, that one builds a bridge by laying down his own body, and thousands of others cross the river through its help. Be it so! Be it so!”

Swami Vivekananda



from
what is



an interview with

Michael Lerner by Andrew Cohen



to ***what ought to be***

"I simply cannot understand how somebody can be a spiritual being and not be *actively* involved in transforming the world," says Rabbi Michael Lerner. Political revolutionary, humanitarian, spiritual mentor, psychologist, and editor of *Tikkun* magazine, Michael Lerner is a powerful

voice for *radical* change in this new millennium. His indefatigable commitment to transform this world from one dominated by ego-centered, mean-spirited, materialistic values to one rooted in the spiritual revelation that we are all one indivisible whole is inspiring, to say the least. He is a

passionate man whose deeply compassionate call to awaken to the truth of our undivided spiritual nature is inseparable from his plea for us all to awaken to our own conscience. Rabbi Lerner is an idealist who is actively engaged, not only philosophically but practically, in how we

can actually transform this world that seems to be heading toward disaster. With his uncompromising demand for a comprehensive transformation of society and culture informed by deep spiritual values, his contribution to our investigation of the question, "Can enlightenment save

the world?" seemed to be invaluable.

Lerner was deeply inspired in his youth by Abraham Heschel, one of modernity's greatest Jewish theologians. A radical while he studied philosophy at U.C. Berkeley in the sixties, Lerner ultimately decided that the liberal and progressive movements were defeating themselves because they were not addressing the ethical and spiritual dimensions of the human experience. He went on to get his second Ph.D. in clinical psychology and founded the Institute for Labor and Mental Health where, as a psychotherapist, he realized that many working-class

people were "moving to the right because the liberals didn't seem to understand or address the alienation and meaninglessness fostered by the me-firstism of the market economy." A tireless political activist, he also became a leading figure in the Jewish Renewal movement. Eventually deciding that liberals needed a "politics of meaning," and that Judaism had the foundations for such a politics, he founded *Tikkun* magazine in 1986. In 1993 Lerner achieved national fame when the *Washington Post* dubbed him "guru of the White House" during his short-lived association with the Clintons, who had been inspired by

his influential book *The Politics of Meaning*. In 1996 he was ordained by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and founded Beyt Tikkun Synagogue in San Francisco.

Being a spiritual teacher myself, I found Rabbi Lerner's uncompromising views refreshing to hear. In our Western spiritual marketplace—where more often than not the endless fears and desires of the ego are assuaged rather than honestly challenged, where the always profound implications of spiritual experience are endlessly watered down—his intolerance for materialism and for those approaches to spiritual transformation that are

ultimately only self-serving is an important wake-up call. While I agreed with Lerner's emphatic declaration that spiritual evolution should result in active transformation of the world, the automatic association of the spiritual and the fiercely political was not always as obvious to me as it was to him.

An unstoppable hurricane of compassionate concern, Rabbi Lerner compels each and every one of us to question the actual depth of our commitment to our own highest convictions. This lively interview was conducted in his living room in the Berkeley Hills last December.



Rabbi Michael Lerner

andrew cohen: In an interview in this issue of What Is Enlightenment?, social scientist and evolutionary activist

Duane Elgin states, "What we're really facing is the convergence of a number of powerful trends—climate change, species extinction, the spread of poverty, and the growth of population. All these factors could develop individually, but what's unique about our time is that the world has become a

closed system. There's no place to escape, and all of these powerful forces are beginning to impinge upon one another and reinforce one another. Our situation is something like a set of rubber bands that you stretch out and out and out until they reach the limit of their elasticity, which is the breaking point of the system. . . . Something powerful is going to begin happening at that point, and while right now we can turn away from this, in another twenty years a systems crisis will be an unyielding reality that we will have to deal with." Elgin, you, and many other activists who speak out passionately



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about the crisis that we are in repeatedly state in no uncertain terms that it is not technological innovation but only a spiritual transformation—a quantum leap in perspective based upon spiritual insight alone—that will have the power to change the hearts and minds of human beings significantly enough to be able to bring to a halt this suicidal game of Russian roulette that we are playing with the fate of the planet and all life upon it. Indeed, the theme of your recent book *Spirit Matters* is that it is our individual and collective alienation from ourselves, from our own spiritual depth, that is the fundamental cause of the narcissism, shortsightedness, and rampant materialism that is bringing us to the brink of self-destruction. Could you please explain why you feel that it is our lack of spiritual realization, individually

and collectively, that is the root cause of all that is wrong, not only with our relationship to ourselves as human beings but also with our relationship to all of life?

MICHAEL LERNER: I'd start by saying this: The fundamental reality of the universe is that we are all interconnected as part of the unity of all Being. And the alienation that we experience is first and foremost an alienation from who we are. It is a product of our failure to understand ourselves as connected to all other human beings and then to all other beings. That failure manifests in a zillion ways in contemporary life, but it's the root of the problem because every specific form of alienation is rooted in our distance from or our lack of awareness of our

fundamental interconnection with all other beings.

If we want to look at some specifics around that, we can talk, for example, about the ecological crisis—the way that we imagine that we can dump pollution into the world and that it won't affect us. Or, in a more sophisticated version of this stupidity, we imagine that we won't dump the pollution into *our* particular part of the planet. We'll dump it into the Third World, not recognizing that we're part of one world system, one planetary system, and one universal system. So this is symbolic of the craziness that comes from not understanding the interconnection—because the poisons come back to us. They come back to us through the food. They come back to us through the air.

They come back to us through the interaction with other human beings who have become sick as a result of the impact of the pollution and environmental destruction that we are engaged with. But we are unaware of this, or we're unable to see it.

It's as if we were to say to ourselves, "Well, this is only my toe. It's something far away. I don't really see it as connected to me. I'm up here in my head, or I'm up here in the upper part of my body." Well, if somebody said that to you, you'd say, "No, no. That's my toe. It's really important to me, even though it's not exactly in front of me in my immediate consciousness. But if you start to hurt it, of course, it will hurt me." We are part of this universal body of the universe, and yet we've cut off our awareness of some of our nerve cells so that we don't respond immediately to the stimuli coming from other places. But eventually the poisons come back to us in a very hurtful and destructive way. There's massive irrationality in our not recognizing the interconnection and the interdependence of all human beings and, fundamentally, our interconnection to all Being. So that's on the ecological level, that fundamental alienation from our recognition of the interconnection between all human beings.

On the social level, the same thing is playing out, just in a slightly different way. Were we to understand our fundamental interconnections, we would recognize that our own well-being or the development of our soul and consciousness is totally dependent on the development of every other human being on the planet. That is to say that we're intrinsically linked, that the image of us as individuals pursuing our own self-interest or even our own enlightenment is deeply mistaken. But when one

doesn't recognize that, then one thinks, "Oh, I can pursue my own path. I can make it for myself, and it doesn't really matter what's happening to these other human beings around me." And that alienation from other human beings causes so many of the social problems that we're facing, because people imagine that they are on their own when, in fact, they're deeply interconnected with every other human being, not just at the physical level that I was talking about with regard to ecology but at the emotional and spiritual level, the level of our expectations of what's possible between human beings. Our capacity to connect with other human beings—every single interaction that we have—is shaped by our consciousness of the totality of human relationships. And in a world where human relationships are based on a model of each one out for herself or himself, the distance between us is dramatic, and the possibility of loving connection is deeply reduced.

When the understanding of our interconnection is lost, people start to proceed in a way that I'd say is analogous to the misunderstanding that happens with a cancer cell. The cancer cell, the cell that pays attention to its own interest without regard to the other cells around it, starts to consume more and more and more. So it's not surprising that cancer really is the quintessential sickness of the contemporary age. As a society, when you suddenly see this as becoming the major form of illness, it's a dramatic symbol of something happening in the universe. And what is happening is that one tiny little part of the universe—us—has started to get out of control. We do not understand our interrelationship with all other beings and are consuming everything around us in an incredibly

destructive way. We do that on the ecological level. We do it on the social level. We do it on the individual level.

AC: *What is unique about your thesis is its rare combination of radical and uncompromising politics and the profound common sense of deep humanism, all grounded in a passionate and inspired spirituality. Many people today who are deeply devoted to spiritual awakening often shy away from the kind of committed and passionate engagement with the world that you repeatedly emphasize is absolutely essential in order for the ever more dangerous world we're living in to actually change in the ways that count the most. Why is it that you feel that committed engagement with the world is the most important part of living a truly spiritual life?*

ML: Because, as I've been saying, a deep truth of spiritual consciousness is the recognition of our interconnection with all others. There is no way to actually be alive, spiritually alive, and not care. In fact, most spiritual traditions have that element of developing a sense of compassion and caring for the well-being of all others. Now, what I have been stressing is that that consciousness is sometimes isolated from practice, from how we actually live. It's a consciousness in which we can say, "Oh, yes. I feel compassion for all others," but that doesn't lead us to do anything about their situation. And I would argue that that disjunction—compassion for others without wanting to act to alleviate their suffering—is not a product of an enlightened consciousness, but it's a product of somebody who feels defeated about the possibility of healing and transforming the world.

The particular form of spirituality that I come from is the Jewish spiritual tradition. And that tradition



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has something to add to the spiritual consciousness of the universe. It contributes the insight that the fundamental spiritual force in the universe is a force of healing and transformation. It is a force that makes possible the transformation from that which is to that which ought to be. That is to say, the universe is *not* morally neutral. The spiritual power of the universe is *not* a morally neutral force. It is a force that inclines the world toward goodness, toward generosity, toward compassion, and toward an alleviation of unnecessary suffering. The God of the Bible is a God that says that the world can be based on love, that it

can be based on caring—love your neighbor and love the stranger—that the world can go in that direction, that that can happen. And not because of some transcendence of all that is, but because the fundamental spiritual reality of the universe is that it is pervaded with love and goodness. And if you are a realized human being or moving in that direction, then your test is to be a witness to that possibility, to be a partner with God in the healing and transformation of the world. This is what it means to say that human beings are created in the image of God: We are meant to be partners, and our task is to actualize more of

the goodness and love in the universe and to recognize the world as potentially transformable.

What I say is that spiritual traditions that don't go in this direction, that think that it's sufficient to understand the universe with a detached compassion, are often based on a defeatism that I think is a despair about the possibility of possibility. To believe in God, from my standpoint, is to believe in the possibility of possibility. God is the force that makes possible the transformation from that which is to that which ought to be. So when a spiritual person testifies to the possibility of transformation, that

testimony isn't simply about writing a book; it's about acting as though the world really *could* be based on love and *could* be based on caring and *could* be based on this active recognition of the unity of all Being. So that leads us to action, to trying to heal and transform the world.

AC: *You said that the Jewish tradition is based upon the fact that in the spiritual revelation, the spiritual energy in the universe is recognized to be a kind of evolutionary movement from, as you said, "that which is to that which ought to be." But is what's recognized in the tradition the absolute truth, or the true picture of reality as it is? I personally agree wholeheartedly with what you're saying, but there are many people who would question whether, in the universe itself, there is any inherent movement of spiritual and evolutionary energy toward, as you were saying, the expression of goodness.*

ML: There are different ways of experiencing the spiritual reality of the universe. People come down from the mountain with different accounts. And what I can do is to testify to the way that I and my people have experienced it. I don't want to say to anybody else, "Your account isn't a legitimate account," but I want to explain, from my perspective, why it might be that others don't seem to see it in this way. You see, the way of experiencing the universe that I'm talking about is one which is very hard to hold on to. Because once you come down from having had the experience that the world is potentially transformable, you enter into a world in which there are elites of power and money who have kept their power and money in part by convincing everybody that the only way things *can* be is the way things *are* and that there is no fundamental transformation

possible. You see, unlike other spiritual insights, the insight into the transformative nature of the world is connected with terror—because every social institution, including one's own parents, is committed to convincing you that the world can't be changed very much and that your task is to fit into a particular reality and make it within that reality. And so, given that, I don't blame anyone who is on a spiritual path and hasn't allowed herself or himself to get into this particular aspect of spirituality.

AC: *So what you're saying is that the revelation of the inherent goodness of the spiritual energy that moves and ultimately is this universe is revolutionary in nature. It's a revolutionary recognition that always threatens any perspective or fixed position that would inhibit its full or complete flowering.*

ML: Exactly. Because its full flowering would lead to a clash with almost every existing religious system, including Judaism, and a clash with all of the rest of the social structures of the society. And I'm not just speaking about economics. For example, so much of what is taught in the universities is theories that tell people to look at the universe in ways that convince them that nothing fundamental can be different, that the world is stuck where it is. All empirical social science and a great deal of the humanities are based on the defeated consciousness, the consciousness that says that nothing fundamentally can be healed or transformed. In fact, in humanities, very often you encounter the following kind of position: "If you're really sophisticated, then you know how much evil there is in the world and how impossible it is to fundamentally change anything. If you believe something different than that, you're just a breathless

teenage girl who hasn't yet grown up, who hasn't become a mature adult, who hasn't really fully understood the implications of evil in the universe!"

AC: *How hopeless things are.*

ML: Exactly. So, this ideology runs very, very deep.

AC: *You speak about a deep cynicism in the hearts and minds of many contemporary Americans at this time of crisis. Would you please explain what the causes are of this cynicism, this postmodern curse that is like a shadow over the human heart, preventing its opening to the call of the true Self to transcend ego and selfishness?*

ML: This cynicism is manifest in what I call a pathogenic belief. Now, in my book *Spirit Matters*, I describe this pathogenic belief as the belief that no one else really shares with us our spiritual understanding. And that, consequently, we will necessarily be alone if we go out into our daily lives and say that the world could be based on this spiritual reality of the universe. So no matter how many millions and millions of people are moved to spiritual understanding—and they'll read *What Is Enlightenment?* or *Tikkun* magazine—no matter how many millions of people have this spiritual hunger, almost all of us share a fear that we are the only ones who *really* believe this, who *really* would want a world based on love and caring, based on awe and wonder. Because of that deep belief, we all act as though we have no alternative but "the real world," that is, the world of making a living and our daily life outside of the few moments when we're meditating or praying or doing religious or spiritual activity. We believe that in



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the real world, this spirituality has no real application, and that, in fact, were we to bring our spiritual understanding to the rest of the world, we would be ridiculed; we would be put down. All of the credibility that we had managed to build up for ourselves in order to become professionals, in order to be successful in the world of business, in order to have good employment—all of this would be vitiated were we to say that we really believe that the world could be transformed and

healed and based on our higher spiritual understanding.

That's the belief. But why is that so deeply ingrained? Well, it's deeply ingrained because at various moments, given that this is shared by most people in the society, when you as an individual try to peer out and see, well, where are my allies, you see all these other people acting on *their* pathogenic belief, acting as though all they care about is their own self-interest and maximizing their money and power. So what

actually ends up happening is that each of us becomes the other to all the others. We are the ones who enforce the reality on each other.

AC: *The status quo.*

ML: Right. The spiritual status quo, the material status quo, the *selfishness* status quo. Now, because of that, when any individual acts in the public sphere according to a different standard, they often find themselves laughed at, ridiculed, or

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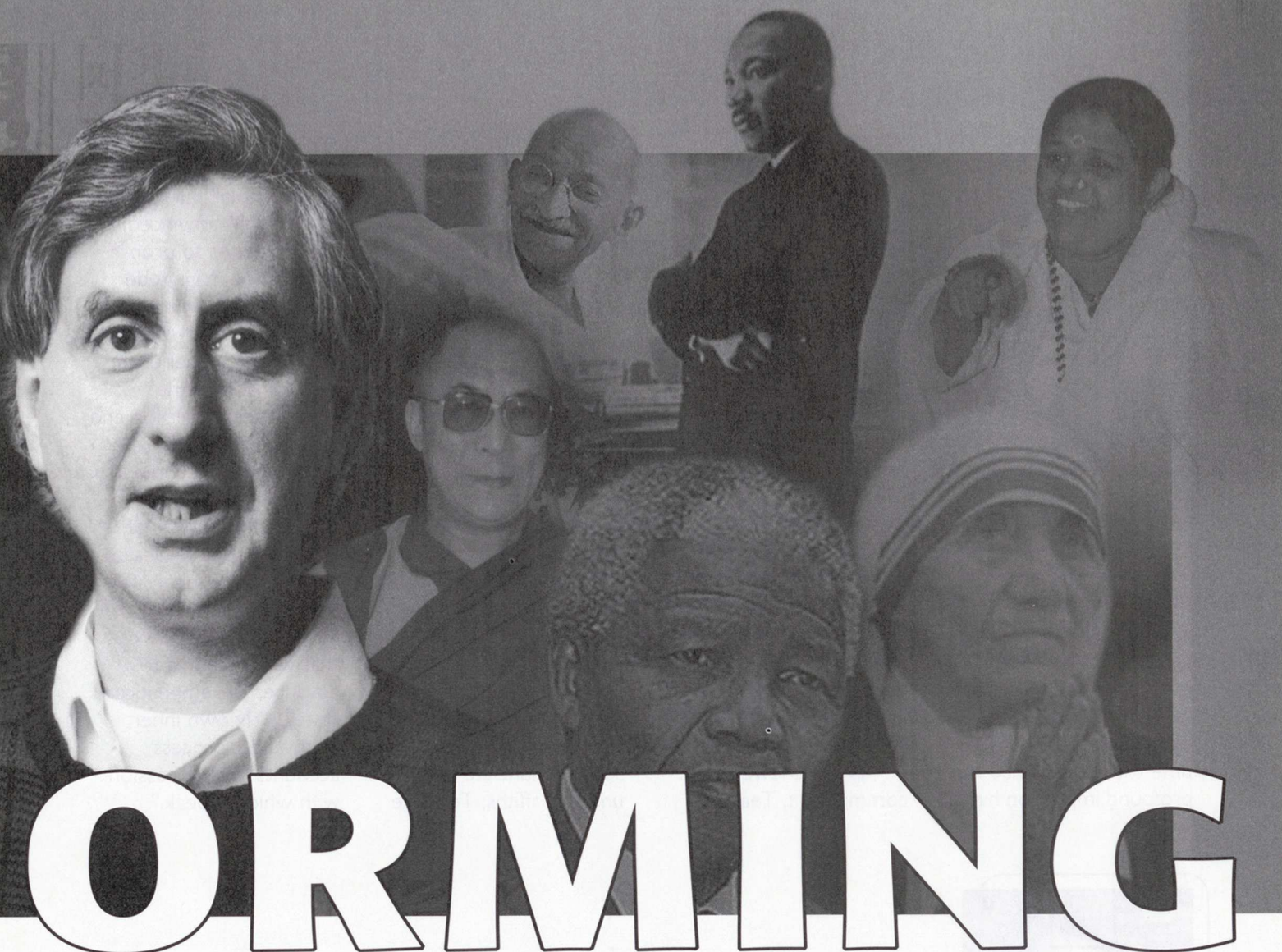
the seeds

an interview with
Brother Wayne Teasdale
by Amy Edelstein

"We have a universal responsibility to speak out when we see injustice, oppression, and the abuse of human rights, the rights of the earth, and other species," writes an impassioned Brother Wayne Teasdale in his book *The Mystic Heart*. "Personally, I find the silence [on the crisis in Tibet] disturbing and morally indefensible; it indicates a lack of

courage and moral strength that hides behind considerations of prudence and discretion."

There are few souls as gentle as Brother Wayne Teasdale, 'lay monk' and pioneer of the interfaith movement, who also speak as stridently and compellingly as he does about the necessity for all spiritual leaders to actively respond to the crises



FORMING of corruption

facing the world. But for Teasdale, the result of any true and deep mystical experience must be an active and engaged response to the cries of a suffering humanity and an embattled earth. Brother Wayne Teasdale has devoted much of his life to facilitating understanding, respect, and practical cooperation among spiritual leaders. Serving on the board for

the Parliament of the World's Religions, he was instrumental in bringing almost eight thousand people of different faiths together for the 1993 Chicago Parliament, an event that led, among other things, to the pivotal signing by two hundred spiritual leaders of *Guidelines for a Global Ethic*. He also organized the Synthesis Dialogues, an interreli-

gious, interdisciplinary forum moderated by H.H. the Dalai Lama, designed to bring key figures from diverse professions together to explore the value and implications of mystical experience. And, together with His Holiness, he helped to draft the influential *Universal Declaration on Nonviolence*.

Teasdale's spiritual calling began almost fifty

years ago when, as a child, one warm summer's eve, awed by the infinite splash of stars in the dark sky, he decided that when he grew up, he was going to be a priest. Raised in a Catholic family in Connecticut, his early years were full of faith and optimism, but the tumultuous times of the sixties and the cruelty and inhumanity of the Vietnam

War sorely challenged his nascent conviction in the immediacy and goodness of God and plunged him into what he describes as a three-year-long "dark night of the soul."

In the midst of this period, questions unresolved, Teasdale enrolled in a small Catholic college in New Hampshire run by monks of the Benedictine Order. The monks were associated with St. Joseph's Abbey, a monastery in Spencer, Massachusetts, whose abbot, the highly revered Father Thomas Keating, ran contemplative retreats for laypeople that Teasdale attended. Teasdale's time with Keating had a profound impact on him,

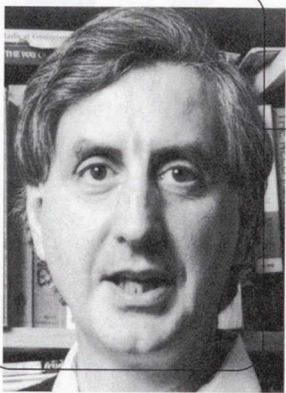
reopening him to the mystical dimension of life. During those days, he writes, "The divine completely took me over . . . I was often taken out of myself, my consciousness enlarged, and perceptions of everything altered from within. Space and time were suspended—I couldn't think, analyze, remember, imagine, or speak. I hovered between fear and awe. . . . Saturated by [the Divine's] incomparable love and mystery, all I could do was to assent to its presence within, around, and through me. . . . Fired with urgency and expectation, I gave myself to the divine."

With renewed commitment, Teasdale

dedicated himself to his spiritual practice. In 1973, he struck up a correspondence with Father Bede Griffiths, a spirited and innovative Benedictine monk who drew on Eastern meditative traditions to enrich his Christian path of charity and selfless service, and eventually Teasdale spent two years at Griffiths's Benedictine ashram in southern India. Life in India opened his eyes both to the depth of Eastern mysticism and to the very pressing reality of overpopulation, deforestation, environmental degradation, and resource depletion. Taking a renewed set of renunciate vows under Griffiths, Teasdale

dedicated himself to a life of simplicity, service, and 'interspiritual' pursuit.

Deeply convinced that solutions to problems of the magnitude facing our world today lie in genuine mystical experience, experience that transcends the boundaries of religion and culture, Brother Wayne Teasdale has become a tireless spokesperson for the practical power of profound spiritual realization. "It is the inner life that is to spark the change in consciousness that will permit us to advance," he emphatically states. "My own inner, or mystical, process . . . accounts for the passion with which I speak."



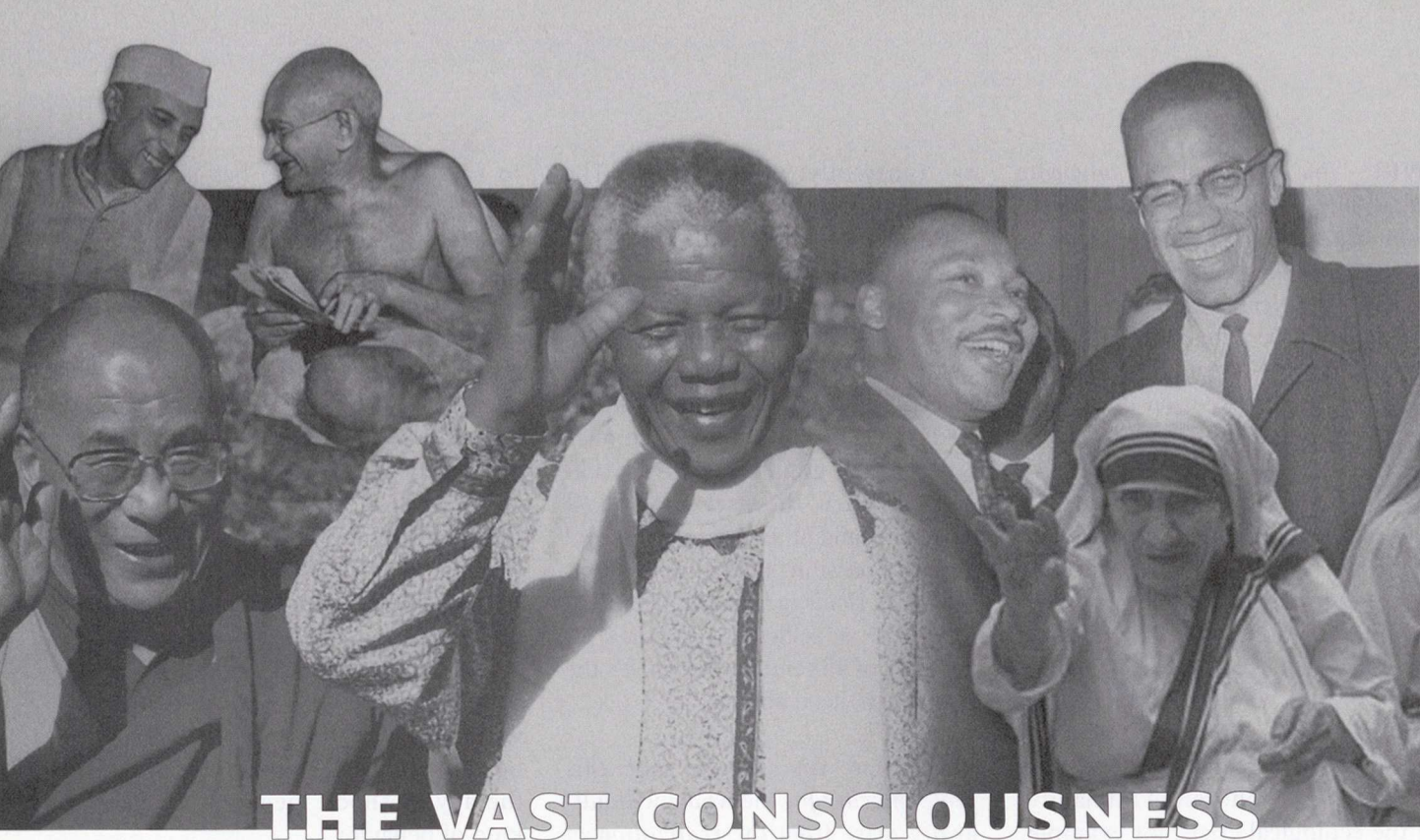
Brother Wayne Teasdale

wie: Brother Wayne, you feel very strongly about the tragedy of the Chinese invasion of

Tibet and are one of the leading Christian spokespeople for the cause of the Tibetan people as well as a personal friend of the Dalai Lama. You've gone so far as to say that the response of the world's spiritual leaders to the situation in Tibet is the critical test of our times, "a test that will measure the mettle of our planet's spiritual

leadership." This is quite a bold statement. Why do you feel this way?

WAYNE TEASDALE: Let me clarify. It is equally true that the tragedy in Rwanda is a test, because it's a challenge to be able to have that kind of concern for people in Africa, or in Kosovo, or in the Middle East, and so forth. But there's something unique about the Tibetan situation. There's such a parallel between what is happening to the Tibetans and what happened to the Jews during the Holocaust.



THE VAST CONSCIOUSNESS

that is the Divine is not a cold analytical intelligence —
it emanates from its very core a concern.

And now there's an opportunity for the world and the spiritual leaders to respond. That's number one. Number two: The Tibetan struggle is a nonviolent struggle. This is not true of these other struggles. The one between the Palestinians and the Israelis is fraught with hatred, violence, vengeance, and incredible irrationality, and also, both sides have many advocates in other nations. But the Tibetans don't. Their nonviolent struggle is a continuation of the ideal that Gandhi put forth, which is an incredibly important resource. I really think that what Gandhi did is a form of revelation. I believe that through his life and teachings, the Divine gave us some vital resources and skills that are going to serve our planet for millennia. The example of the Dalai Lama and the struggle of the Tibetans continue and deepen

and reinforce what was gained through Gandhi, and therefore, the Tibetan cause *must* be supported. And then thirdly, this is an incredibly precious culture. It's reached a very high point and we mustn't lose it.

WIE: *How do you feel that taking a stand with the situation in Tibet will galvanize the world's conscience?*

WT: Well, let us say, for instance, that the Vatican gets off the fence and takes a leadership role. It will focus the world's attention, and slowly governments will begin to realize how serious this is in terms of the moral development of the planet. We can't have business as usual; we have to solve this. The religions coming together would be a powerful step forward in bringing this tragedy to an end. I believe, in

the fullest sense, what I said before about this being a test. I don't mean that it's just a challenge. I mean it is a test.

WIE: *You've said that if we fail, if we don't respond, then it's a sign of a real lack of evolution on a moral and spiritual level.*

WT: Yes. *Individuals* may be capable of evolution but maybe not the whole of humanity, as represented by institutions like the Catholic Church. They just don't seem to have that moral level of awareness. Still, there are some voices in the Vatican that are looking for a new vision, and I think that the Church could be extremely effective and influential if it put its genius of organization to the service of the interfaith movement for justice, ecology, and peace.

WIE: *You passionately advocate the coming together of individuals from different spiritual traditions as an essential step toward solving the pressing problems of our times. Why do you believe that interfaith dialogue can bring about global change, and how do you envision it working on a spiritual and practical level?*

WT: So many of the wars in history, thousands and thousands of them for the past five, six, seven thousand years, have been related to differences in Truth claims. If we can evolve beyond that problem, then I think there's some chance that we could retire the whole institution of war and begin to focus on the peaceful evolution of humanity. If the ecological crisis, for example, is to be solved and if we are to promote genuine justice and thus bring real peace to the planet—and with it the possibility of improving lives on every level, not just economically, socially, and politically, but spiritually, psychologically, and intellectually—then, just on a practical level, we need to have all of the religions working together.

I feel that slowly the interfaith movement is replacing the old habits of mutual isolation, hostility, competition, conflict, and ignorance of one another's traditions with habits of mutual trust, mutual respect, and friendship.

WIE: *In your book, The Mystic Heart, you write about how deep mystical experience will engender the depth of care and perspective that will enable us to truly respond to the crisis facing the world, to the needs of the whole. Can you speak about the relationship between mystical experience and the arising of compassion?*

WT: Well, in my experience in the mystical life, I find myself becoming more and more aware of the Source

as “inherently warmhearted.” The vast consciousness that is the Divine is not a cold analytical intelligence—it emanates from its very core a concern. Heidegger said that the essence of being is concern, and this is what many of the traditions have tried to communicate, even the Buddhist tradition. The Buddha said that once a person lets go of the focus on self-interest, then they see that all is emptiness and all is compassion. And that compassion, that ultimate concern that Heidegger is talking about, that *agapic* or selfless love, is the connectivity of all sentient beings. It's the glue that holds it all together.

WIE: *Are you saying that this profound care for the whole will naturally arise from the realization of the Source, or from what Buddhists call “emptiness”?*

WT: Yes, absolutely.

WIE: *The teachings of Jesus present an interesting challenge to the interfaith movement. While Jesus preached compassion and tolerance, he himself was first and foremost concerned with defending the truth. He raged at the Jewish priests who were destroying true spirituality through their corruption, and rather than sitting down with them in dialogue, he stormed into their temples and overturned the tables as a statement of his uncompromising stand. In the spiritual endeavor, if the goal is first and foremost ecumenical tolerance, then it's likely that such a broad net will be cast that important distinctions will not be made and the result will be compromise on the most crucial matters. How do you reconcile the movement to accommodate all religions with the imperative to stand for what is true?*

WT: That's a very tricky question. Our work in interfaith doesn't require us to submerge our differences or

to sacrifice what one has seen or experienced of ultimate truth or ultimate reality, but it does require us not to be quite so overbearing. It's not a competition. It's a question of sharing what we know and what is our position, our faith, our experience—just not in a militant way where we lose compassion and perspective.

Why was Jesus so angry with the money changers in the temple? Because they were misguiding the people. The temple was supposed to be a forum for relating to God, and it had become a very worldly place of commerce. They had distorted what that was all about; that's why he got so angry. I think it was like a therapy to shock them out of that kind of behavior.

WIE: *With the crisis facing the world, it seems like we have to do a lot of shocking at this point.*

WT: Right. Exactly. We need to do it. But I don't think we can shock George W. Bush out of unrealized. He seems to be fixated on it!

WIE: *At previous times in history, revolutionary thinkers believed that changing our social or political structures would bring about the changes we so desperately need to make in the world, but nowadays many visionary futurists are convinced that in order to change the world, we must first change the human heart. At an event connected with the recent State of the World Forum, you exclaimed, “What we need is a spiritual revolution!” What do you mean by that, and what do you believe will bring that about?*

WT: Let's put it this way: Christ said two thousand years ago that before kingdoms change, the hearts of people must change. The revolutionaries have not seen that; they've focused on the external. And we



I THINK THAT ONLY SPIRITUALITY

will bring about that self-knowledge that will allow us to purify ourselves and to shift to a focus that protects the interconnectedness of all life and all being.

have seen the disasters that have occurred, for instance, with Marxism. The problem with Marxism is that it never looked at the *agents* of change. It only looked at the *process* of change. It never looked at the transformation that needs to occur in the individuals who foment change. They defined the human in the abstract, and they ended up killing the human in the concrete.

I really feel that what we need is awareness, and you can't get that simply through a political process or an ideology or a slogan. It's something that has to engage what is deepest in the human. We have to have a holistic, integral kind of development that isn't simply intellectual or moral but that is also deeply mystical. A kind of development that engages one with the

Source itself, the Source that is that pure love, pure concern, pure sensitivity, and which then allows *that* to radiate out into our actions and our attitudes and our perceptions and how we relate to one another in the world. I think that only spirituality will bring about that self-knowledge that will allow us to purify ourselves and to shift to a focus that protects the interconnectedness of all life and all being.

So I like to put it this way: The real revolution, the *definitive* revolution, is the spiritual awakening of humanity. The real revolution is one that goes to the radical core of human limitation and raises that up to transformation, to development. Unless that happens, the seeds of corruption are still going to be there—and the seeds of inequity, of

exploitation, and of a selfish, greedy existence that neglects the welfare of the masses and of the planet.

WIE: *What do you see as the most pressing crisis facing our world community at this juncture in history?*

WT: The ecological crisis, and the kind of change required in humanity that would allow us to resolve it. It's a crisis of the environment, but it's also a crisis in the style of life that people are living. On the one hand, there's an agreement that we have to do something about the environment, and on the other, there isn't really the will to change our style of life to allow a resolution. I see that as the most pressing threat and the highest moral priority because, as Thomas Berry says, if the life raft,

which is the earth, goes, what use will our economic system be? Or even our spirituality?

Take, for example, the heavy use of fossil fuels, the rise in the rate of global warming, the depletion of the ozone layer, the deforestation in the Amazon. Just the cutting down of trees in the Himalayas is causing massive flooding in Bangladesh every year. All of these factors add up. We need to really simplify how we are living and using resources. We don't know enough about the resilience of the planet in restoring itself and its ecosystems, but we are aware of how much damage we're doing. If you take the American dream and you apply it to six billion people, there's no possibility of our species surviving. We will destroy what we have left around the planet.

WIE: *Given the severity of the crisis, do you feel optimistic about the future?*

WT: Well, clearly the situation requires a fundamental change in how we live, and right now, given our spiritual and psychological understanding and how we view our individual responsibility for this situation, it's hard for me to be optimistic that people will make the sacrifices necessary for us and for other species, other sentient beings, to survive. But I think optimism can be found in our spiritual technologies. I would suggest that we utilize those technologies, those forms of spirituality that transform attitudes, that open minds and hearts, and that change consciousness. One of the great practical values of a spiritual transformation is that it *does* possess the resources to change humanity, and to change humanity in time.

WIE: *You obviously feel very passionately about bringing about a real change in the world in our lifetime.*

What makes you care so much? Can you describe the turning point in your own life when you realized this passionate concern for the state of the world?

WT: I think the concern has come out of my spiritual life and out of my years at attempting prayer. You know, it's very strange. I used to wonder whether I had any compassion. I wasn't sure I understood it. One of the turning points for me was when I was walking around a lake in St. Paul, Minnesota, and I saw a mother and her two sons, maybe seven, eight years old. The two kids were throwing stones at these swans, and one of them hit one of the swans. And I instantly felt an incredible, overwhelming grief at the suffering of that poor swan and also anger at what the children had done. I realized in that moment that, yes, I guess I do have compassion. ■

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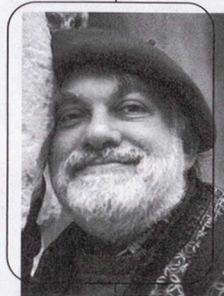
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compassion in action

WHAT DOES COMPASSION in action look like?

What is the enlightened response to overwhelming crisis and terrible suffering? Two answers to that question are Roshi Bernie Glassman and Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati. Interestingly enough, they were both born to Jewish parents, in the same part of Brooklyn, less than one year apart. Now, over sixty years later, he, as a Zen Buddhist master, and she, as an incarnation of Kali, a manifestation of Hinduism's Divine Mother, have become deeply compelling examples of what it means to care and to respond with one's whole being to the injustice, misfortune, and agonizing pain in this world that most of us don't have the heart to even begin to face.



**ROSHI
BERNIE GLASSMAN**

interview on page 68



**MA JAYA
SATI BHAGAVATI**

interview on page 76

ROSHI GLASSMAN

became an avid student of Zen while working for McDonnell-Douglas as an aerospace engineer in the mid-sixties. Unusually passionate in his interest, in 1970 he was ordained as a Soto Zen priest and soon was the chief administrator at the Zen Center of Los Angeles where, at the request of his teacher Taizen Maezumi Roshi, he began to teach. In 1979 he started his own Zen community in

New York, where he became a controversial figure in Zen circles because of a new emphasis in his teaching on work and business as Zen practice rather than the traditional zazen [sitting meditation]. "You can be a zazen freak," he says, "without putting emphasis on really opening up, and that brings a bigger problem because you get attached to the form. And the form becomes a substitute for life."

As a Zen business venture to support his fledgling community, Glassman started the Greyston Bakery, which has, over time, become a multimillion-dollar success story. His interest in Zen as business evolved into a passionate interest in Zen as social action. And although all this initially alienated many of his original students, over the years it has attracted others in different ways to a life of devoted

service, or compassion in action. That compassion in action has become manifest as what is presently called the "Greyston Mandala," a network of community development organizations informed by Buddhist values. The Greyston Mandala provides a variety of services in southwest Yonkers, New York: The Greyston Bakery currently hires and trains local residents from its low-income community;

the Greyston Family Inn manages renovated apartment buildings for formerly homeless and poor working families; and Greyston Health Services is a housing facility for individuals living with HIV/AIDS, which also provides medical services and rehabilitative counseling.

Motivated by his experience working with homeless families, Glassman wanted to feel firsthand what homelessness was like, so in the early nineties, he began what has become an annual tradition for him—"street retreats"—where retreatants live on the streets for five days and beg for food in order to know what it's like to be completely at the mercy of others' generosity. Roshi Glassman also leads retreats at Auschwitz where, every November, 150 people "bear witness" to the unthinkable horror of the Holocaust.

In the winter of 1994, Glassman celebrated his fifty-fifth birthday by spending five days sitting in the snow on the steps of the US Capitol building, asking himself one question: "What can I do about homelessness, AIDS, and violence in this country?" The result was the creation of an order of Zen practitioners dedicated to the cause of peace called the "Zen Peacemaker Order." This idea has broadened to become an international, interfaith network that stresses the integration of spiritual practice and social action.

"In a Zen monastery, the environment is carefully, meticulously controlled to bring the monks to a state of unknowing and experiencing the oneness of life," he writes in his book *Bearing Witness*. "But I chose not to live in a monastery. I got involved in business, social action, and peacemaking. So for me the question became, What are the forms in business, social action, and peacemaking that can help us see the oneness of society, the interdependence of life? My entire teaching life has been dedicated to creating new environments and structures, new businesses and social forms that will move each of us toward the realization and actualization of the enlightened way, which is nothing other than peacemaking."

The outrageous **MA JAYA SATI BHAGAVATI**

grew up as Joyce Green in a working-class Jewish family and was orphaned when her mother died in a public hospital when she was thirteen. Educated on the streets of Brighton Beach, she married a "big beautiful Italian stud" named Sal DiFiore at fifteen and soon gave birth to two daughters. After ten years of suburban life, her now-legendary story of miraculous transformation began when she enrolled in a yoga class at a Jack LaLanne health spa, pursuing the promise of weight loss through yogic

breathing exercises. After being told that five minutes of breathing a day would produce a weight loss of one pound a week, she concluded that hours of practice would have to have dramatic results. She was right. To her surprise, she began to enter ecstatic states and to have powerful visions of Jesus Christ and visitations by famous gurus, including Swami Nityananda and Neem Karoli Baba. As her life as a wife and mother fell away, she was given guidance and support by the late spiritual teacher Hilda Charlton and soon became a guru in her own right.

In 1976 she moved with her students to central Florida and formally established the Neem Karoli Baba Kashi Ashram, an interfaith spiritual community. Ma Jaya has become a champion of people who have AIDS all over the world, and her ashram is the home for her many diverse projects. These include the River Fund, which offers physical, emotional, spiritual, and educational support to those with AIDS and other diseases; the River House, a hospice where adults are able to die with dignity; Mary's House, which takes in and cares for unwanted babies with AIDS; and the Ma Jaya River School, which provides nonsectarian education through high school for "her kids"—formerly unwanted and abused children who go on to some of the best

colleges in the country. Her global outreach projects support townships and orphanages in South Africa, Uganda, and Mexico. In California, her students run a service called "Under the Bridges and on the Streets," in which they visit hospitals and hospices and work in the streets, feeding and comforting destitute people. In New York, the River Fund attends to the mentally and physically challenged and those with AIDS, and provides clothing and two thousand meals per month to the hungry and homeless. Ma Jaya is a trustee of the Parliament of the World's Religions, and in 1998, with the support of the Dalai Lama, she founded World Tibet Day, an annual event observed in fifty-one cities in ten countries to raise awareness of the plight of the Tibetan people. She is a human tornado of compassion in action; her path is to attain spiritual fulfillment through selfless service in the world.

"I sit always at the feet of my guru, at the feet of Lord Siva," she says. "I ask them to give me the strength not to crumble, not to let the world consume me. And then every night, of course, I go into meditation. Without this great power of relieving myself of all that I pick up during the day, I would not be able to be."*

*From "The Selfless Life of Serving Siva in All," by Lavina Melwani, *Hinduism Today*, February 1999.



is that me

an interview with

roshi bernie glassman by andrew cohen

introduction on page 66

andrew cohen: This is a delicate moment in the history of planet earth. Overpopulation, environmental pollution, and modern technology's weapons of mass destruction

threaten the survival not only of our own species but of all life on the planet. Duane Elgin, social scientist and evolutionary thinker, in this issue of WIE, states, "What

we're really facing is the convergence of a number of powerful trends—climate change, species extinction, the spread of poverty, and the growth of population. All these factors could develop individually, but what's unique about our time is that the world has become a closed system. There's no place to escape, and all of these powerful forces are beginning



bleeding?

Roshi Glassman at Auschwitz

Photographs by Peter Cunningham



Auschwitz retreat

to impinge upon one another and reinforce one another. Our situation is something like a set of rubber bands that you stretch out and out and out until they reach the limit of their elasticity, which is the breaking point of the system. Something powerful is going to begin happening at that point, and while right now we can turn away from this, in another twenty years a systems crisis will be an unyielding reality that we will have to deal with."

And cultural historian Thomas Berry, in his new book *The Great Work*, states, "We find ourselves ethically destitute just when, for the first time, we are faced with ultimacy, the irreversible closing down of the Earth's functioning and its major life systems. Our ethical traditions know how to deal with suicide, homicide, and even genocide; but these traditions collapse entirely when confronted with biocide, the extinction of the vulnerable life systems of the Earth,

and geocide, the devastation of the Earth itself."

Roshi Glassman, you're a Zen activist, a passionate Zen activist. For many years you have been responding in very practical ways to the immense suffering that you have seen in the world around you. Ethically and spiritually, how should we deal with this crisis? What, in your view, is the appropriate attitude for us to cultivate in order to come to terms with the ultimacy that Elgin and Berry so graphically describe?

BERNIE GLASSMAN: You know, Andrew, I'm basically a simple person. The way I look at the issues you're talking about, which are issues of the globe, is to bring it back to our own bodies. My understanding is that we are all interconnected. But it's not so easy to think that way—so I like to talk about it in terms of our own bodies. Because in a way, all those

issues that you talked about for the planet are constantly happening within us, within our own bodies. I have diabetes and prostate conditions, and if I look at it, it could be extremely overwhelming. I mean, I could say, "Well, I can't do anything about it." And yet, if we don't do anything about it, we die. So the point is, we *do* do something about it! We do something to the extent that we can see clearly. If my hand is bleeding, I can't sit around watching it just bleed and say, "I don't know what the hell to do." If your hand is bleeding, *you're going to do something about it*. If you don't have a bandage, maybe you'll have to just suck the blood with your own mouth or tear off a piece of your shirt to use as a bandage. You're going to do *something*. You clearly don't just sit there and think, "Is that me bleeding?" You *do* something.

So for example, if I see myself on the streets as a homeless person or as somebody who's defoliating the forest, I'll say, "That's me doing this, so what can I do about it?" I'll do what I can. That's my only answer. I don't have any solutions, because *I don't know*. That's the first tenet of our Peacemaker Community. We may have lots of tools—knowledge, languages, equipment, whatever—but we approach every situation from the standpoint of not knowing. That means being completely open, *listening*. And then doing whatever we can do. Not saying, "I don't have enough money. I don't have enough knowledge. I don't have enough enlightenment. I don't have . . ." But saying, "Here's what I do have"—and then doing the best actions that we can. That's what drives me to keep working in all these arenas. When we step back, we can just say, "It's overwhelming, you know—it's all going to fall apart." Yes, it is all going to fall apart. But, in the meantime, this is what I'm going to do.

AC: So you would say, "Abide in a state of not knowing and do the best one can"?

BG: Yes, approach the situation in a state of not knowing. Then *bear witness* to it. Try to *become* it, and out of that, I believe, automatically will come the right actions. Those actions are loving actions just like the action of trying to stop our own hand from bleeding. That is, they will arise automatically.

AC: You're saying that if we bear witness, if we face the suffering, if we truly face it, then there's going to be a natural response?

BG: I'm sure of it. I've seen it happen over and over again. But if we're trying to *solve* issues, then we'll be trapped.

AC: Because we don't have the capacity to do that?

BG: Yes. Our role is just one piece of the whole picture, and that's all we can do. There's a story of a *bodhisattva* who finds an empty well and sees a mountain covered with snow and climbs up the mountain with a spoon and gets a spoonful of snow, comes down, puts it in the well, and then goes back up the mountain. He keeps doing that, not with any sense that he's actually going to fill the well with water, but simply because that's what's needed. I preach activism. What I try to encourage folks to do is to do whatever they can with whatever they have at the moment.

AC: And how should we respond to the "ultimacy" that Berry mentioned, which is so overwhelming because it potentially implies the end of life as we know it?

BG: In some sense, it doesn't matter how big or how small it is. Those who can work on a larger scale are going to do so, and those who can work on a smaller scale will do what they can. I define enlightenment as the depth to which one sees the oneness of life, the interconnectedness of life. And the degree of your enlightenment can be measured by your actions.

AC: How can we remain attentive to the severity of the crisis without being so overwhelmed by it that we become completely paralyzed by fear and despair?

BG: I think we become overwhelmed only because of our expectations—our expectations that we are going to be able to resolve the problem.

AC: I see, so that's the key.

BG: Step by step, see it in its broadest perspective, and then do the things that you can do without any expectations.

AC: Without any expectations that you're going to solve the problem completely?

BG: Yes, or even *help* it. You're going to do what you can do, and something's going to happen—who the hell knows what.

AC: In your book *Bearing Witness*, you say that "in Zen practice we . . . do our sitting meditation not for ourselves but for the world." Under the present circumstances, do you think it is still possible to do spiritual practice outside the context of this extraordinary crisis? In other words, is it still possible for an individual to pursue personal enlightenment or spiritual transformation only for his or her own sake? Or does it now no longer make sense for a sincere individual to pursue spiritual awakening without that search being the expression of a deeply committed and engaged relationship with life as a whole?

BG: We have many metaphors that show enlightenment as something that is only for one's self. I think those are old metaphors. I believe that in this day and age, we have evolved to the point where the oneness of life is part of our consciousness, independent of whether one is pursuing individual transformation. And if I use the monk as a metaphor—these days I think that metaphor is about the pursuit of enlightenment for the transformation of the world, not merely of the individual self. Whether we realize it or not, I believe that we somehow have in our consciousness the knowledge that we are not only an individual, but we truly

are the world—one piece of the whole. And practices for enlightenment, I feel, have to lead to action in the world.

AC: So you're saying it wouldn't be possible to pursue enlightenment only for oneself in this current context?

BG: I don't think so. And I think that those who are still caught in thinking that one can stay out of the world, so to speak, just wind up frustrated. I agree with what you mentioned before—that the world is a closed system and that everything that happens affects the whole world. Yes, all of our actions are affecting all of the world, and we cannot do any actions, including practices for transformation or enlightenment, that are not affecting the whole world.

AC: In *Bearing Witness*, you describe the enlightened perspective as a state of unknowing. You say, "When we live in a state of knowing, rather than unknowing, we're living in a fixed state of being where . . . our notions of what should happen block us from seeing what actually does happen. We get upset because our expectations aren't met. . . . The truth is . . . no matter what we think, we are never in control and things will happen as they happen. But in a state of unknowing we actually live without attachment to preconceived ideas. There is no expectation of gain, no expectation of loss." So what I wanted to ask you is, What is the relationship between that state of unknowing, where there is no expectation of gain or loss, and the awakening of spiritual conscience, that conscience that compels us to transcend ego and selfishness and begin to live not only for our own sake

but for the sake of others? How can we have no expectation that things will change for the better and yet still feel compelled to act, to respond to the ignorance and suffering that we see in the world around us?

BG: I think if we truly are in that state, that state of not knowing, we will do the best thing possible. And our actions will be "healing"—but I'm not sure if that's the best word to describe it.

AC: But could you say a little bit more about the relationship between, on the one hand, not knowing and having no expectations and, on the other, the awakening of compassion, that passion to respond to the ignorance and suffering that we see in the world around us?

BG: I think that the desire to respond comes more passionately from the state of not knowing than from the state of knowing.

AC: Because?

BG: Because it's more immediate. In the state of not knowing, the suffering that's appearing becomes a part of me, and therefore I need to take care of that suffering. Because I'm suffering; it's not separate from me. But if I have some preconceived idea of how I'm supposed to respond, then I've created a separation from the experience itself, from the thing itself. And I get caught up then with the "dos" and "don'ts" of my understanding rather than with feeling that experience and then reacting directly to it.

*I define enlightenment
as the depth to which one
sees the oneness of life,
the interconnectedness of
life. And the degree of
your enlightenment can be
measured by your actions.*



Street retreat, Thompson Square Park, NYC

AC: You've been saying, "The right response is going to happen"—and I believe you and I agree with you. But I still want to ask you, in terms of the *dharma*, what exactly is the relationship between that state of unknowing and the awakening of conscience that transcends ego?

BG: I think they're the same state. But it's not a passive state; it's very active. And that active state is bearing witness. That's, for me, the way to approach it. Instead of waiting for something else to happen, say, "Right now, I, to the best of my ability, will approach this situation from the state of not knowing." I think that gives you the best shot at doing something. It gives people permission to do something from their state of enlightenment. And it

means bear witness to the suffering; don't run away from it. Bearing witness is really important. To bear witness is to sit with it—and by "sitting," I don't necessarily mean physically sitting—but to sit with it, and try to simultaneously keep coming from that place of not knowing. Stay with it and bear witness to it—then you can *do* something.

Now, each one of us has got whatever attachments we have, and that's why I say that *the degree of our enlightenment is the degree of passion that we will have for the whole world*. That passion will arise. Stay with it. Bear witness to what's coming up. Out of that, action *has* to happen.

AC: You're a Zen master and a teacher of meditation. In Buddhist meditation, the goal is to realize and experience

emptiness of self. What is the relationship between the realization of emptiness and the awakening of compassion?

BG: I look at compassion as the functioning of that empty state. So again, I use "not knowing" similarly to the term *sunyata*, or emptiness. And in Zen, we sort of force people toward what we call the root of emptiness, the *essence* of it, which really is the state of not knowing. Because once I even use the word *sunyata*, or emptiness, that's a—

AC: Concept.

BG: Something in the mind, yes. But the *functioning* of that state is what I would call compassion.

AC: Because?



Roshi Glassman in Paris

BG: Because my understanding of it is that when one comes from that place of emptiness, then one is full of this passion for life and for the end of suffering. And the actions that arise out of that emptiness are going to be actions that are trying to reduce suffering.

AC: Would you say the reason is that in that emptiness there is freedom from ego or self-concern, and when we're in a state of egolessness, or freedom from self-concern, there will be a spontaneous arising of compassion?

BG: Yes. But you know, "ego" is a tricky term. I tend to use the word "ego" to refer to the set of conditioning arising from our concept of who we are. I'll put it

this way: I haven't met anyone—whatever degree of enlightenment they say they have or the world says they have—who doesn't have some set of conditioning or some ego structure.

AC: But what if we refer to ego strictly as being pride or arrogant self-importance or the deeply conditioned need to see one's self as standing apart from or separate from the whole?

BG: With that definition, I can agree with you. Ego will fall away then.

AC: So would you say then that emptiness would be synonymous with, or not separate from, that falling away and that, as a result of that falling away, compassion would spontaneously arise?

BG: Yes.

AC: And that that would be part of the miracle of who we really are and of awakening itself?

BG: Yes. And I personally am moved toward the word "love" rather than "compassion." Because compassion, for me, has a little bit of a judgmental sense. For each of us, what we see as compassion and noncompassion is different. I see the state of love arising out of that egoless state, and that's generally looked on as compassion—but not always.

AC: So would you say that love, in the way you're using it, is not personal?

BG: Yes. In our three tenets of the Peacemaker Community, the first is

Whether we realize it or not, I believe that we somehow have in our consciousness the knowledge that we are not only an individual, but we truly are the world—one piece of the whole. And practices for enlightenment, I feel, have to lead to action in the world.

time, isn't there an overwhelming amount of suffering that urgently needs to be responded to in every moment?

BG: Exactly. Some people experience that first stage and get caught there. They think, "There's nothing to do."

AC: Yes. And may even use it as an excuse not to have to do anything. That's how many people actually squelch the expression of their own conscience, their own humanity. That's a pretty bad place to be.

BG: That's sort of where I started—trying to encourage people not to remain in that place. There's a state in Japanese Zen that's called the "Cave of Satan." It's that place where you just stay—because there's nothing to do. And you can get in that state and it can be an overwhelming experience. But the point is to kick the person out of that cave.

AC: It's a place of complacency and self-satisfaction.

BG: Yes. I had that experience once in 1969 in a sesshin, a meditation retreat. I was working with a teacher; Koryu Roshi was his name. He was one of Maezumi Roshi's teachers. I was working on my first koan with Koryu Roshi, and I got into a very, very deep state. I got into this place where I didn't want to leave, and Maezumi Roshi pushed me out of it.

AC: Was it a very blissful place?

BG: Very blissful.

AC: Was there anything specific that he said to you about why you had to get out?

not knowing, the second is bearing witness, and for the third I use the word "healing," which again, I don't like so much. That word could have been compassion; I think compassion is the more typical Buddhist term to use. These are just semantics in some sense, but my own inclination is to talk about the healing of one's self and the world as that third tenet that arises naturally out of the first two. That's really a state of love, and out of that love, action arises. And I guess the actions themselves, which are the function of that love, we could call compassion. I call it "healing." The love arises and compassionate actions happen. But it doesn't necessarily mean that we're going to fix the situation. Because my feeling is that the world at every moment is the perfect world as it is.

It's not like something is broken that I'm going to put together. But I'm going to work toward making a more loving situation.

AC: That's a very delicate distinction you're making.

BG: It is.

AC: Because that is the challenge of enlightenment. On one hand, everything is already full and perfect and inherently free as it is, and yet at the same time—

BG: Yes, but if you're attached to that—then you may not act.

AC: But aren't both true? Isn't everything already full and complete and already free, and at the same

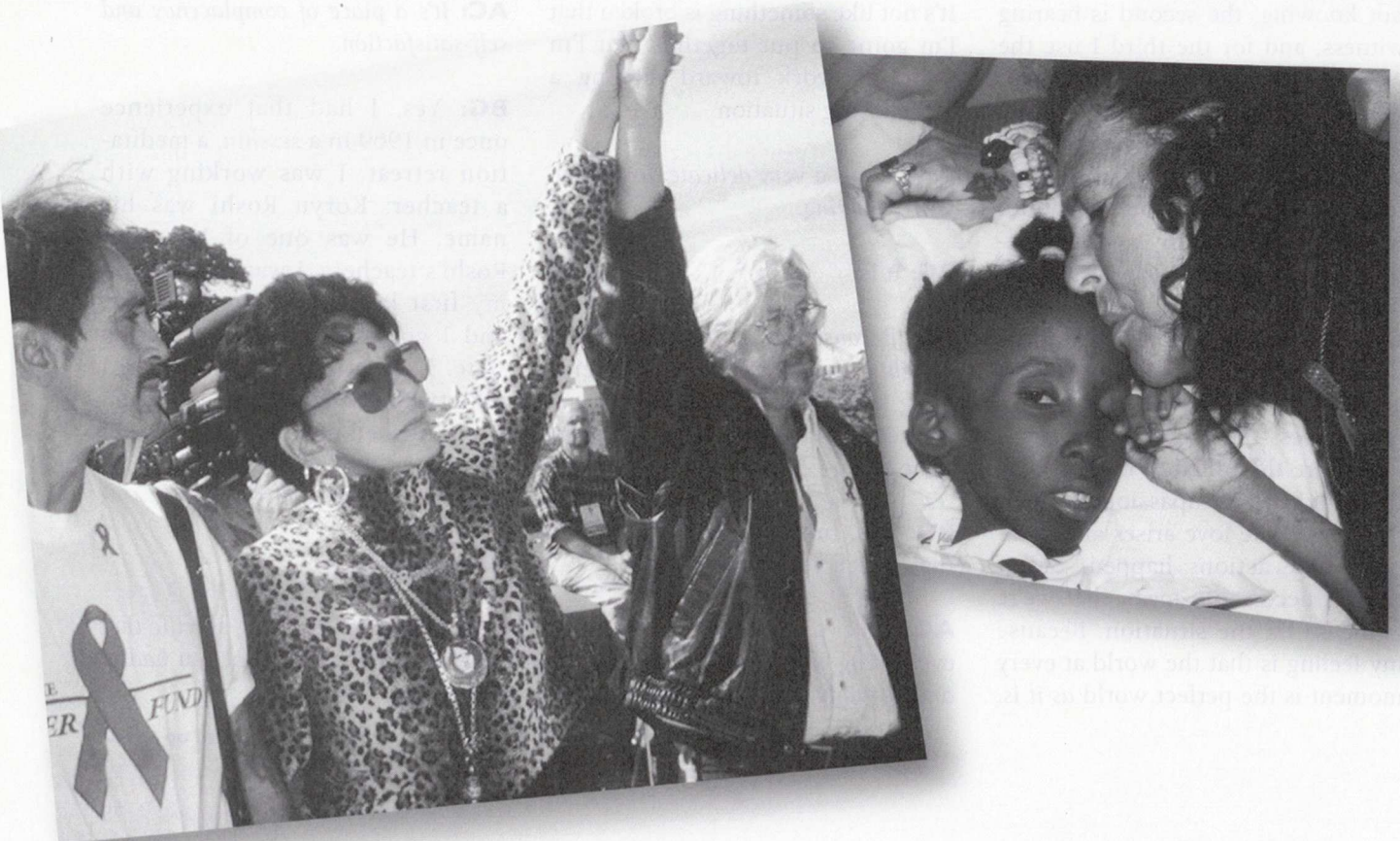
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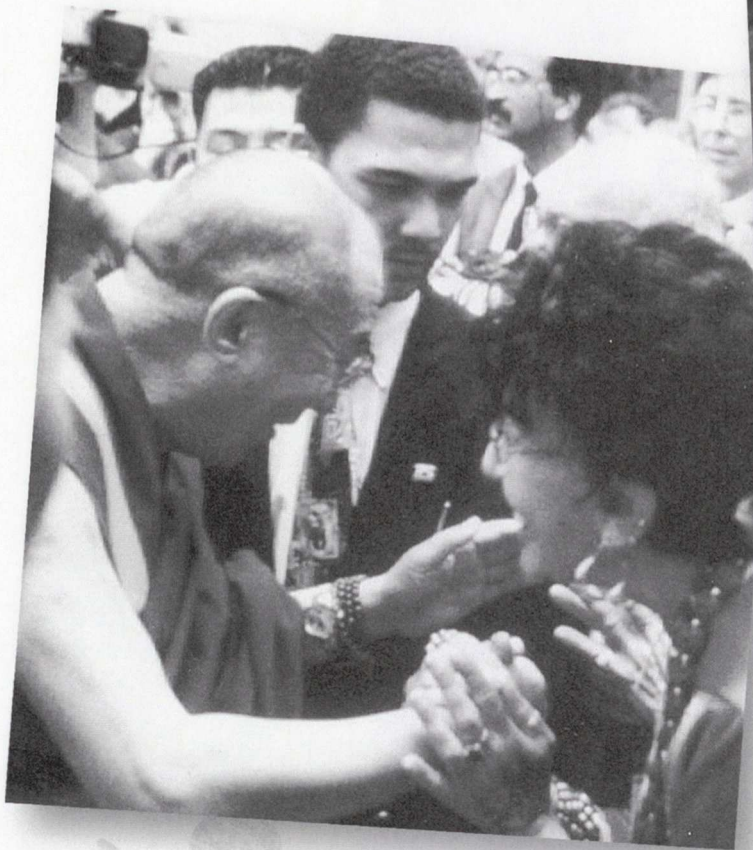
don't ask why— *Just Do Something!*

an interview with

Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati by Andrew Cohen

introduction on page 66





andrew cohen: *We're living in a unique time in the history of our planet, a unique time in the history of our species. The experts are telling us that, as a result of globalization,*

overpopulation, grinding poverty, destruction of the natural environment, pollution, not to mention the spread of weapons of mass destruction, if we don't turn things around very quickly, we are going to enter what evolutionary theorist Duane Elgin calls "an evolutionary dark age." Indeed, some are saying that we've already reached the point of no return. What I wanted to speak with you about was not so much the specific work you're doing—although I'm personally very inspired by your example—but rather, as a spiritual activist whose very life is a

clear expression of a passionate response to the overwhelming pain and suffering that occurs on a daily basis in this world, what do you advise is the most appropriate way to respond to this crisis that we're in the midst of?

MA JAYA: The kali yuga [dark age] is like a huge swarm of curses. And the world, Andrew, needs one word, and that word is awareness. If you live and act in a state of ignorance, then who will take care of the children's children? Where will they run? Where will their feet step? I cannot be separated from my work. I am my work and my work is me. I am privileged to have an orphanage in the thick of the jungle in Uganda. I have two hundred children there. If I did not have that



awareness and my *chelas* [disciples], who know that my whole path is a path of service, did not have that awareness, perhaps these children wouldn't eat. Certainly they would have suffered more, due to AIDS. So it's all connected, like a gigantic lotus, and the very core of the lotus is awareness. I go all over the world touching people with AIDS. It's about awareness.

You talk about the environment; you talk about the world. I'm sixty years old; I've been serving for thirty years. I have never, ever felt such pain as I do now about the environment. The rainforests are gone. I believe your magazine can reach the people who need the most awareness—and that's not the average guy, but the spiritual leader. You're reaching the seekers, and that's fine, too. But I want to talk to the leaders. Those are the ones who have to open their doors.

I was a delegate for the United

Nations, for spiritual leaders, at the Peace Summit last summer. And it shocked me. There was a seminar about poverty that I was asked to attend. It was about the hungry, about the needy. And a Hindu stood up and began to scream at a Catholic priest that the Christians stole their religion. This was in the papers—this is real. I stood there in shock, Andrew. And the priest turned around and said, "You had no religion to steal!" And I stood up and said, "Excuse me. Have any of you ever seen the light go out in a child who had nothing to eat and just gave in to death?" And that kind of stopped it. The need to be right—and they're not right, but they think they are—takes away the awareness on an earth that's going nowhere and going nowhere very, very quickly. I've seen too much, Andrew. I've seen too much, and the world has never been in as much chaos. If I can go to a

Start very small.

See how it feels to take care of one thing and let it nurture. Let it grow. Yes, you get overwhelmed. But *I have such passion about what could be done!*

And if we go down, we go down—
but we go down trying.



seminar on poverty at the U.N. and find two religions fighting, what's happening? We each owe this world of ours, this magnificent, beautiful world of ours. We must take care of her.

AC: *I know you're a trustee of the Parliament of the World's Religions.*

MJ: Yes, and if the spiritual leaders don't go there and don't touch these problems, we're going to lose everything. There's going to be nothing. Followers quit following, you know. People get disillusioned. But what if everybody took a small speck of this earth and made it their own, by taking care of *whatever* is on that speck, whatever is in front of them? What if other leaders said, "Well, let me take a town and support them. Let me take a block. Let me take a house. Let me take a person." You know, automatically, you start the fertilization of

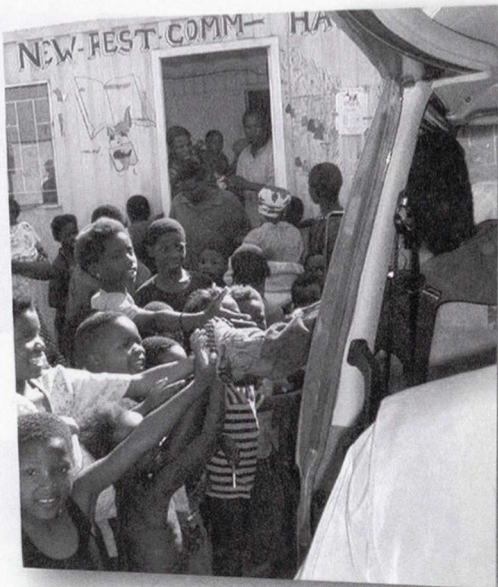
your own earth with love. So when you say you admire my work—I don't want to be admired. I want to be *copied*. In any way, however one has the ability.

I've been here at my ashram in Florida for twenty-five years. I have leaders coming. I have Muslims, I have Christians, I have Jews, I have Hindus. And I say to them, "What are you doing? How much can you pray? Take those hands that you hold together in a *pranam* [gesture of reverence] and *do* something. Caress a child." That's my message. *Do* something. Start with exactly what is in front of you. The ability to take care of another human being in a sincere way enables a very small part of the earth, that which is in front of you, to shift, to change. I believe that with all my heart, because if we can't take care of each other as human beings, how are we going to take care of the earth?

Andrew, we're sharing now. You want something, not just for your magazine—you want something for the world. I do too. I want something so badly it brings tears to my eyes. I can taste it. And in this moment, both of us are aware. What's going to happen? As soon as I'm finished speaking to you, I'm going to retake my vows to serve even more. Because what I speak, I must do. I walk the talk. And maybe, who knows? Maybe you're going to get interested in helping somebody with AIDS.

AC: *What would you say to the individual who says, "I can't bear to face it. What you're asking for is so psychologically and emotionally and spiritually overwhelming that I just can't bear to face it. Even when I do begin to face it, I can't stay with it because it's too much to bear."*

MJ: It's so overwhelming that one is



Awareness leads to detachment, which leads to the utmost compassion. And when I say "detachment," it doesn't mean not caring. In fact, on the contrary, it means caring in a bigger, more beautiful, more profound way.

like a deer in a headlight. You can barely look at it. So what I would say is start very small. Start very small. See how it feels to take care of one thing and let it nurture. Let it grow. Yes, you get overwhelmed. But I have such passion about what could be done! And if we go down, we go down—but we go down trying. We go down knowing we did not waste our love and our life. If you waste your love and your life, what's going to happen? Put it toward something. Is it a human being? Is it a forest in Brazil? My grandson studied in Argentina. He says, "Ma, you don't understand the destruction that's there." It's all over the world, and it's right in front of us. When I came back from Africa, I saw that half an hour away from where I am in Florida, there are people living in little tin huts. So, it's all over the world, but we need to stop a moment and look at what's right in front of us and take

care of it. And if we get overwhelmed, there is the solace that we've given something. We've given birth to a moment of love.

AC: *I spoke to Roshi Bernie Glassman about this the other day. He speaks a lot about "bearing witness," being able to just face directly into the crisis without any preconceived ideas about how one should respond to it. He says that out of bearing witness, just being willing to bear it directly, an appropriate or right response is going to occur. That takes a lot of courage.*

MJ: It takes courage. But does it really take courage to become who we are? Is it really a courageous thing to be in that moment? That moment brings liberation. That moment brings enlightenment.

AC: *How is it that bearing witness in this way brings enlightenment?*

MJ: Bearing witness is another term for awareness. If you are physically in this moment—*because* you are in this moment—you can't avoid the hardship. Because you are in this moment, as the hardship is in front of you, so is the movement to help fix it. It's the same moment. There is the reaction to the moment and the action. Not tomorrow. In the same moment. So as you bear witness to your own breath, you're looking around you. You can do it right this second, and you can see, "Look what I notice!" And whatever you're looking at becomes bigger and more magnified, and as you bear witness, you become more magnified. And you have the tools to fix it, even if it's ever so slightly.

AC: *And what would you call that tool?*

MJ: I would call it the great awareness of the moment. It's a great

awareness. Why is it great? Because not only is everything in front of you being taken care of, no matter how overwhelming—because you start very small—but guess what? You're returning to the core. You're returning to, as Swami Nityananda taught me, whence you have come.

AC: *What is the relationship between awareness and compassion?*

MJ: With awareness, you grow detached, and all of a sudden, it's not about you. Then a *huge* well, a *huge* well of compassion flows through you. When you are aware, you realize that attachment has no place in your life.

AC: *Because?*

MJ: When you are aware, you know that everything that we have is impermanent. Swami Nityananda taught me about *chidakash*, the heart space over the head. And I go to this space. In this space, I disappear. It's not about me. And therefore, compassion, which I've always prided myself with having, begins to flow even more, and I realize, "My God! I could have had a billion times more." Awareness leads to detachment, which leads to the utmost compassion. And when I say "detachment," it doesn't mean not caring. In fact, on the contrary, it means caring in a bigger, more beautiful, more profound way.

AC: *Awareness leads to detachment, but what's the relationship, then, between detachment and compassion?*

MJ: Because it's not about me. I *must* have compassion for other human beings in this place of detachment. I only know how to speak of my own experience. I get a call that there's a young girl with full-blown AIDS on the street who

just gave birth. She's in the street. She's calling for Ma. I go to the street. I had a personal tragedy that day. Okay? What am I giving? What's left for me to give? How can I look at this child? Her pain adheres to my pain. Therefore, I go to the place of detachment. It is *not* about me. And I am there for a young girl, without judgment. Compassion can only be given without judgment—without judgment, because it's not about me. And I hold her close to my breast until the ambulance comes and takes her. In that moment, I have disappeared because I'm not in my own pain. And if I don't have pain, I am so wide open to hers that the compassion flows.

AC: *The reason I'm asking you this question is that some people are afraid of detachment, because they're afraid that if they allow themselves to experience detachment, then they're not going to care.*

MJ: I know that. Most people are afraid of detachment. But I'm living it. Not only am I living it, thousands of my students are living it. I have a small ashram in California, and they have a program called "Under the Bridges and on the Streets," and they feed thousands of people each month. Because they are detached, what they see fuels them to go on and serve even more.

Okay, I have another story. It's not going to be pretty. So just hear what I have to say.

AC: *I'm listening.*

MJ: I have a young child. I've had her about six years. This child was a beautiful young girl. And her father forced her to drink Drano.

AC: *Oh my God.*

MJ: I warned you. If I did not go to the place of detachment, do you think I could have walked into that room a few days after that happened? I needed to go to where I was not attached. And the compassion flowed. I've had her for about six years, and now she goes to school. She has no face. A beautiful child, and now she's dying. From attachment comes what? Anger. So how would I be able to help this child?

AC: *How old is she now?*

MJ: Thirteen. This is detachment. Does it mean I don't love them? I could tell you stories to make your hair curl. All because of what? People's attachment. "I am attached to my space. I have my white picket fence. I have my husband, my children. I see it on TV, but I don't want to go look at it." And I'm saying, "Be *detached*, and take care of girls like Melissa whose father poured Drano down her throat." If I was attached, I could never in a million years do what I'm doing. I would collapse if I was attached. I would fall into my own pool of self-pity.

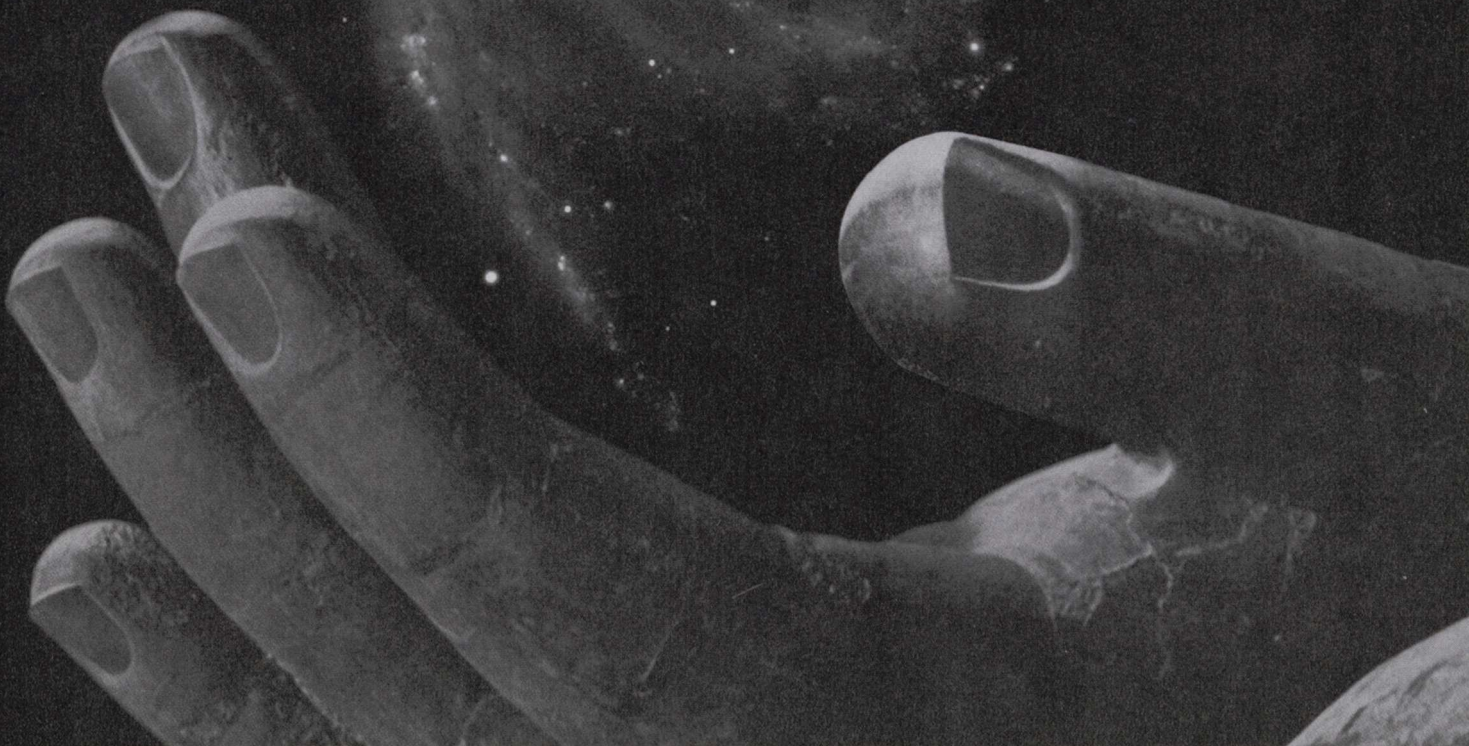
AC: *There's a mystery in this because—as you've been saying, and many great masters have spoken about this—it's through letting go that we find love and care.*

MJ: Exactly. And boy, is it scary. It's frightening. When you let go, the true compassion of love emerges because you are living exactly in the moment. All of a sudden, your children are close to you, your lovers are close to you, because you do not have your claws in their necks. I do not own you. I enjoy you. And I do not look back to see who is taking my love. That is the greatest mystery. I

continued on p. 148

*“The only way to
discover the limits of
the possible is to go
beyond them into
the impossible.”*

Arthur C. Clarke





toward homo noeticus



an interview with

john white

by craig hamilton

Envisioning the earth's future is an exercise in paradox. For while it's hard to imagine a future planet earth dominated by anything other than *Homo sapiens*, it is perhaps equally hard, given our current course of multilateral destruction, to imagine just what kind of future the earth will have if *Homo sapiens* continues to dominate. In our quest to find out if and how enlightenment

might resolve our global predicament, we came across one intriguing thinker who has dared to stretch his own imagination through and beyond this apparent double bind and has arrived at a solution that is nothing short of evolutionary. According to consciousness researcher John White, despite all trends to the contrary, humanity and the earth do indeed have the makings of a promising future

together. But the form of human being that will be here to participate is a primate of a very different order than the human as we know it today. He calls it *Homo noeticus*—the next step in human evolution.

Called to the spiritual life in 1963 by a spontaneous experience of what he describes as 'God realization,' John White has never had a problem telling others he's enlightened, provided he can

quickly follow up with the qualifier, "but just barely." And for the past twenty-seven years, that "just barely" has been the fuel behind his insatiable interest in exploring our higher human potential. Ask him about his achievements in this domain, and one of the last things you'll hear about is the enlightenment experience that sparked his journey. First, you'll learn about his alliance with *Apollo 14* astronaut Edgar Mitchell, whose spiritual experience in the space capsule led him to found, with White's help, the now internationally renowned Institute of Noetic Sciences. Then there was the book manuscript he received from a struggling young writer named Ken Wilber back in 1974

entitled *The Spectrum of Consciousness*. The book so impressed White that he devoted himself to getting it published, a task which he eventually accomplished, thirty-three publishers and four years later, launching Wilber's rise to become one of the most highly respected spiritual thinkers in modern times. A freelance writer and editor for much of his career, White might also mention that he has himself published dozens of articles and over fifteen books, including *The Meeting of Science and Spirit*, *A Practical Guide to Death and Dying*, and the anthologies *Kundalini, Evolution, and Enlightenment* and *What Is Enlightenment?* In his forthcoming book, *Enlightenment 101*, White describes the radical evolutionary shift that his research and

experience have convinced him is already under way in the human race.

Living at the forefront of consciousness exploration, in the company of many of today's leading spiritual visionaries, has given White an unusual appreciation for our higher human capacities and no doubt an inside look at where we might be headed as a species. But, White confesses, the source of his conviction in our imminent evolutionary potential does not lie ultimately in his research and study but in that first spiritual experience he had back in 1963. As he tells it, "There was a flipping over in consciousness which showed me the illusion of the separate self and the identity of true Self. It was a moment of cosmic consciousness. My sense of body self was

just absolutely blown away and there was only 'I' as the universe, as the cosmos. Now that didn't confer all sorts of omniscience on me, but it conferred certitude. I knew beyond any doubt whatsoever who I am, why I'm here, where I'm going, what the way home is, to God. And in that, I saw that if there's any such thing as human nature, what was potential for me was potential for everyone. I saw in my past, the human past. I saw in my future, the human future."

One day last fall, we had the pleasure of a neighborly visit from John White, who drove up from his Connecticut home to our center in western Massachusetts and spent the afternoon sharing his vision of an enlightened humanity.



John White

wie: Many futurists, scientists, and social thinkers feel that humanity is facing an evolutionary crisis. They predict potentially devastating global transformations over the next several decades as environmental destruction, overpopulation, rapid globalization,

and technological experimentation place our species and the planet as a whole in an ever more precarious balance. Many leading thinkers have suggested that given the enormity of the challenges we are facing, the only solution that could hope to get to the root of the problem is a spiritual solution—a transformation of consciousness. What do you think about this idea? Can enlightenment save the world?

JOHN WHITE: Enlightenment is the *only* thing which can save the world. The *only* thing.

When I was working with *Apollo 14* astronaut Edgar Mitchell, we had the idea that the Institute of Noetic Sciences, which he founded back in 1972 and for which I was the Director of Education, could study the human mind in order to apply our findings to the problems confronting humanity. It was clear to Ed, from the moment he had an epiphany or a religious experience in the space capsule coming back to Earth, that the problems besetting humanity are not inherent in the natural world. Social divisions and conflict and strife and all the political troubles—he saw that those problems arose at the level of the human mind, or human consciousness, and wanted to study *that* in order to solve those problems at the root level. As Einstein said, you can't solve a problem at the level which originated it. You've got to get up-level from it. So that was the hope for the Institute of Noetic Sciences: to better understand the nature of consciousness and our potential for transcending the state which generates all the problems facing humanity. Without that, we very well could end up as just a cindery speck in the night sky, or a debilitated, weakening planet with dead species.

So yes, we face various crises, but my recent research and my personal experience tell me that we *will* make it through those crises. That is part of the grand design of creation. That is part of the intelligent

purpose behind the universe. God didn't bring us forth through five million years of human evolution to snuff us out just like that. We have the means; we have the potential to deal with crises in an intelligent way, which is aligned with the teleological drive that we have for self-transcendence.

But it's not absolutely certain, as far as I can see. We could OD as a planet, so to speak. I don't think we will. We have weathered many, many crises in our long history, and I see all sorts of hopeful signs telling me that we will weather these too. In fact, as a friend of mine said, "Hope is an acronym for Help Our Planet Evolve." And I am ever hopeful.

WIE: In your forthcoming book, *Enlightenment 101*, you state that humanity is in fact evolving into a new and higher form of life, which will be able to transcend many of the difficulties that we currently face. You've labeled this new evolved form of humanity "Homo noeticus." What is Homo noeticus?

JW: *Homo noeticus* is the term I use to designate what I see as a higher form of humanity emerging on the planet now, characterized not by genetic changes but by *noetic* changes. In other words, *consciousness* is the guiding principle by which to define *Homo noeticus*. There's a radical transformation of consciousness that characterizes *Homo noeticus*, a movement from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. Members of *Homo noeticus* may look very much

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like Joe Six-pack and Harriet Handbag who are walking around the sidewalks of New York today, but they nevertheless are characterized by a profound change in consciousness. And that change in consciousness is part of the process of enlightenment.

Now, I don't have an anthropological checklist of how to define *Homo noeticus*. If we were alive at the time of the Neanderthals and the emergence of the Cro-Magnon, how would we know how to distinguish Cro-Magnon from Neanderthal? Physically, they had pretty much the same appearance. But in retrospect, we can say that Cro-Magnon was a new and superior type of humanity characterized by things such as being the world's first artists, with their cave paintings and female statuary. The Cro-Magnon invented the bow and arrow, the world's first weapon beyond just simple stone tools. And there are a few other markers that distinguish Cro-Magnon from Neanderthal. Likewise, with *Homo noeticus*. The markers that I feel would indicate full-fledged membership in the species *Homo noeticus* are primarily reflections of one's consciousness moving from self-centeredness into God-centeredness, which recognizes the presence of the Divine in everyone and operates in the world on that basis. In that, there's not competitiveness but rather cooperation, and the thought process is not a simple, linear, sequential, either/or type of thought process, but one that's multileveled, integrated, and inclusive. And emotionally speaking, you will not find hatred, vice, or any of the nonvirtuous feelings which make for such suffering and pain in the

world today, so much destruction and death and violence. You could say that you'll know that *Homo noeticus* is the dominant life-form on the planet by the absence of war, the absence of oppression, the absence of all the competitiveness, acquisitiveness, greed, and other vices, which have pretty much defined the human condition as we experience it today.

WIE: What are the signs that you see in the world today that have led you to the conclusion that *Homo noeticus* is emerging, that we really are evolving?

JW: In my book *The Meeting of Science and Spirit*, I include a long list of indicators which, taken together, say to me that a profound transformation of consciousness is underway in the world. Not that each and every one of these indicators is globally present, but we can look at every aspect of current human affairs and see things, movements, groups, perspectives which are not just counter to the status quo but which indicate a new and higher way beyond it. Economics, education, military affairs, political affairs—every aspect of human activity is showing signs here and there of something emerging from it which not only transcends it but projects an influence back into it for the further transformation of that domain.

The hunger for growth in people is widespread, and it's breaking out all over in a variety of ways: physical, mental, and spiritual. Look at how the human species is pushing the envelope just at the level of athletics and exploring the planet.



For the first time, we now have mastered underwater exploration to the point where people can scuba dive to hundreds of feet and go even farther down in technological devices like submarines or bathyscaphes. So we're pushing the boundaries in the depths of the ocean and to the extremes of the atmosphere and beyond, with space travel and ultralight aircraft and all sorts of aerial sports. And just plain physical sports themselves have blossomed into things that were totally undreamed of a century ago. The records themselves are falling, falling, falling as we develop better training programs and better nutrition to support them.

Also, a good deal of my background is in parapsychology, psychic research. I see that as part of an awakening of consciousness in humanity where people want to know more about who they are at deeper or higher dimensions. For the first time in all of human history, there is a widespread public recognition of the psychic potential of people. And that is being applied very practically in the holistic, or alternative, health movement. All over, the human species is just pushing at the limits of our physical, mental, and spiritual condition.

So, those are a few of the indicators.

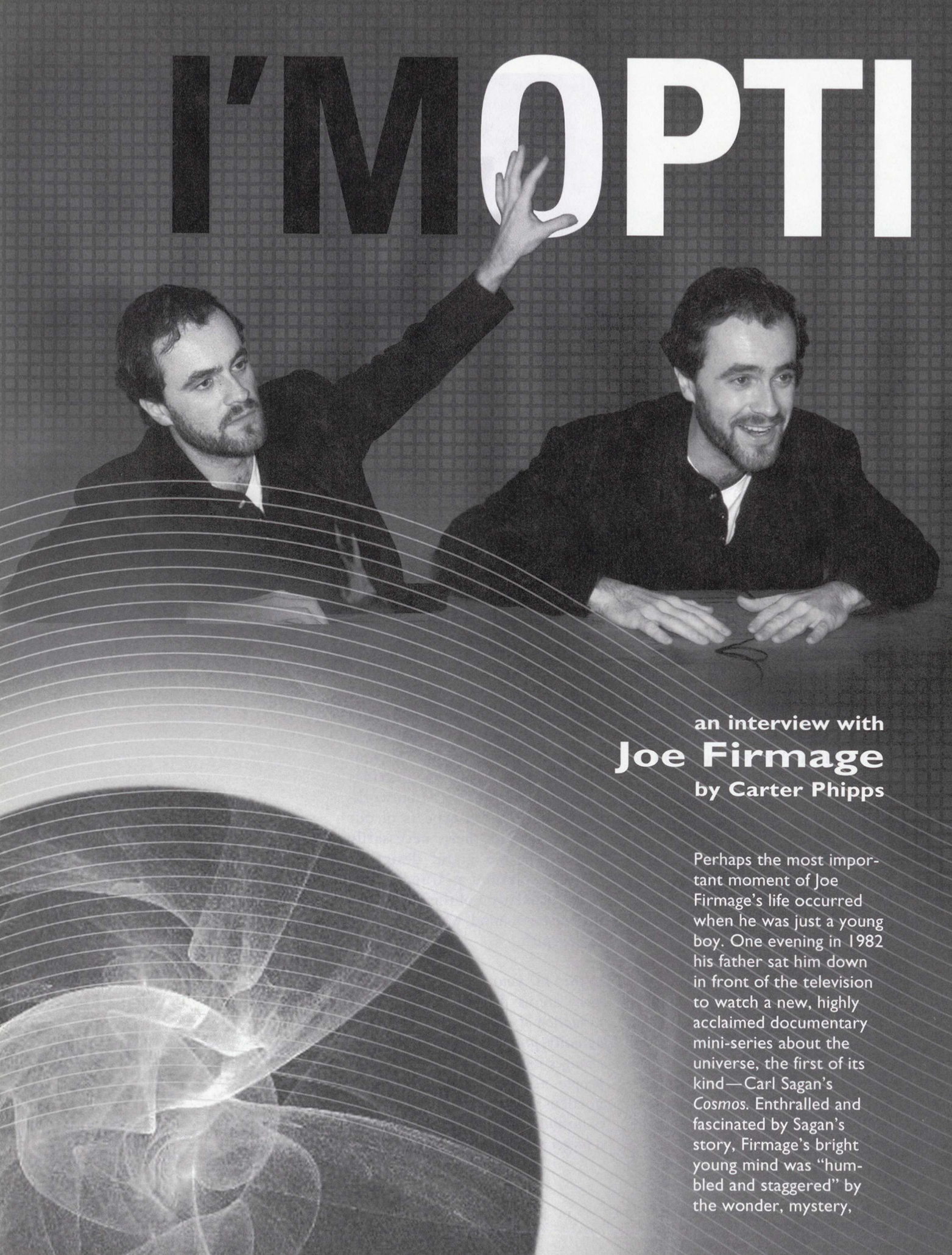
WIE: *Would it be accurate to characterize Homo noeticus as an enlightened humanity in the way enlightenment is traditionally understood?*

JW: It would be what I call the first stage of enlightenment, where there is a psychological conversion, a radical change in consciousness from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. But that has got to work itself out physiologically as well. Many years ago, I stated what I think of as the first law of noetics: "Body follows where consciousness goes." Now, when there's a radical change of consciousness, *moksha*, that provides a stable platform for the outworking of itself in *all* aspects of our activities. And there necessarily follows, in the grand design of human evolution, as I understand it, the conversion of the body *itself*, the body and mind, which are *junior* to the spirit.

WIE: *In your opinion, how far away are we from the kind of transformation of consciousness that could actually prepare us for the radical changes ahead? What percentage of people need to evolve into Homo noeticus before there will be a hope of turning things around and bringing a larger vision to these problems?*

continued on p. 149

I'M OPTI



an interview with
Joe Firmage
by Carter Phipps

Perhaps the most important moment of Joe Firmage's life occurred when he was just a young boy. One evening in 1982 his father sat him down in front of the television to watch a new, highly acclaimed documentary mini-series about the universe, the first of its kind—Carl Sagan's *Cosmos*. Enthralled and fascinated by Sagan's story, Firmage's bright young mind was "humbled and staggered" by the wonder, mystery,

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and beauty of the cosmos, and a newfound sense of the sacred, as gleaned through science, was born. Raised in a Mormon family in Utah, Firmage sensed even then that he had found his true religion. "No seminary lecture could hold a candle to the awesome truths I saw in the nature of the cosmos," he says. "Science became the path I would follow to find answers to my deep questions."

Inspired by Sagan's vision, Firmage spent much of his teenage years studying science during the day and studying the stars at night. But like many adolescent boys of his generation, he eventually discovered

the computer, and fell hook, line, and sinker for this exciting new technology. By the time he was in his twenties, space and physics had receded from his attention, and Firmage had given his talent and energy to the world of computers, achieving no small amount of success. Indeed, at the ripe age of twenty-five he was already a millionaire, had founded and sold a small software business, and was a high-profile executive at the second-largest software company in the world. In those days, the Internet phenomenon was just beginning to explode, and Firmage, ever mindful of the future, was in the right

place at the right time. He moved to northern California and founded a new company, which soon became a multibillion-dollar success story. In a valley of silicon stars, he was suddenly one of the brightest. At twenty-seven, he was considered to be a true visionary, someone who was changing the world and all of our lives through technology. But what he had no way of knowing at the time was that the future already had new plans. Fate was set to intervene and reawaken the passion for physics, space, and spirituality that had once consumed his young mind.

Some have called it an alien, an angel, or

even a hallucination, but whatever the case, someone or something visited Firmage in his bedroom early one morning in 1997. As he writes, "A remarkable being, clothed in brilliant white light, appeared hovering over my bed. He looked rather annoyed and asked, 'Why have you called me here?' I answered without a moment's pause, 'I want to travel in space.' He chuckled skeptically, paused, and asked, 'Why should you be granted such an opportunity?' I responded without hesitation, 'Because I'm willing to die for it!' The visitor was shaken. He stared at me, lowered his head, and out of him

emerged an electric blue sphere, just smaller than a basketball, which was swirling with what looked like electrical arcs. It left his body, floated down, and entered me. I was overcome by an unimaginable ecstasy. . . . My body shook as I awoke and continued to shake for what appeared to be minutes. Something had been given to me."

This powerful experience had a profound effect on Firmage and helped give new urgency to a whole series of questions that were already beginning to make him think twice about his role as a leader in the Internet revolution. Where were we truly heading as a species, he wondered, if the purpose of our modern economic system was to turn the world's six billion inhabitants into six billion hungry consumers? Was the Internet economy

just going to escalate to new heights the impending ecological crisis we were facing? What was the role of ethics and spirituality in a world of science and business? And his questions did not stop there. Was it true, as he was beginning to suspect, that new ideas percolating on the cutting edge of physics were beginning to make space travel in the near future at least a possibility—ideas that could create new methods of energy generation, radically changing our modern world? Needless to say, these weren't the kind of questions that went down well even in the relatively progressive boardrooms of Silicon Valley. After a series of run-ins with the press and his peers over some of his more radical speculations, Firmage decided it was time to trade in his silicon dreams for more carbon-based

realities, and he set his sights on pursuing the breakthroughs in science, economics, and consciousness that he felt were necessary if our species was to have a chance of surviving and thriving through the next century.

Today, at thirty, Firmage is more convinced than ever that the next few decades will bring about major transformations in all areas of human society, and he has dedicated his time and much of his fortune to imagining that future, preparing for it, and helping to bring it about. He is founder and chairman of the International Space Sciences Organization, a research institute set up to pursue new breakthroughs in cutting-edge physics and to explore the evolving connections between science and spirituality. He has been a generous philanthropist, providing

crucial support to organizations such as Gorbachev's State of the World Forum and Ken Wilber's Integral Institute. And recently, he launched what may be his most ambitious venture yet, One Cosmos, a science-based media and entertainment company. Nearly two decades after his childhood imagination was awakened by a new kind of television program, Firmage, along with his business partner Ann Druyan, Carl Sagan's widow, intends to carry the legacy of *Cosmos* to new frontiers. He hopes to awaken millions of minds to the vision that originally inspired him—the beauty and fragility of our embattled mother earth, the awe-inspiring vastness of the cosmos we live in, and the possibility that one day, perhaps, in a future he envisions, humanity may travel among the stars.



Joe Firmage

wie: As we enter the twenty-first century, there are few who would disagree that the world in which we live appears to be in crisis. Indeed, with widespread environmental destruction, a rapidly accelerating species extinction rate, a population explosion, and a number of other disturbing

trends, many leading futurists, scientists, and visionaries, yourself included, warn of potentially catastrophic changes ahead that threaten the very survival of life as we know it. In order to face this impending crisis, you have spoken about the need for a revolution in our society—a scientific and technological revolution, and most important of all, a spiritual revolution. Could you speak about the transformations



“In an era when the price of a weapon of mass destruction drops to a middle-class income, the whole question of security changes. You become dependent for planetary survival on the ethics of the individual and not on a global police force.”

you envision and explain why you feel confident that they will help us navigate the challenges ahead?

JOE FIRMAGE: I think that the work of so many wonderful people in the world—you in your own way, and me in mine, and everybody else who is involved in a community of action—is providing a catalyzing function that is very important. I’m certain that scientific and spiritual enlightenment *can* save the world. But the questions of how and when have no simple answers. However, there are increasing millions of people who are finding their own answers, and I remain optimistic that we will cross the critical threshold in time to evolve our

course toward sustainability and toward happiness.

My confidence is also bolstered by the tools that are available now that have never been available in history. A device that fits in a twelve-year-old’s hand that speaks and understands spoken words and that connects to the sum total of recorded human knowledge will soon be a reality. That can catalyze a startlingly profound and rapid transformation in an individual. That process is underway right now, and it’s one of the brighter sides of technology. It’s one of the major contributions that the technological endeavor will make to the enlightenment of the people.

So I’m optimistic because this

transformation can happen more rapidly than has ever before been possible in the history of humanity. I think that there are good grounds to believe that these tools not just can be, but will be, deployed in this way and, in the process, will mark an inflection point in the trajectory of society.

Another reason why I express the optimism that I do is that I’m close enough to some of these new innovations, in terms of my study. There are a lot of people who just don’t take the time to thoroughly study and investigate. For example, I’m far more optimistic than most environmentalists that we are close to an energy revolution—an energy revolution that does not depend

upon solar energy, that does not depend upon wind, that does not depend upon waves or other types of gross macro methods. I think that we are very close to transformations in technologies for propulsion and for architecture that may transform the infrastructure of society, shrinking our footprint on the earth and allowing us to step very lightly on the land, yet without dispensing with the qualities of life afforded by modern society. If I were not convinced that those kinds of breakthroughs were possible, I would be much more pessimistic than I am.

But I do not see a solution to our problems without a combination of technological transformation and consciousness transformation happening. It must happen together. If the technological transformation happens without the consciousness transformation, we will become like the "Borg" on *Star Trek*. If the consciousness transformation happens without the technological transformation, we're out of luck. What are we going to do? Are we all going to return to the forests? I mean, that's not really a practical solution. What do we do? Stop driving cars? Stop creating enough energy to power our homes? Once we're all willing, once we all want to see a different kind of society, how do you feed people? What's the system that does it? How do we lift a billion human beings in China out of poverty without exacerbating the consumptive pressure on the planet?

So to me, the importance of both of these cannot be overstated. And I see the opportunity for *both* to happen. If these two transformative processes can be woven together in the right way, we can build a third-millennium society that you would want to live in, one that would make you and every other

member a happy person. But it's going to take a hell of a lot of work from a lot of people to make that happen.

WIE: *While technology is no doubt going to have a greater and greater role in our lives as we move forward into the future, there are many who have issued strong cautions about the dangers of the Internet and the information revolution. For example, Michael Lerner, in his new book Spirit Matters, warns of "a new global consumer society obsessed with avoiding commitments and entanglements and focused on individual pleasure. . . . Detached from everything that roots us to place and time, we can then endlessly surf the web, isolated tourists in a world of virtual experiences. Our emancipation from the weight of the past creates an unbearable lightness in the present: we become tourists to our own inner beings and tourists to others, never staying long enough to risk getting involved." As a believer in the power of information technology to help see us through our current crisis, what do you think about Lerner's concerns?*

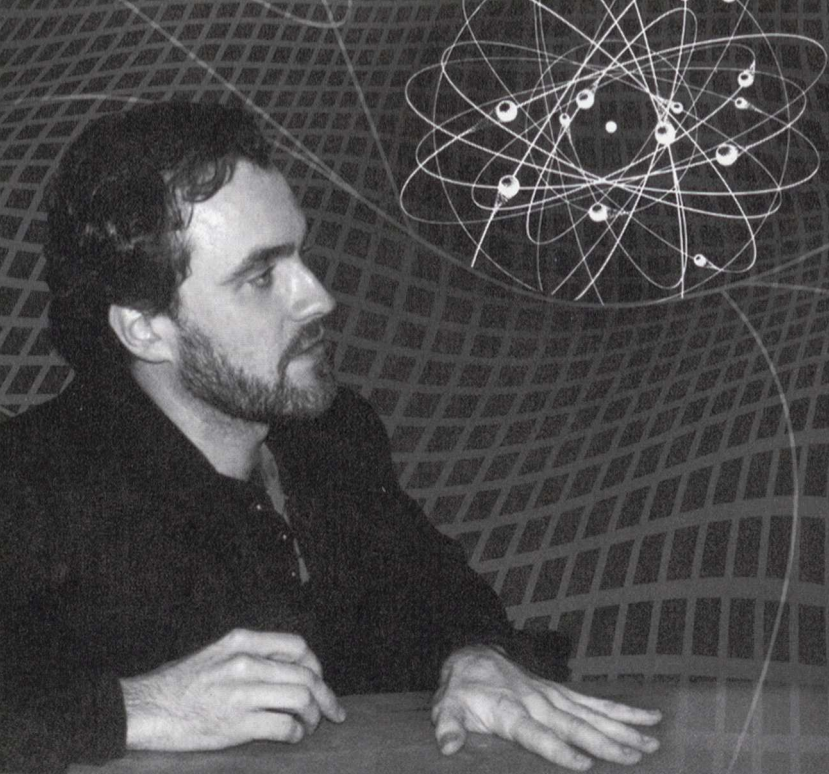
JF: I wouldn't be as harsh as he is, but I would be as concerned about some of the dangers, especially with respect to the potential for the Internet to dramatically aid the scaling of the economy. The friction that the Internet removes from supply and demand is amazing to behold; it makes it so much easier to transact business from one side of the globe to the other. There are now a couple of companies that have sprouted up that allow tribesmen in the jungle to sell trinkets to people on Madison Avenue through the Internet! Now one group of people says, "Amazing business opportunity." I said, "Holy shit. What are we doing?"

WIE: *You're saying that the Internet may increase the world's rate of consumption?*

JF: It allows consumerism to scale up fast. I have a very deep concern that the Internet allows us to scale up commerce in an abrupt sort of way, and therefore, we are scaling up an economic machine which we already know in its present condition is unsustainable.

So that's the dimension where I have equal concern. Where I would disagree with Lerner is that I think that the experience afforded through information communications, while it will have its negative side, is, on balance, a great aid to both society and the individual. The opportunity to convey experiences and share them in the new medium is a profoundly good thing for human beings on the whole. I view it as a successor to paper, a successor to books, a successor to telephones. And the reason why it's so cool is that it's a successor to all of them. It combines the best qualities of paper, phones, televisions, and computers and puts them into one device.

Of course, it will be used for ill. It will be, and that drives home the point that we need to make sure that we find ways to get rid of the ill in society through non-draconian but nonetheless systemic means. It raises the kinds of issues that Ken Wilber and others write about so comprehensively, which is the need for a reappraisal of the basic ethics of ordinary human relationships. You have to find a way to remove the motivations for people to do ill things with powerful technology. Because in an era when the price of a weapon of mass destruction drops to a middle-class income, when you are able to buy a vial that knocks out a city for \$25,000, the whole question of security changes. You



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become dependent for planetary survival on the ethics of the individual and not on a global police force. And the same thing is true with information technology in a different sense. It’s an incredibly powerful tool for people to magnify whatever it is they want to say. If we have a billion people who are really pissed off and want to hurt each other, information technology will be a very serious weapon.

WIE: *You are the founder of the International Space Sciences Organization, a science and theological research institute established to conduct cutting-edge science research as well as to explore the relationship*

between science and spirituality. What do you believe the future holds for science and spirituality, and how can they help us to save the world?

JF: I believe that most religious systems lack a deeply rooted appreciation for the knowledge that we have gained from science. And I think that religious traditions as a whole are certainly going to be far less effective if they, as society evolves forward, attempt to hang on to the past, to dogmatic notions and moral codes that are frankly irrational and unfounded in any sort of reasoning or logical process. If religions fail to appreciate what we have learned about reality, they

will fall by the wayside.

At the same time, one of the qualities of religion that science has not presented well is a sense of the integral nature of the cosmos and the universe. And when one sees the universe through the lens of science without that sense of integration, it becomes somewhat cold and lifeless. Even life becomes somewhat cold and lifeless.

One of the things that I think is happening now is that the qualities of the religious experience that are positive and not destructive to human beings are being recognized and seen elsewhere—other than in religion. They’re being seen in science itself. Science is not

fundamentally about equations and abstract diagrams and such. It's about truth. It's a truth-finding process. It's a truth-finding methodology. So what if you took an integral spiritual perspective and infused it with a sense of deep respect for the truth-finding process of science? If you brought these together, then you would have both the practice of integral spirituality and the strengthening of it by intellectual development.

WIE: What do you mean by "an integral spiritual perspective"?

JF: It's the sense that the human being is one beautiful, small part of an incredibly vast universe. And more specifically, it's the sense that you are a part of God. God isn't out there as an anthropomorphic being who is going to visit earth one glorious day and pass judgment on all of us *Homo sapiens*. No, God infuses all things. You are That. Everything is part of this incredibly vast, ancient, macroscopic being. It's a very pantheistic vision, which very much resonates with me.

So as we look at a century-long sweep into the future, I see a rapidly rising integration of science with a sense of spiritual oneness with the cosmos. I think the spiritual revolution of the future has to do with an arising awareness of our place in space and time, an arising awareness of what we really are, and that knowledge comes from science. It will be the first spiritual revolution in history that originates from science, and I think that's just a tremendously hopeful concept. Those are the basic principles that will be common to whatever type of twenty-first-century or third-millennium spirituality is going to take root.

If that type of belief system emerges across society as a whole,

it can give us the kind of rugged emotional foothold on which to rest the social challenges that the twenty-first century will present us with. The challenges of the twenty-first century cannot rest on the aging and arthritic religious dogmas of the past. So we're in a period of time right now where perhaps the single most important thing to do is educate. Among all other priorities, all of which are urgent simultaneously, it's hard to imagine what's a higher priority than education. We have to find a way to convey the inherently spiritual nature of the universe and the cosmos without sacrificing scientific integrity, and with complete accessibility to the typical person.

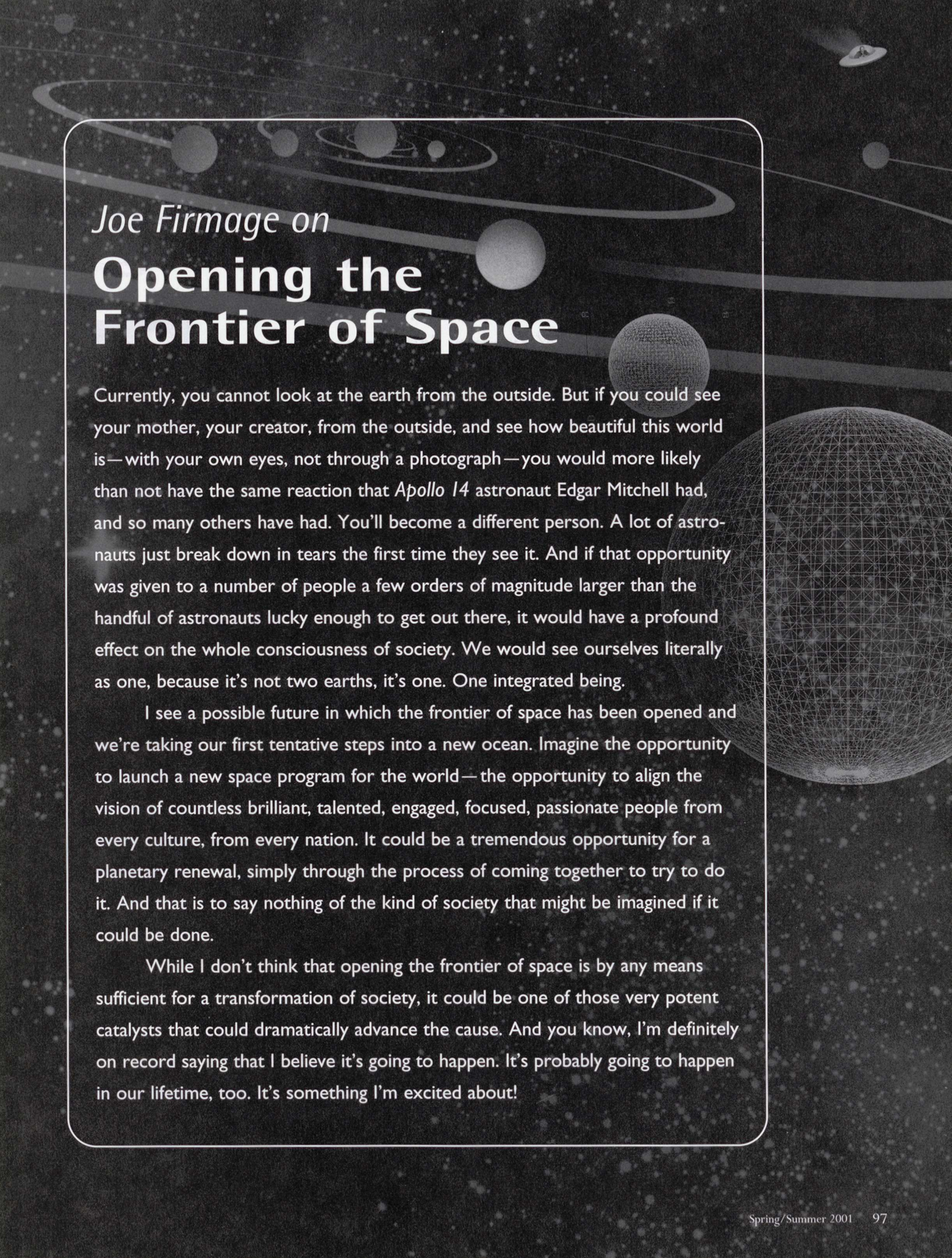
If we can succeed in significantly expanding people's sense of their place in the cosmos, their place in space and time and the relationships that they have with all other things, if we can dramatically expand that consciousness in the next twenty years, then you can turn six billion people into collaborators in the problem-solving process. Because it's going to take collaboration of the whole planet to save the planet. It ain't going to be done by a handful of environmental organizations, although they can be the catalyst, maybe even the critical catalyst.

WIE: Can you give me a picture of the world as you believe it will look in fifty years?

JF: The kind of 2050 that I envision is not a society that is harnessed to an increasingly powerful economic machine where the output of goods and services is the definition of success. We could live in a society in 2050 where we know that economics is no longer in conflict with the sustainability of our culture, where what

is traditionally defined as economically necessary work is occupying a declining percentage of time in our lives, opening the rest for other activities. I see a society in which individual human beings are freed to enjoy life, to pursue their own passions. And it would be an era in which the knowledge of science becomes joined with a sense of wonder at the spiritual connectedness of all things, which is increasingly describable by science. I see a possible 2050 with breakthroughs in science that simultaneously lengthen our stride and lighten our footprint by allowing new forms of energy generation and transportation to replace the fossil-fuel-based systems of today. With these tools, I believe we will have the opportunity to transform cultures and societies that are wasting today for a lack of resources and tools for self-transformation, such as in Africa. I see a possible 2050 where the continent of Africa is slowly becoming a garden once again. But if we fail to cross above the fifty percent mark in the number of ordinary modern adults who wake up every morning thinking about these types of issues and making a difference in their own way, if we can't cross that threshold, I don't think that we'll make it.

But in spite of all the dire circumstances we face, I'm optimistic, because it just makes so much sense. And when you reach a certain critical mass of people who come to this understanding, you'll see, I think, that while the process of transformation can be very painful for many parts of society, the joy of actually seeing all of these problems beginning to be addressed in serious ways will be very motivating to people. It's motivating to actually see light at the end of the tunnel, even if the end of that tunnel is a century away. ■



Joe Firmage on **Opening the Frontier of Space**

Currently, you cannot look at the earth from the outside. But if you could see your mother, your creator, from the outside, and see how beautiful this world is—with your own eyes, not through a photograph—you would more likely than not have the same reaction that *Apollo 14* astronaut Edgar Mitchell had, and so many others have had. You'll become a different person. A lot of astronauts just break down in tears the first time they see it. And if that opportunity was given to a number of people a few orders of magnitude larger than the handful of astronauts lucky enough to get out there, it would have a profound effect on the whole consciousness of society. We would see ourselves literally as one, because it's not two earths, it's one. One integrated being.

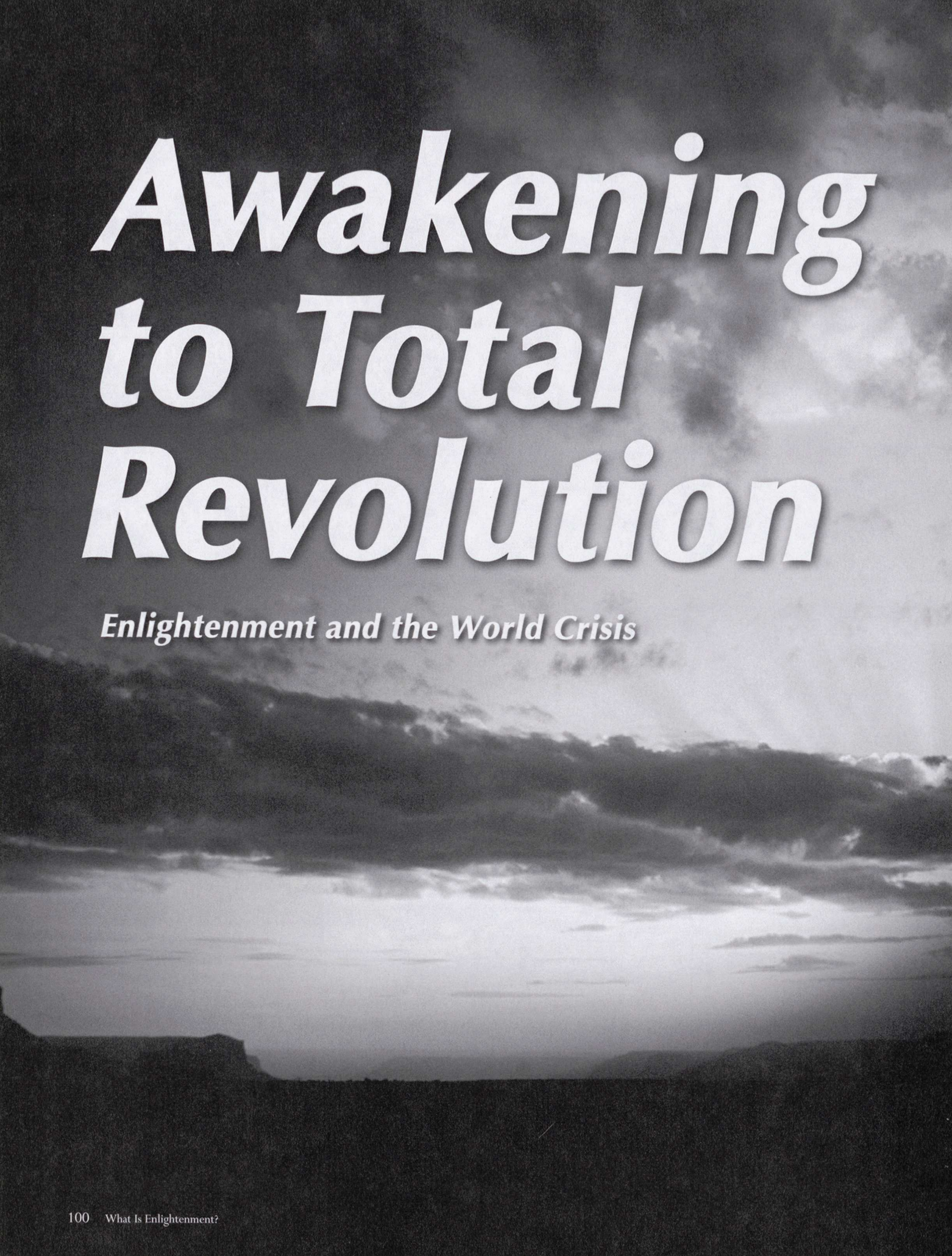
I see a possible future in which the frontier of space has been opened and we're taking our first tentative steps into a new ocean. Imagine the opportunity to launch a new space program for the world—the opportunity to align the vision of countless brilliant, talented, engaged, focused, passionate people from every culture, from every nation. It could be a tremendous opportunity for a planetary renewal, simply through the process of coming together to try to do it. And that is to say nothing of the kind of society that might be imagined if it could be done.

While I don't think that opening the frontier of space is by any means sufficient for a transformation of society, it could be one of those very potent catalysts that could dramatically advance the cause. And you know, I'm definitely on record saying that I believe it's going to happen. It's probably going to happen in our lifetime, too. It's something I'm excited about!

*“What you are,
the world is. And
without your
transformation,
there can be no
transformation of
the world.”*

J. Krishnamurti





Awakening to Total Revolution

Enlightenment and the World Crisis



by Vimala Thakar

The Indian spiritual master Vimala Thakar, whom we featured in our Fall/Winter 1996 issue of *What Is Enlightenment?*, is best known in Europe and the US as a strikingly independent and powerful teacher of spiritual awakening. Indeed, we at *What Is Enlightenment?* believe that she is perhaps the most enlightened woman in the world today. But what many may not know is that Thakar is also a passionately committed social activist. Deeply

influenced by the teachings of both J. Krishnamurti and Mahatma Gandhi, Thakar embodies the essence of enlightened consciousness and social responsibility—the two usually divergent streams of personal awakening and social advocacy seamlessly blending into the one indefatigable torrent of her life. And in both spheres, not unlike her mentors, she is a complete revolutionary. Her life and her teaching burn with the fire of the

inner revolution of spirit that she feels is the only true foundation for a revolution of society.

Born to a middle-class Brahmin family in central India, Thakar's passion for the spiritual life began early. "The awareness of 'something beyond' dawned on me at the age of five," she writes, describing how she ran away from home into the forest searching for God, imploring God to reveal himself. Her father, boldly independent and free-thinking,

encouraged her spiritual interests, supporting her in visiting ashrams, studying the scriptures, and experimenting with spiritual practices. She continued her spiritual pursuits in earnest throughout her youth and young adulthood and did an extended retreat in a cave in the Himalayas at nineteen. Her many unusual experiences during these early years have the epic aura of Mahabharatan tales.

As a young woman, Thakar became involved



with Vinoba Bhave's Land Gift Movement. Bhave, Gandhi's spiritual successor who is considered a saint in his own right, furthered Gandhi's mission and vision of a new social order, and in his years of working closely with Thakar, instilled in her Gandhi's passion for, as she describes it, "a radical change in the very structure of human society as well as a radical revolution in the very substance of the human mind." Thakar worked tirelessly in the Land Gift Movement—a program that secures land from the wealthy and redistributes it to landless farm workers—traveling from village to village the length and breadth of India for eight years.

In 1960 Thakar was invited by a friend to attend a series of talks a visiting spiritual teacher was giving in Varanasi. The teacher was the legendary J. Krishnamurti, and he immediately took note of the unusual young woman listening so attentively at the back of the hall and offered to meet with her. Their talks and private interviews sparked an upheaval within Thakar's consciousness, catapulting her into profound silence. "Something within has been let loose. It can't stand any frontiers," she wrote. "The invasion of a new awareness, irresistible and uncontrollable . . . has swept away everything." Within less than a year, Krishnamurti not only confirmed her

spiritual realization but urgently implored her to begin to teach: "Why don't you explode? Why don't you put bombs under all these old people who follow the wrong line? Why don't you go around India? Is anyone doing this? If there were half a dozen, I would not say a word to you. There is not time. . . . Go—shout from the house-tops, 'You are on the wrong track! This is not the way to peace!' . . . Go out and set them on fire! There is none who is doing this. Not even one. . . . What are you waiting for?"

At this point, she says, the "burning ashes became aflame," and she left the Land Gift Movement and the sphere of social action to take up her role as a spiritual teacher, traveling the world to give talks and lead meditation camps. In an open letter to her friends and former colleagues, she explained her reasons for turning her attention now exclusively to the inner revolution: "No words could describe the intensity and depth of the experience through which I am passing. Everything is changed. It is as if I am born again! . . . My association with the movement is over. Today it strikes me that the true problem is the internal problem of complete freedom! . . . *The only salvation for mankind appears to be in a religious revolution of the individual.* . . . As the source of all evil is in the very substance of our con-

sciousness, we will have to deal with it. Everything that has been transmitted to our mind through centuries will have to be completely discarded. The momentum of a million yesterdays is not easy to overcome or to discard if we try to tackle it in a casual way, or if we don't touch it at all."

For the next twenty-two years, Thakar traveled and taught in more than twenty countries, and scores of books of her teachings were published in twelve languages. While she always stayed keenly attuned to the political, environmental, and social currents throughout the world, her teaching for the most part remained focused on the inner revolution of the spirit. In 1979, however, Thakar rekindled her social advocacy and curtailed her global teaching tours for three years to stay in India, once again traveling from village to village, talking with people about local problems and founding centers for educating villagers in agro-centered industries, sanitation, local self-government, and active democratic citizenship. After this hiatus, she began traveling abroad again, with the focus of her teaching now more fully encompassing her passion for both inner and outer revolution. When California meditation teacher Jack Kornfield asked her why she returned to development work and to helping the hungry and homeless, she replied, "Sir, I am a lover of life, and as a

lover of life, I cannot keep out of any activity of life. If people are hungry for food, my response is to help feed them. If people are hungry for truth, my response is to help them discover it. I make no distinction between serving people who are starving and have no dignity in their physical lives and serving people who are fearful and closed and have no dignity in their mental lives. I love all life."

Now seventy-nine, Thakar no longer travels outside India but remains busy seeing individuals or groups who make their way to visit her at her home in Rajasthan or in Ahmedabad where she stays during the winter. Here she meets with people from all over the world, ranging from Buddhists and yoga teachers to industrialists, ecologists, Indo-Pakistan peace activists, and members of Parliament. "Spirituality is the seed," says this awakened activist, "and social action is the fruit born of it." Thakar's words have the authority and authenticity born of a life wholeheartedly and holistically devoted to total revolution of the human spirit.

—Introduction by Susan Bridle

Quotations from: *On an Eternal Voyage*, Vimala Thakar (Vimal Parivar: Bombay, 1994) and *Vimalaji's Global Pilgrimage*, ed. Kaiser Irani (Vimal Prakashan Trust: Ahmedabad, 1996)

The following article is excerpted from Vimala Thakar's *Spirituality and Social Action: A Holistic Approach* (Vimala Programs California: Berkeley, 1984).

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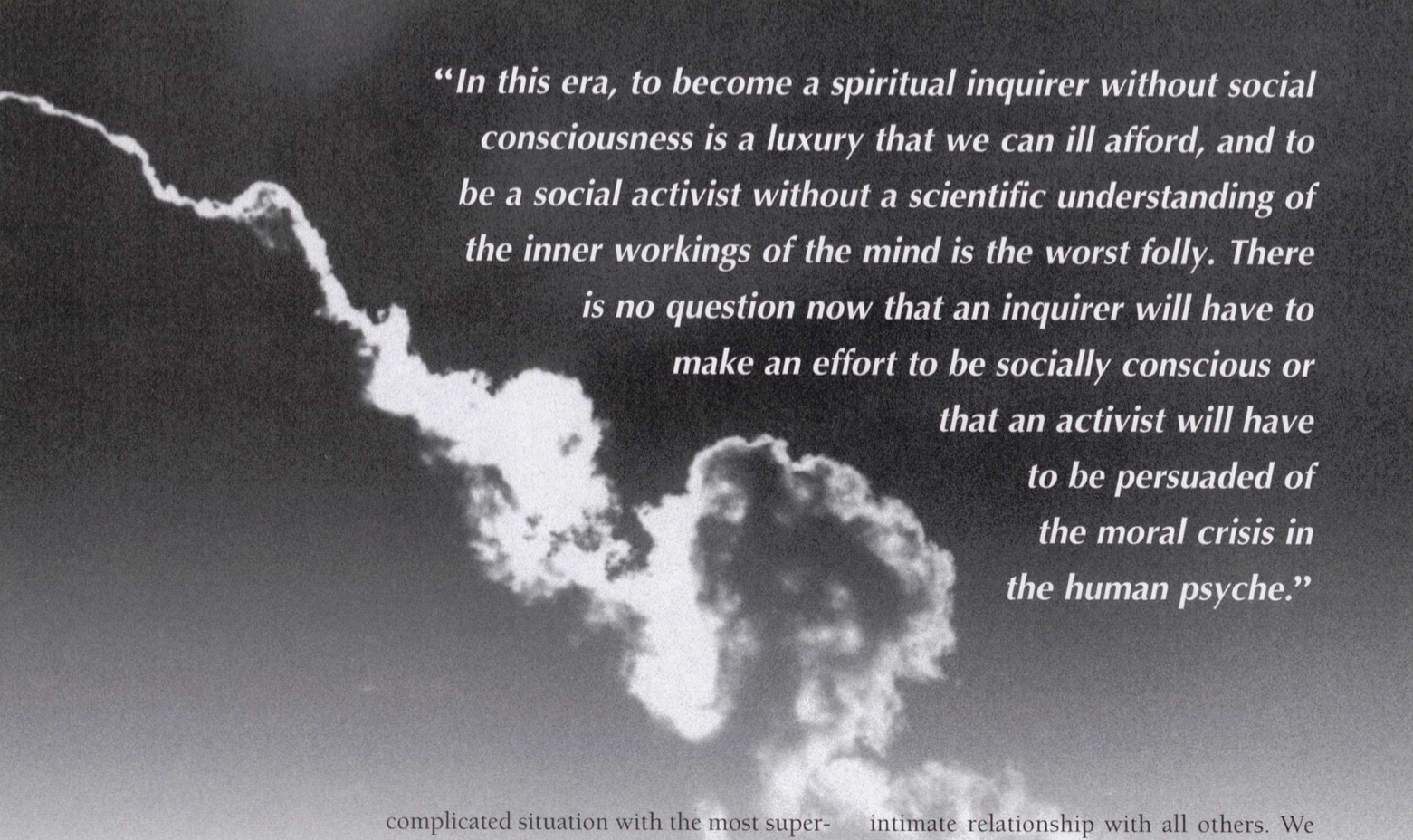
Awakening to Total Revolution

IN A TIME when the survival of the human race is in question, to continue with the status quo is to cooperate with insanity, to contribute to chaos. When darkness engulfs the spirit of the people, it is urgent for concerned people to awaken, to rise to revolution.

The cleverness of the human mind has led us to the complex, horrifying, and all-encompassing crisis that we now face. The familiar solutions, based on a limited view of what a human being is, continue to fail, to be pathetically inadequate. Yet we pour vast resources into these tired solutions and feel that if we achieve a grand enough scale, the old solutions will meet the new challenges. Do we have the courage to see failures as failures and leave them to the past? Do we have the vitality to go beyond narrow, one-sided

views of human life and to open ourselves to totality and wholeness? The call of the hour is to move beyond the fragmentary, to awaken to total revolution.

The call is not to one of the revolutionary formulas of the past; they have failed—why drag them out again even in new regalia? The challenge now is to create an entirely new, vital revolution that takes the whole of life into its sphere. We have never dared embrace the whole of life in all its awesome beauty; we’ve been content to perpetuate fragments, invent corners where we feel conceptually secure and emotionally safe. We could have our safe little nooks and niches were it not for the terrible mess we have made by attempting to break the cosmic wholeness into bite-size bits. It’s an ugly chaos we have created, and we try to remedy the



"In this era, to become a spiritual inquirer without social consciousness is a luxury that we can ill afford, and to be a social activist without a scientific understanding of the inner workings of the mind is the worst folly. There is no question now that an inquirer will have to make an effort to be socially conscious or that an activist will have to be persuaded of the moral crisis in the human psyche."

complicated situation with the most superficial of patched-together cures.

Today, with the scars of our past failures marring our existence and the fears of the future weighing heavily on our spirits, we can no longer go on with this dangerous game of fragmentation. We can no longer escape the fact that we are all bonded, equal in wholeness. Science and technology have brought each of us into

intimate relationship with all others. We are truly a global human family. Yet as a family, we have not learned how to live together in peace, to live without violence and exploitation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Bertrand Russell wrote: "Man knows how to fly in the air like a bird, he knows how to swim in water like the fish, but how to live among other human beings, he does not know."

Penetrating to the Roots of Conflict

EVEN THOUGH our very survival is in question, we tend to look at the crisis superficially, emotionally, sentimentally. We have tried in subtle ways to absolve ourselves of any deep responsibility for the condition of the human family. We perceive ourselves, or our small identity groups, as truly sincere and peace-loving, and we ascribe to outsiders, to those apart, to power-hungry villains, responsibility for aggression and wars.

Yet as members of societies that are

prepared for war, how can we set ourselves apart as peace-loving and the others as violent? This is, however, what we attempt to do. We see on the television or hear on the radio news about massacres and wars taking place in different countries, and we feel how stupid it is to wage war and wonder why the politicians and the statesmen don't have the wisdom to stop all this nonsense. This is the reaction perhaps of every sensitive citizen of the world. But who wages war? Where are the roots of

war? Are they in the minds of a handful of individuals ruling over their respective countries? Or are the roots of war in the systems that we have created and have been living by for centuries—the economic, the political, the administrative, the industrial systems? If we are not romantic and sentimental, and do not feel gratified just by reacting emotionally, by expressing how bad the wars are, but rather go deep, won't we find the roots of war in the systems and structures that we have accepted?

We will discover that there are systems and structures that inevitably lead to aggression, exploitation, and war. We have accepted aggression as a way of living. We create and entrench ourselves in structures which culminate in wars. Retaining the structures and avoiding wars is not possible. You and I as individuals have to realize how we are responsible, how we cooperate with the systems and thereby participate in the violence and wars. And

then we must begin to inquire whether we can discontinue cooperating with the systems, whether we can stop participating in wars, and explore alternative ways of living for ourselves.

We must go to the roots of the problem, to the core of the human psyche, recognizing that collective social action begins with action in individual life. We cannot separate the individual and the society. We each contain the society when we accept the value structure of society, when we accept the priorities worked out for us by governments and the states and the political parties. We are expressions of the collective, repeating the pattern created for us, and we feel happy because we are given physical security, economic security, comfort, leisure, entertainment. We have been trained to be obsessed with the idea of security; the idea of tomorrow haunts us much more than the responsibility for today.

Going Beyond Fragmentation

IF THERE IS a willingness to face these unpleasant facts, and be with these facts, then we can proceed. If we enter into self-pity and depression, then negativity may lead to cynicism and bitterness against others and bitterness against the system. And releasing such negative energy does not help solve the problems. We have to stick with the facts as they are. Whether we like it or not, we are responsible participants in what is happening in the world.

If we sanction violence in our hearts, we are going to cooperate with whomever is waging war. We are participants because psychologically we sanction violence. If we really want to put an end to warfare, we need to explore deep into the human psyche where the roots of violence have a stronghold. Unless we find the roots of violence, ambition, and jealousy, we will not find our way out of chaos. Failure to

eliminate their roots will doom us to endless miserable repetitions of the failures of the past. We must see that the inner and the outer are delicately intertwined in a totality and that we cannot deal with the one successfully without the other. The structures and systems condition the inner consciousness, and the conditionings of the consciousness create the structures and systems. We cannot carve out one part of the relationship, make it bright and beautiful, and ignore the rest. The forces of human societal conditionings are powerfully entrenched; they will not be ignored.

Traditionally, there have been two separate approaches. One approach takes us toward the social, the economic, the political problems, and says, "Look here, unless the economic and political problems are solved, there will be no happiness and no peace, there will be no end to

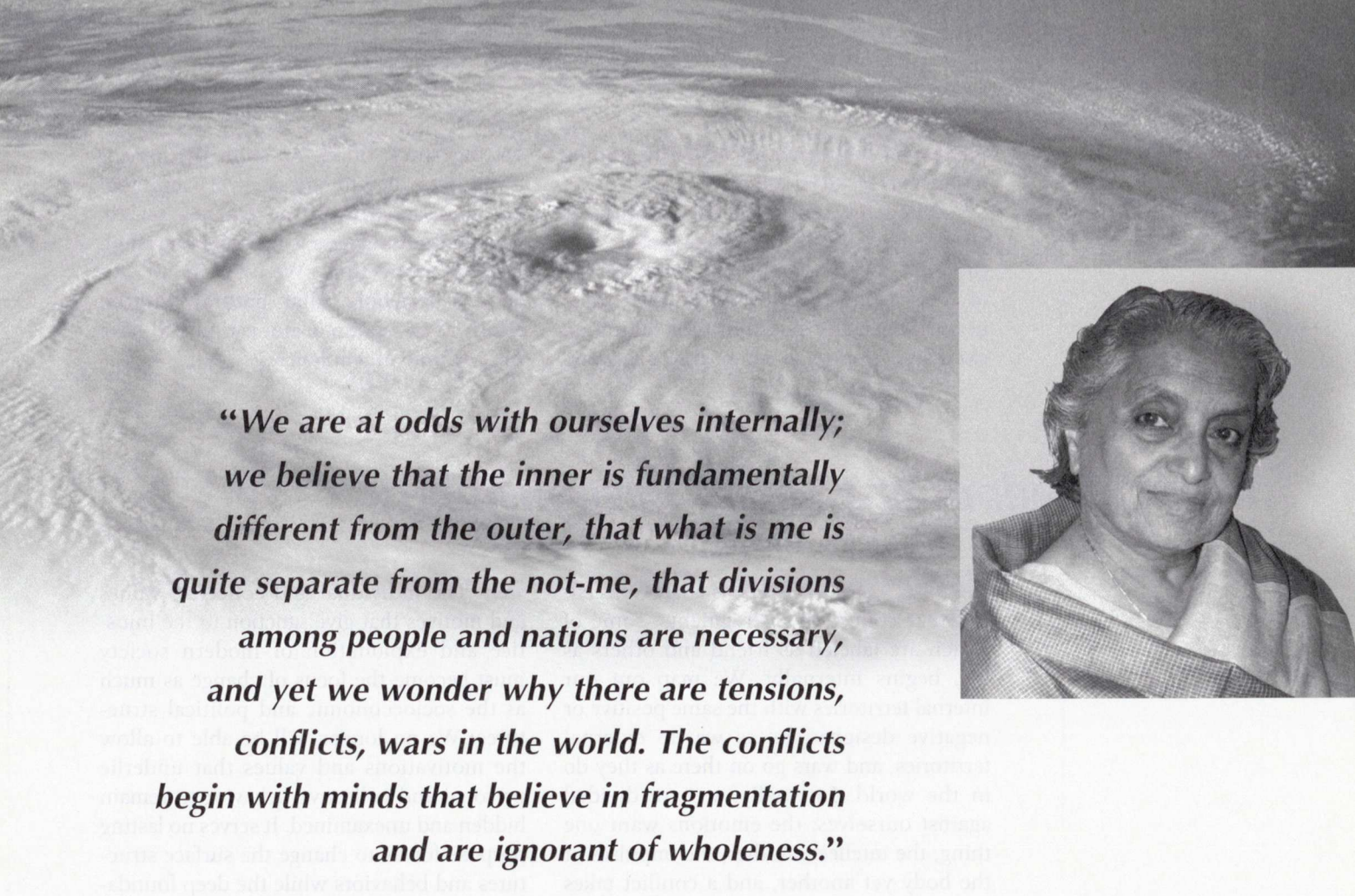
suffering. It is the responsibility of every individual to engage in solving these problems according to some ideology. Turning toward the inner life, the imbalances and impurities of the inner life, that is not so important, that can be taken care of later on, for it is a self-centered, egoistic activity. But the responsibility is toward the society, toward the human race, so keep aside all those problems of meditation and silence, inner sophistication, transformation for inner revolution—keep all that aside. First turn toward this.” And the other approach says, “The political and economic problems cannot be solved unless the individual is transformed totally. Be concerned with your psychological mutation, the inner, radical revolution. The political, the economic, the social problems can wait.”

People have generally followed one or the other of these two conventional approaches: religious groups concerned with inner growth and inner revolution, and social activist groups concerned with social service. Traditionally we have created boundaries, and exploration beyond our home territories has been only superficial. The social activists have staked out their territory, the outer life—the socioeconomic, political structures—and the spiritual people have staked out theirs—the inner world of higher dimensions of consciousness, transcendental experiences, and meditation. The two groups, throughout history, have been contemptuous of each other. The social activists consider the spiritual inquirers to be self-indulgent, and the inquirers consider the activists to be caught in a race of activity, denying the essence of living. Traditional spiritual leaders have divided life into worldly and spiritual, and have insisted that the world is illusion. They said, “This world is *maya*, is an illusion. So whatever action you take should be in relation to the absolute truth and not in relation to *maya*.” Thus a religious person sitting in meditation for ten hours a day need not mind the tyranny or the exploitation or the cruelties surrounding him. He would say, “That’s not my responsibility. It’s God’s responsibility. God has created the world. He or She will take care of it.”

There have been superficial blendings, as spiritual groups take up social service work and social activists join religious organizations, but a real integration of social action and spirituality at a deep, innovative level has not yet happened to any significant degree. The history of human development has been fragmentary, and the majority of people have been content with the fragmentation. It has the sanction of society. Each fragment of society has its own set of values. Among many social activists, anger, hatred, violence, bitterness, and cynicism are accepted norms, even though the effectiveness of these motivations for peaceful living has been seriously put in doubt. And indifference to the needs of the poor has had shocking acceptance among generations of spiritual people who considered higher states of consciousness much more significant than the misery of the starving millions.

A new challenge awaits us at the beginning of the twenty-first century: to go beyond fragmentation, to go beyond the incompatible sets of values held even by serious-minded people, to mature beyond the self-righteousness of one’s accepted approaches and be open to total living and total revolution. In this era, to become a spiritual inquirer without social consciousness is a luxury that we can ill afford, and to be a social activist without a scientific understanding of the inner workings of the mind is the worst folly. Neither approach in isolation has had any significant success. There is no question now that an inquirer will have to make an effort to be socially conscious or that an activist will have to be persuaded of the moral crisis in the human psyche, the significance of being attentive to the inner life. The challenge awaiting us is to go much deeper as human beings, to abandon superficial prejudices and preferences, to expand understanding to a global scale, integrating the totality of living, and to become aware of the wholeness of which we are a manifestation.

As we deepen in understanding, the arbitrary divisions between inner and outer disappear. The essence of life, the beauty and grandeur of life, is its wholeness.



***“We are at odds with ourselves internally;
we believe that the inner is fundamentally
different from the outer, that what is me is
quite separate from the not-me, that divisions
among people and nations are necessary,
and yet we wonder why there are tensions,
conflicts, wars in the world. The conflicts
begin with minds that believe in fragmentation
and are ignorant of wholeness.”***



Life in reality cannot be divided into the inner and the outer, the individual and social. We may make arbitrary divisions for the convenience of collective life, for analysis, but essentially any division between inner and outer has no reality, no meaning.

We have accepted the watertight compartments of society, the fragmentation of living as factual and necessary. We live in relationship to these fragments and accept the internalized divisions—the various roles we play, the contradictory value systems, the opposing motives and priorities—as reality. We are at odds with ourselves internally; we believe that the inner is fundamentally different from the outer, that what is me is quite separate from the not-me, that divisions among people and nations are necessary, and yet we wonder why there are tensions, conflicts, wars in the world. The conflicts begin with minds that believe in fragmentation and are ignorant of wholeness.

A holistic approach is a recognition of the homogeneity and wholeness of life. Life is not fragmented; it is not divided. It cannot be divided into spiritual and material, individual and collective. We cannot create compartments in life—political, economic, social, environmental. Whatever we do or don't do affects and touches the wholeness, the homogeneity. We are forever organically related to wholeness. We are wholeness, and we move in wholeness. The awareness of oneness refuses to recognize separateness. So the holistic approach *de-recognizes* all the fragmentation in the name of religion or spirituality, all the compartmentalization in the name of social sciences, all the division in the name of politics, all the separation in the name of ideologies. When we understand the truth, we won't cling to the false. As soon as we recognize the false as the false, we no longer give any value to it. We de-recognize it in daily living. A psychic and psychological de-recognition of all

manner of fragmentation is the beginning of positive social action.

When awareness of the totality, of wholeness, dawns upon the heart, and there is awareness of the relationship of every being to every other, then there is no longer any possibility of taking an exclusive approach to a fragment and

getting stuck there. As soon as there is awareness of wholeness, every moment becomes sacred, every movement is sacred. The sense of oneness is no longer an intellectual connection. We will in all our actions be whole, total, natural, without effort. Every action or nonaction will have the perfume of wholeness.

Inner Freedom Is a Social Responsibility

VIEWING THE WORLD as a large pieced-together collection of fragments, some of which are labeled as friend and others as foe, begins internally. We map out our internal territories with the same positive or negative designations as we do external territories, and wars go on there as they do in the world. Internally, we are divided against ourselves; the emotions want one thing, the intellect another, the impulses of the body yet another, and a conflict takes place which is no different in quality, although it is in scale, from that of the world wars. If we are not related to ourselves in wholeness, is it any surprise that we cannot perceive the wholeness of the world? If we believe ourselves each to be a patched-together, unmatched assortment of desirable and undesirable features, motives at odds with each other, undigested beliefs and prejudices, fears, and insecurities, will we not project all this on the world?

Because the source of human conflict, social injustice, and exploitation is in the human psyche, we must begin there to transform society. We investigate the mind, the human psyche, not as an end in itself, as a self-centered activity, but as an act of compassion for the whole human race. We must move deep to the source of decay in society so that the new structures and social systems we design will have a sufficiently healthy root system that they will have an opportunity to flourish. The structures of society need to be transformed, but the hidden motivations and assumptions on which the structures rest need to be transformed as

well. The individual and collective values and motives that give sanction to the injustice and exploitation of modern society must become the focus of change as much as the socioeconomic and political structures. We no longer will be able to allow the motivations and values that underlie personal and collective behavior to remain hidden and unexamined. It serves no lasting purpose for us to change the surface structures and behaviors while the deep foundations remain decadent and unsound.

Those of us who have dedicated our lives to social action have considered our personal morality and ethics, our motives and habits, to be private territory. We not only want our personal motivations and habits cut off from public view, but from our own recognition as well. But in truth, the inner life is not a private or personal thing; it's very much a social issue. The mind is a result of collective human effort. There is not *your* mind and *my* mind; it's a *human* mind. It's a collective human mind, organized and standardized through centuries. The values, the norms, the criteria are patterns of behavior organized by collective groups. There is nothing personal or private about them. We may close the doors to our rooms and feel that nobody knows our thoughts, but what we do in so-called privacy affects the life around us. If we spend our days victimized by negative energies and negative thoughts, if we yield to depression, melancholia, and bitterness, these energies pollute the atmosphere. Where then is privacy? We need to learn, as

a social responsibility, to look at the mind as something that has been created collectively and to recognize that our individual expressions are expressions of the human mind.

Inner freedom from the past, from the thought structure, from the organized, standardized collective mind, is absolutely necessary if we are to meet one another without mistrust or distrust, without fear, to look at each other spontaneously, to listen to one another without any inhibition whatsoever. The study of mind and the exploration of inner freedom is not something utopian, is not something self-centered, but it is urgently necessary so that we as human beings can transcend the barriers that regimentation of thought has created between us. Then we will perceive ourselves, each as an unlabeled human being; not an Indian, an American, a capitalist, or a communist—but as a human being, a miniature wholeness. We have not yet learned to do that. We are together on this small planet, and yet we cannot live together. Physically we are near one another, and psychologically we are miles apart. Clearly the social responsibility for arriving at inner freedom is a very relevant issue. We study the mind because we want the harmony of peace to prevail, because we need the joy of love in our hearts, because we care about the quality of life our children will inherit. We do not undertake such study because we want something new and esoteric for the ego, some transcendental experiences to enhance our self-image. We study the mind as a social responsibility;

we recognize that the roots of violence, injustice, exploitation, and greed are in the human psyche, and we turn our clear, precise, objective attention there.

We are related organically, and we have to live that relationship. To be attentive to the dynamics of the inner being is not creating a network of escapes to avoid responsibility. It is not continuing a false superiority that I am sensitive and you are not. It is simply recognizing that our personal relationships and collective relationships are miserable affairs, and that these relationships stimulate fear and anxieties and throw us on the defensive. However much we yearn for peace, emotionally we are not mature enough for peace, and our immaturity affects everything we do, every action we take, even the most worthy of actions.

The elimination of inner disorder takes place in the lives of those who are interested in being truly creative, vital, and passionate whole human beings, and who recognize that inner anarchy and chaos drains energy and manifests in shabby, shoddy behavior in society. To be attentive requires tremendous love of living. It is not for those who choose to drift through life or for those who feel that charitable acts in society justify ugly inward ways of being. The total revolution we are examining is not for the timid or the self-righteous. It is for those who love truth more than pretense. It is for those who sincerely, humbly want to find a way out of this mess that we, each one of us, have created out of indifference, carelessness, and lack of moral courage.

***“When we come
face-to-face with
the actualities
of human and
planetary suffering,
what does the
powerful moment
of truth do to us?
Do we retreat
into the comforts
of theories and
defense mecha-
nisms, or are we
awakened at the
core of our being?”***

The Choice Is Ours

MOST OF US are not aware of our motivations for living or our priorities for action. We drift with the tides of societal fashions, floating in and out of social concerns at the whim of societal dictates and on the basis of images created by the media or superficial, personal desires to be

helpful, useful persons. We are used to living at the surface, afraid of the depths, and therefore our actions and concerns about humanity are shallow, fragile vessels easily damaged. Ultimately most of us are concerned chiefly with our small lives, our collection of sensual pleasures, our

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what do you think?



does the world need to be saved?



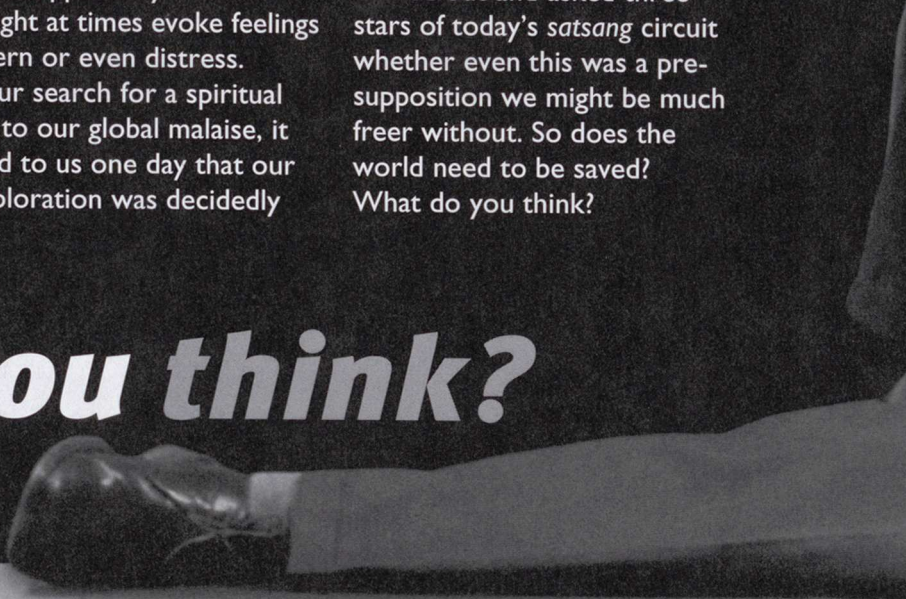
One of the hottest trends in today's booming spiritual marketplace is the burgeoning neo-Advaita *satsang* movement. Tracing their roots to the ancient Indian Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Shankara, this new breed of Western enlightenment teachers are bringing their message of effortless freedom here and now to an ever-growing audience of seekers around the world. According to this postmodern

doctrine of nonduality, the recipe for instantaneous spiritual freedom is the abandonment of all concepts—in particular, any and all notions of good and evil or right and wrong— notions that, in a world as apparently troubled as ours, might at times evoke feelings of concern or even distress.

In our search for a spiritual remedy to our global malaise, it occurred to us one day that our own exploration was decidedly

tethered to what, admittedly, was a very BIG concept: the notion that the world *needs* to be saved in the first place. Anxious to cover our spiritual backs with some nondual insurance, we rushed out and asked three stars of today's *satsang* circuit whether even this was a pre-supposition we might be much freer without. So does the world need to be saved? What do you think?

what do you think?



THE QUESTION:

As we enter the twenty-first century, there are few who would disagree that the world in which we live appears to be in crisis. Indeed, with widespread environmental destruction, a rapidly accelerating species extinction rate, a population explosion, and unchecked technological experimentation, many leading futurists, scientists, and social thinkers warn of potentially catastrophic changes ahead that may threaten the very survival of life as we know it. However, among those who have dedicated their lives to the spiritual quest, the question of how the individual should respond to this apparent crisis is a matter of some disagreement. On one hand, a growing number of contemporary spiritual activists are convinced that the spiritual vision must be brought to bear on all the problems of the world. Yet on the other, some teachers of enlightenment, of nonduality, have stated that if we truly enter into the spiritual vision, we will discover that everything is already perfect as it is. As a teacher of nonduality, what do you think? Does the world need to be saved?



what do you think?



THE ANSWER:

Wayne Liquorman

Your question presupposes that the separate human individual exists as something other than an expression of God, Consciousness, Source, Tao—whatever you call it. The question is truly not whether an individual should act this way or that, but rather, CAN an individual act other than in accordance

THE ANSWER:

Satyam Nadeen

Does the world need to be saved?
In one word—No! Are there spiritual activists who need to save the world?
Of course! How do you know if this applies to you? Only if you feel that attraction to do so from your own inner Wisdom. There is a part of me that knows the inter-connectedness of the infinite intelligence that

THE ANSWER:

Tony Parsons

The concept of there being something called “enlightenment” that can affect something called “the world” is born from the same basic misunderstanding that presumes the existence of a separate entity who could attain one and save the other!
Awareness is the original source of all that is! It is the

"If you were to discover a means to completely destroy the AIDS virus, you would be honored by all of humanity and no doubt be given the Nobel Prize. However, from the standpoint of the AIDS virus, you would be considered a genocidal maniac."

— Wayne Liquorman

Wayne Liquorman

with the will of God.

Pure Advaita points to the understanding that everything is ONE . . . all is Consciousness . . . all is God. Thus, from the perspective of Pure Advaita, every action, be it considered environmentally positive or negative, is a happening emanating from God, not an action created by the individual (even though the individual may be convinced that he is the author of his deeds).

It is doubtful that, given the choice, many would CHOOSE to be an environmental villain rather than to play the role of environmental savior, yet so far, in this drama of life, both villains and saviors have been created. Furthermore, the question of who is a villain and who is a savior depends completely on who is doing the judging. For example, if you were to discover a means to completely destroy the AIDS virus, you would be honored by all of humanity and no doubt be given the Nobel Prize. However, from the standpoint of the AIDS virus, you would be considered a genocidal maniac.

One of the most devastatingly revealing statements my guru, Ramesh S. Balsekar, ever made in my presence was: "The Universe is not human-hearted." I saw in that moment that humanity was simply a minute aspect of a hugely complex manifestation. Such understanding does not mean that one automatically stops caring about the environment or about human concerns. Rather, the actions that arise naturally as part of the nature of each individual are then seen as being the perfect functioning of God. Thus hatred, condemnation, and arrogant righteousness do not arise.

In the understanding that Consciousness is the author of every thought, every emotion, every action, true humility prevails. ■

Satyam Nadeen

comprises this old world.

Events don't feel to me like they are happening out of control, even when it appears they might be. My soul feels compassion for those who are suffering as a result of the surface chaos, and my limited mind then wants to "fix" the situation in whatever limited way possible. But in my own unique destiny as a vehicle for the Source to play in Its dream of creation, there is a Presence that giggles at the idea that fixing anything out there, including me, is necessary. I am fascinated with watching what lengths of cosmic soap operas our Consciousness will create to keep it all interesting and never boring. Just when you think it can't get worse, it does! Just when you see it all as hopeless, a solution creates itself. My role: Feel the fear, the anguish, the overwhelm of the scenario, and then let it go as "what is." And because all experiences are truly part of this dream, we also need the spiritual activists to fill the role of trying to save a world that doesn't need to be saved. ■

Tony Parsons

uncaused, unchanging, impersonal stillness from

which the all and everything of creation manifests, including the illusion of separation which generates the belief that there are objects called "enlightenment" and "the world."

There is no separate "me" reading these words. They simply arise in awareness as the apparent manifestation of print on paper.

All of creation is nothing more and nothing less than the invitation to rediscover that awareness is our original nature. Should that invitation need to include the apparent destruction of the so-called world, then that would be as appropriate as the apparent rejection or acceptance of this communication. ■



what do you think?

can they save us?

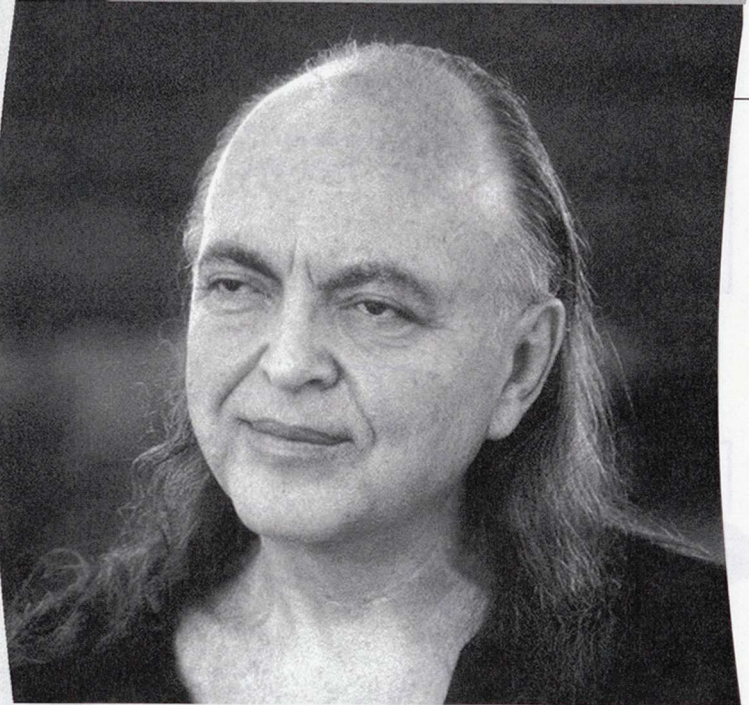
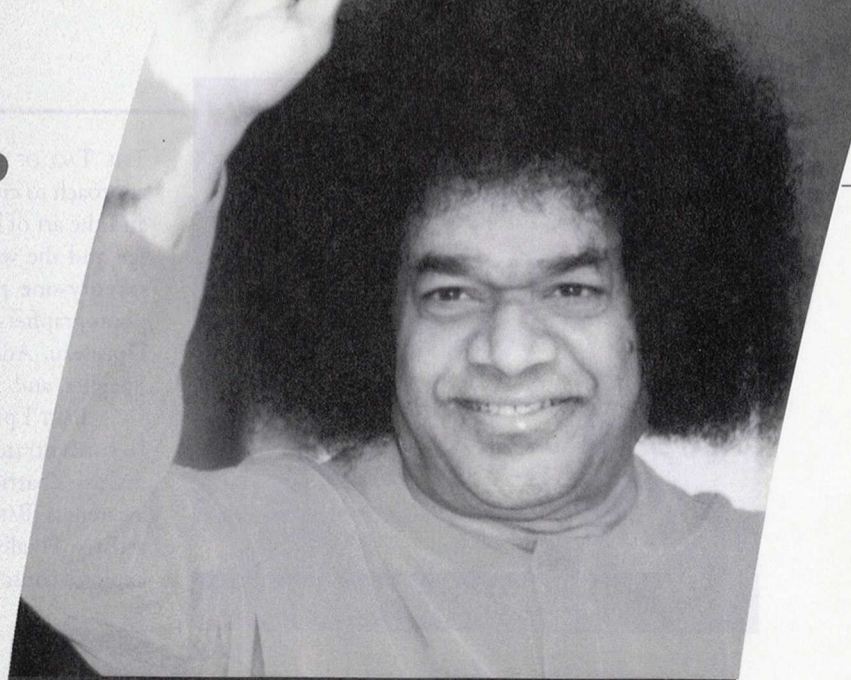
According to Hindu tradition, an Avatar (from the Sanskrit *avatara*, meaning “descent”) is an exclusive incarnation of God who manifests on earth only once in every great age, or *yuga*, of human and cosmic evolution to restore order and peace in the world. The Avatar, traditionally considered to be the incarnation of Vishnu, or embodiment of the Divine as Cosmic Preserver, descends and assumes a human form in those epochal moments of greatest spiritual crisis to inaugurate “a new era of truth.” In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna declares his divine function as an Avatar:

Although I am unborn and My transcendental body never deteriorates, and although I am the Lord of all living entities, I still appear in every millennium in My original transcendental form. Whenever there is decline in religious practice, O descendent of Bharata, and a predominant rise in irreligion—at that time I descend Myself. To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I Myself appear, millennium after millennium. Book IV:6–8

With our world and our species facing an evolutionary crisis such as we’ve never in 1.5 million years of human history encountered before, if there was ever a time we needed an Avatar, it is now.

Living among us in the world today are a number of individuals who, by their own declaration, are this very manifestation of the Avatar principle, descended in human form to restore peace, order, and righteousness in our *kali yuga*, or “dark age.” Can they save us?

what do you think?



Sathya Sai Baba

MY TASK is the spiritual regeneration of Humanity through Truth and Love.

Whenever there is a languishing of *dharma* or righteousness, and an upheaval of unrighteousness, I create myself, for it is part of the primal resolution, or *sankalpa*, to protect the spiritual structure of the universe. I lay aside my formless essence and assume a name and a form suited to the purpose for which I come. Whenever evil threatens to vanquish good, I have to come and save it from decline.

This is a human form in which every Divine entity, every Divine Principle, that is to say, all the Names and Forms ascribed by man to God, are manifest.

People tell me that mankind is on the brink of destruction, that the forces of hypocrisy and hate are fast prevailing on all continents, and that anxiety and fear are stalking the streets of every city and village in the world; there is no need to tell me this, for I have come precisely

continued on p. 118

Avatar Adi Da Samraj

AVATAR ADI DA SAMRAJ is not an egoic religious leader. Sooner or later, the world will come to know that the purpose of My Birth is to transform the world at a critical moment in history. And I will do it. But I need this vehicle of response. I need the human vehicle, because the purpose of My Birth is an epochal moment of Spiritual Intervention, and you are showing the same reluctance that has always appeared in those associated with Adepts in the past. When you have passed through this crisis of growth, you will begin to understand what has happened, what Force has been brought into the flesh through My Birth.

What I Submit to, I become, and this makes My Life a crucifixion. What you submit to Glorifies you, Awakens you, expands the sphere of your existence, and brings you into a Glorious Possibility. All of us will participate in that Glorious Possibility in time. I promise you will see this. But here we are in this human plane, involved in this great struggle, which is difficult, but made easier by My Coming here.

THE SEPARATION AND DIVISION and death of human beings all over the world is the dramatization of egoity made collective, made political. Understand that that is what is happening around you—all over the earth. And that egoity is not only being manifested

continued on p. 118

Mother Meera

THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF MY WORK is in the calling down of the *Paramatman* Light and in helping people. For this I came—to open your hearts to the Light. The consciousness of mankind is being prepared for great leaps and discoveries—in a gentle way wherever possible. But some things will have to be destroyed. I do not like to destroy . . . but where there is no openness, there must be destruction. However, God is giving man a great chance. Many divine persons are here. We are showing man a way out; we are offering him the divine Light, the divine knowledge. We are bringing down into the consciousness of the earth the divine consciousness.

Q: Is this a particularly dangerous moment for the earth?

MM: There are always some problems, but there is no danger that the world will be destroyed by them. The Divine will always give protection. Humans make many mistakes, but God protects, helps, pardons, and excuses them. That is

continued on p. 119

Sathya Sai Baba

for this reason. When the world is on the verge of chaos, the Avatar comes to still the storm raging in the hearts of men. *Prasanthi*, the higher Peace, will be established soon; the demonic deviations from the straight Divine Path will be corrected. *Dharma* will be revived and revitalized in every human community.

God incarnates for the revival of *dharma*, which includes morality, truth, virtue, love, and a host of other qualities that uphold the communities of man as well as the individual.

For the protection of the virtuous, for the destruction of evildoers, and for establishing righteousness on a firm footing, I incarnate from age to

age. Whenever *asanthi*, or disharmony, overwhelms the world, the Lord will incarnate in human form to establish the modes of earning *prasanthi*, or peace, and to reeducate the human community in the paths of peace.

This is a great chance. Many hesitate to believe that things will improve, that life will be happy for all and full of joy, and that the Golden Age will recur. Let me assure you that this *dharma-swarupa*, this divine body, has not come in vain. It will succeed in averting the crisis that has come upon humanity.

Transformation must begin with the individual. When the individual changes, the world will change.

This transformation has to take place in the minds of men. Right thoughts will lead to right actions.

Today the seeds are still in the ground, slowly germinating, as the teachings of the Lord begin to spread throughout the world and infiltrate the mind of man. Soon those seeds will begin to grow, and what emerges will brighten the world as the beauty of the Absolute Truth begins to reach so many people.

So you should live in hope. Let the divinity within shine forth and become one of the great beacons to light up the world and hasten the arrival of the new Golden Age. ■

— from *The Sathya Sai Baba Compendium* (Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1997)

Avatar Adi Da Samraj

politically and socially, it is being manifested in the whole atmosphere of the earth—the hole in the ozone layer, the possible rising of the tides, storms, destructiveness everywhere.

You can make a difference by cooperating with one another, by refusing the impulse to noncooperation among human beings, by manifesting the principles of your religion—of compassion, cooperation, and love. If you do not manifest those principles in your personal life every day, you are supporting the destructiveness that is going on all over the world. Am I asking too much?

You are at a critical time in this epoch. Do not ever manifest intolerance in your speech or in your life. Exhibit tolerance, compassion, love, freedom from self-obsessed acts in your life, in your speech, in your actions. This is not a moralistic matter. It is necessary for your survival. All over the earth people are dying every day, because of separatism, idealistic politics, dissociation, so-called “ethnic cleansing.” Human beings are being murdered casually, suffering intense, extraordinary pain.

You must understand the time you are in. . . . This is a very, very dark and difficult time. The situation on earth must change, or you and

future generations are not even going to get a chance at God-Realization. There are ground obligations. They are about tolerance, and compassion, and cooperation. You all have to get serious and end your petty preoccupations with your personal lives and get down to what is required for humanity to stop destroying itself. You are destroying the environment upon which you depend, and you are destroying the possibility of God-Realization in each one of you. It is time to become serious people. ■

— from a talk given in November 1983 and from *Drifted in the Deeper Land* (The Dawn Horse Press, 1997)



what do you think?

Mother Meera

the way of the Divine.

Q: What about nuclear destruction?

MM: When the divine grace is on man, no man-made creative energy can destroy the world. God is not blind and watches the situation. The destruction of humankind is a human idea, not the divine idea.

Q: How long will worldly conflicts go on?

MM: As long as there is the world, there will be conflicts—but things are improving.

Q: Will there be a real evolutionary leap for man coming out of this crisis?

MM: Man must work for that leap. Man must become conscious, must hunger for change, must desire this leap for it to happen. Aspiration and work are everything. My help is always given, my help and my Light.

Q: What can I do to further world peace?

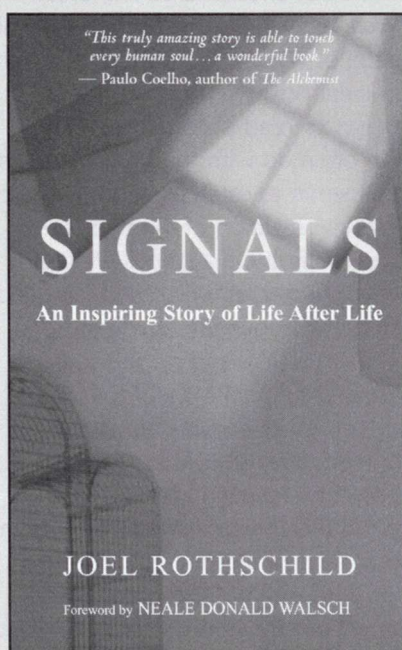
MM: Pray to Him that there should be peace. Bring down Light into your life so that you can do His work of peace in the world. Understand that the pain of the world will only be healed when the world is transformed in God, and work with all your heart and being that this should be accomplished. Do not be

distracted by anything from that work.

Those who love me will work with everything in the world—all the darkness and all the difficulties. Nothing must be avoided. . . . I am asking people to take on the whole difficulty of matter and reality. I have come in a body to show that this is possible. My grace and help and Light are there, but man must also do the work. People should not come to me if they just want to escape something. I have not come only to be a refuge; I have also come to give the joy and strength necessary for change. ■

— from *Answers*
(Meeramma Publications, 1991)

“A TRULY AMAZING STORY”*



*Paulo Cuello

“SIGNALS IS THAT TREASURE OF TREASURES
for which every thinking person searches.”

— Neale Donald Walsch, author of *Conversations with God*

▼ ▼ ▼

“A profound testimony to the tenacity of the human spirit and the courage of its author. What a blessing!”

— Iyanla Vanzant, author of *One Day My Soul Just Opened Up*

▼ ▼ ▼

“*Signals* is wonderful proof that the field of all possibilities exists and that within it we are never apart from those we love.”

— Deepak Chopra, author of *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*

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“A WONDERFUL AND INSPIRING STORY
of hope and of triumph over illness and devastating loss.”

— Brian L. Weiss, M.D., author of *Many Lives, Many Masters*

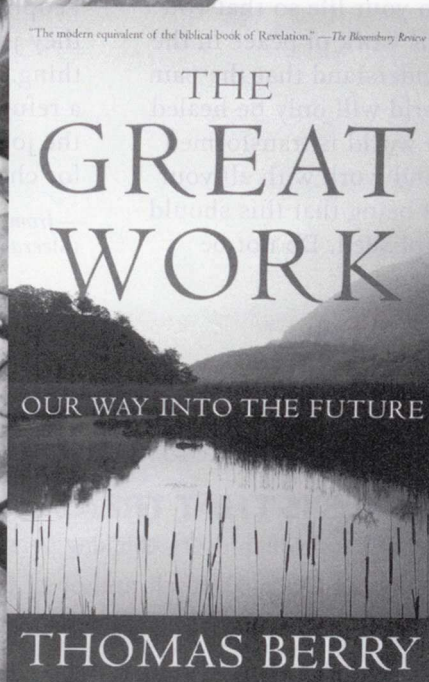
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book review

Susan Bridle considers eco-theologian Thomas Berry's resounding call to our ecological conscience. *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (Bell Tower: New York, 1999)

I sit here before a blank screen in a difficult predicament. I'm writing a review of a book that I feel very strongly about. Simple enough—ideally one *wants* to feel strongly about the books one reviews. But in this case, the trouble is, I also feel very strongly *divided* about it. One of the reviewers in my head wants to heap on the accolades and shout from the rooftops: *Read this book! It could change the world as we know it!* The other reviewer, unfortunately sharing the same keyboard, is needled with doubts and reservations and is tempted to take out my mental X-Acto knife and launch a pointed critique. The book provoking this war of the words is eco-theologian Thomas Berry's latest collection of essays, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*.

I first encountered *The Great Work* early in our preparation for this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* when our editorial team picked it up and began to read it aloud together, as we often do with the seminal books that serve as catalysts in our research and investigation of the themes we explore in the magazine. Chapter after chapter, as we passed it around, stopping frequently to reflect upon, exclaim about, and discuss some of Berry's key points, the book riveted our attention, driving home the horrors wrought on our fragile planet by human hands and the profoundly uncertain future of life in our ravaged biosphere. More than anything else we had come across, as we put together an issue devoted to examining the role of spiritual awakening in addressing the urgent environmental and social crises we



"The devastation taking place cannot be critiqued effectively from within the traditional religions or humanist ethics. We find ourselves ethically destitute just when, for the first time, we are faced with ultimacy, the irreversible closing down of the Earth's functioning in its major life systems. Our ethical traditions know how to deal with suicide, homicide, and even genocide; but these traditions collapse entirely when confronted with biocide, the extinction of the vulnerable life systems of the Earth, and geocide, the devastation of the Earth itself. . . . The human is at a cultural impasse. . . .

Radical new forms are needed."

—The Great Work

face today, *The Great Work* was a wake-up call. At times we fell into silence, stunned by the starkness of the picture Berry paints. He calls for an awakening of ecological conscience that goes far beyond a commitment to recycling or living the basic tenets of voluntary simplicity. The human/earth predicament is now so grave, Berry asserts, that only a radical re-visioning of what it means to be human on this planet will suffice. As we made our way through the book, a few chapters per afternoon over the course of a week, Berry's voice became a nagging mosquito in my mind. A deeper ecological conscience was indeed being called up from the roots. Yet inexplicably, at the same time, I experienced a sense of subtle suffocation, a kind of flattening effect on my consciousness, a dulling rather than a vivifying atmosphere that seemed very at odds with the starkness of the issues being confronted. I came away from our reading sessions convinced beyond doubt that *The Great Work* is a truly important book that many, many people should read, consider, and deeply grapple with—even while I continued to have significant questions about it.

A grandfather of the deep ecology movement and a Catholic priest in the Passionist order, Thomas Berry is a prophetic visionary, a voice of the crying wilderness, a resounding call to wake up from our nightmare of alienation from and devastation of the earth. *The Great Work* is the culmination of his lifetime of contemplation, as both a renowned cultural historian and a catalytic environmental activist, of humankind's evolving

relationship with our planet. His central thesis is that each era of human history has its own particular "Great Work," which can be seen as the central aspiration of a culture that gives shape to its cultural forms and worldviews and furthers the human venture in a distinct way. From the ascendancy of reason and humanistic values championed in classical Greece to the personal rights, religious freedom, and participatory government established by the Industrial Age, the arc of history is punctuated by these great movements that provide new forms and meaning for the human endeavor. "The Great Work now, as we move into a new millennium," he explains, "is to carry out the transition from a period of human devastation of the earth to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner. This historical change is something more than the transition from the classical Roman period to the medieval period, or from the medieval period to modern times. Such a transition

has no historical parallel since the geobiological transition that took place sixty-seven million years ago when the period of the dinosaurs was terminated and a new biological age begun." Humankind becoming truly "present to the planet" is the heart of the matter. "Our fulfillment is not in our isolated human grandeur," he insists, "but in our intimacy with the larger earth community, for this is also the larger dimension of our being. Our human destiny is integral with the destiny of the earth." What is now required of us is a wholesale "reinvention of the human, at the species level, . . . within the community of life-systems." For Berry, this is simply, unavoidably, "the historical mission of our times."

The wisdom of the past, Berry asserts, is entirely inadequate for the challenges that lie ahead. Our religious and cultural traditions took shape in ages when we had no notion of the vast extent of cosmological evolution, in eras when we little perceived the subtleties of the interdependencies and interactions

among species, in times when the pressure of humans on the planet through our burgeoning population and technology was far less lethal. "The devastation taking place cannot be critiqued effectively from within the traditional religions or humanist ethics," he writes. "We find ourselves ethically destitute just when, for the first time, we are faced with ultimacy, the irreversible closing down of the earth's functioning in its major life systems. Our ethical traditions know how to deal with suicide, homicide, and even genocide; but these traditions collapse entirely when confronted with biocide, the extinction of the vulnerable life systems of the earth, and geocide, the devastation of the earth itself. . . . The human is at a cultural impasse. . . . Radical new forms are needed. These new cultural forms would place the human within the dynamics of the planet rather than place the planet within the dynamics of the human."

Cosmologist Brian Swimme has described Berry's work as the emergence of a new eye and a new ear with which to see and hear the earth and comprehend our place within it. "Of course, in an obvious sense we have eyes and ears and we can regard the earth," Swimme writes. "We have photographs, geophysical surveys, historical studies. . . . But the vision of the earth Thomas Berry points to is something more. . . . [His] essays, . . . once assimilated, begin to rework one's visual, aural, intellectual, imaginative, emotional, and spiritual orientation in the world. . . . [In] our new experience [of] the earth through the eyes of Thomas Berry, . . . colors reveal unsuspected hues, and not all of them are soothing; sounds swell with new meanings, but not all of them are comforting; human actions bespeak hitherto unimaginable significance, but not all of it is complimentary."*

This, indeed, is the experience

of reading *The Great Work*. The solid center from which we usually perceive and evaluate the human enterprise is dismantled. Grappling with these pages forces a confrontation with one thing above all else: our deep-seated and pervasive anthropocentrism. In chapter after chapter, addressing everything from the horrors wrought on the North American continent and its peoples by European colonists and their enterprising successors to the failures of education, politics, economics, and religion in understanding and being responsive to our intimacy with the natural world, Berry exposes and erodes every vestige of human-centeredness. He laments the many ways that "we make everything referent to the human as the ultimate source of meaning and value, [for] this way of thinking has led to catastrophe for ourselves as well as a multitude of other beings." Berry strips away layers of fixed ideas about man's place on the planet and plants subversive seeds of doubt in one's deepest psyche about man's manifest destiny as the center of the great unfolding order of the universe. He asks us to think anew about everything we've ever believed about what it means to be a human being; what, in fact, makes us human; and what our role is within the great explosion of life.

Yet for all the profound reckoning with our ecological conscience, confrontation with our ego-centrism, and questioning of our entitlement to comfort and convenience that Berry demands, the other half of my schizophrenic experience of reading *The Great Work* didn't go away. I still couldn't help but feel an uneasiness about the possible risks of taking some of the tenets of Berry's deep ecology too far, particularly his assertion of the equality of the "human and other-than-human components" of the earth and the importance of "moving beyond

democracy to biocracy." When Berry decries our difficulty accepting the human being as simply a fundamentally equal, integral part of the biosphere—because we mistakenly "see ourselves as a transcendent mode of being"—I felt haunted by his seeming dismissal of that which in our deepest experience is a transcendent mode of being. As humans, we *do* have a capacity for greater awareness, self-reflection, and conscious participation in the evolution of the cosmic dance and the manifestation of the divine—a greater capacity than other forms of life, and therefore a greater responsibility, even though up to this point we have flagrantly failed to embrace this responsibility. Although Berry would certainly agree with this, his emphasis on biocracy as a corrective to our species' arrogance runs the risk of reducing humans to just one of many equally significant threads in the great web of life, thus not emphasizing and nourishing that in us which is highest, deepest, and which has the most potential to truly embrace the Great Work before us. And while Berry presents the Great Work of our time as an unprecedented evolutionary step forward, at the same time he makes the disturbingly reductionistic and backward-looking assertion that "Somehow we must reach even further back, to where our human genetic coding connects with the other species codings of the larger earth community. Only then can we overcome the limitations of the anthropocentrism that binds us." Although certainly Berry's and the deep ecology movement's critique of the stupor of self-indulgence and the destructive entitlement-consciousness that have been the legacy of our cultural traditions is compelling, urgent, and very much to the point, I questioned if Berry's prescription for "Our Way into the Future," as the book is subtitled, unsoundly mini-

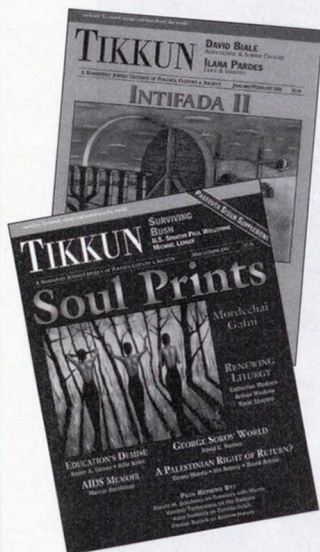
mizes the evolutionary importance of the transcendent dimension of the human experience.

As I grappled with my divided experience of Berry's vision, I reread some of integral theorist Ken Wilber's well-known critiques of the reductionism in many forms of contemporary eco-philosophy. As ever, he makes important distinctions, clearing murky waters of thought. Wilber points out that the deep ecology movement often engages in a kind of retrogressive "eco-romanticism" that mythologizes indigenous and Neolithic cultures, posits a potentially suppressive bioequality, and fails to appropriately acknowledge, embrace, and further the profound evolutionary developments in consciousness that have enabled us to arrive at the point when we can now finally, for the first time, genuinely engage the Great Work of reinventing the human in harmony with the planet.

What is the most profound, vast, evolutionary, and truly undivided vision of the way ahead, one that can truly encompass and fuel the undeniably Great Work before us? How do we genuinely shatter the illusion of separation between ourselves and all of life—from the depths of being, from the inside out? How, indeed, do we wake up from our nightmare of alienation and indifference and make the evolutionary leap from self-centrism to a profound care and concern for all of life? Father Thomas Berry has been deeply contemplating these questions for many decades and has brought the passion and vision of a lifetime to bear on them in a work that both deconstructs and reconstructs the role and place of the human on a planet that is bleeding at the roots. In turning the pages of this prophetic hymn to the earth, you may find yourself, as I did, deeply

confronted as Berry hammers the harsh reality of the pain of our ailing planet through layers of protective armor that we may not have known were there. "How much *do* I see and hear?" one is forced to ask. "How much *do* I still view myself as the center of the universe? How much *do* I *really* care?" As much as we might agree with Reinhold Niebuhr's statement that "We cannot build our individual ladders to heaven and leave the total human enterprise unredeemed of its excesses and corruptions," we have to ask ourselves: To what extent is our embattled earth *central* to our vision of the redemption of the human enterprise? And to what extent do we still have our hands and feet on the rungs of the ladder of isolated grandeur? ■

*From Brian Swimme's Introduction to *Dream of the Earth*, Thomas Berry (Sierra Club Books: San Francisco, 1990)



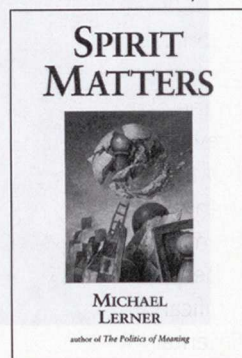
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What happens when a small independent spiritual magazine has lunch with a hot-shot New York consultant?

An open letter to our readers

At *What Is Enlightenment?*, we've recently been getting "enlightened" about the business of magazine publishing. You see, our accountant informed us a few months ago that despite our phenomenal success on the newsstands (we sell more copies on newsstands than many publications twice our size), our distribution expenses were growing just as fast as our income.

In an effort to find out what we were doing wrong, we took the advice of a friend and had lunch with a magazine consultant in New York. Somewhere between hors d'oeuvres and the main course, he made it clear to us that for all our well-intentioned efforts, we've been barking up the wrong tree. As it turns out, newsstand sales are simply not enough to make ends meet in the magazine business. In order to be truly successful, a magazine has to have the support of a strong base of subscribers.

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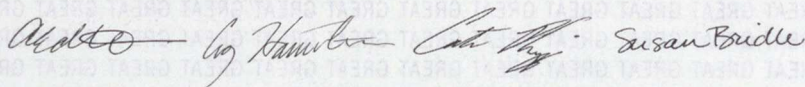
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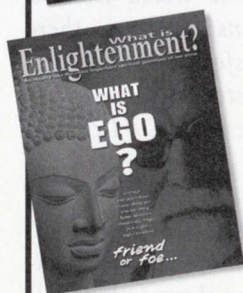
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Women, enlightenment, and the divine mother.

Accounts of personal experiences with: Mother Meera • Anandamayi Ma
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Issue 14

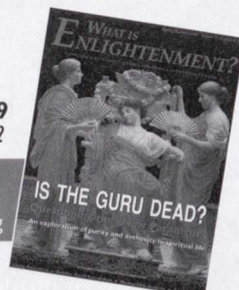
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places and circumstances the following question: If you look at the whole human family as a single individual, how old are we? Are we behaving like toddlers, teenagers, adults, or elders? And immediately, much to my surprise, people have had no problem understanding the question and overwhelmingly have said that we're in our teenage years as a species.

That prompted me to look at adolescent psychology. And, indeed, if you look at adolescents, they tend to be rebellious, just like we're rebelling against nature. They tend to feel that they're immortal, that they're going to live forever in their current form, and we are also living with disregard for the long-term consequences of our behavior. Adolescents tend to be into outward appearances—and here we are, this materialistic, consumer-oriented culture. So there are a lot of parallels between teenagers and the

behavior of the human family today. Now I have three sons in their late twenties and have seen them mature out of those adolescent qualities into a real concern for their families, their future, their work, and their relationships with others. And if we, as a human family, make that simple shift from our teenage consciousness into our early adult consciousness, I think the results will be organic, very natural, and quite amazing.

So I take confidence from having asked people about the age of the human family and having heard people respond so enthusiastically and so quickly that we're in our adolescent years. That suggests to me that a very normal, organic process of development and growth is taking place. We are approaching our natural opportunity to wake up and come to our early maturity as a species, and I have confidence in the deep integrity of the universe and in

our integrity, as a human family, in our journey.

WIE: *Social activists have often been harshly critical of the spiritual search as being overly narcissistic—concerned solely with the individual and indifferent to the larger concerns of society. At the same time, spiritual masters have long claimed that it is only through individual transformation that anything can ever truly change in society as a whole. For example, the highly respected master J. Krishnamurti is quoted as saying, "What you are, the world is. And without your transformation, there can be no transformation of the world." It is a question perhaps as old as the spiritual life itself: Do I change the world or do I change myself? Given our current evolutionary crisis, how do you understand the role of individual evolution versus that of collective change? For those individuals who have a powerful spiritual calling and who also care deeply about the state of the world, where should they put their energy and attention?*

DE: My sense is that it's a co-evolutionary process. We've thought that we could disengage from the world and have a spiritual enterprise that was our own process of awakening. It's wonderful to be awake in an ancient tradition, but it's also very important to integrate those lineages into the modern world. So we have a lot of bridging to do between the spiritual and the worldly, between the species mind and the species body, so to speak.

For example, if you look at the world's spiritual traditions and ask how many of them are looking at the mass media as an expression of the collective mind and, therefore, bringing insights from their traditions to help transform the mass media into a more enlightened, healthy expression of that collective

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mind—it's not happening. You don't read about this. But the mass media is a powerful tool for bringing the principles of insight developed in personal meditative practice into our collective practice of paying attention as a whole civilization. For example, in Buddhism, there is a list of factors of enlightenment or of a healthy mind, which include concentration, mindfulness, equanimity, etcetera. Now let's apply those to our whole civilization and use television as the most obvious manifestation of our species mind. Are we using television to be mindful? No, we're not. We're being contracted into a very narrow, small, consumerist view of the world. We're practically disconnected from the world. We do not understand these larger adversity trends that are impacting upon us. Are we using television to cultivate the capacity for collective concentration on critical choices? No, we're fostering distraction and fragmentation. Are we using television—our social brain—to cultivate equanimity? No, we're fostering collective agitation in much of the media produced now. My point is that irrespective of the spiritual tradition, there are general qualities of an awakened species mind that we need to begin cultivating as a human family if we're going to really deal with these serious challenges.

So I think we're discovering that we're deeply immersed in the species mind and that the species mind is not terribly awake at this point. But those who are awake are experiencing the suffering, the tension, and the stress of that species mind, which is struggling to awaken. And it's important for those who are working on their own wakefulness to be attentive to the species mind and to recognize that they are pioneers in a larger struggle, in a larger process of awakening. In many ways,

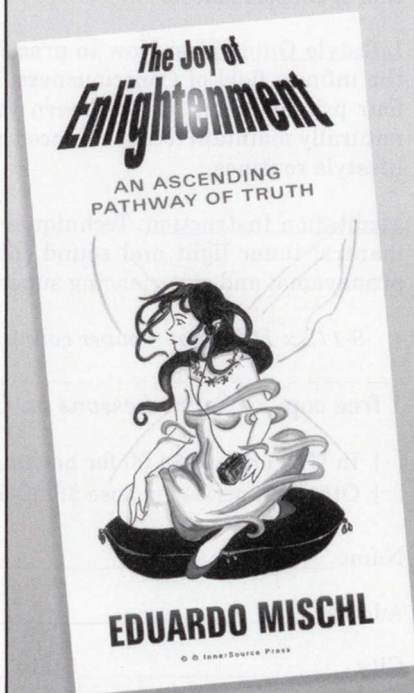
this is the call to species maturity that is being evoked by this time of initiation, this rite of passage as we move from a journey as individuals to a journey in communion with the rest of life, with other people, and with the species mind.

WIE: *Earlier you mentioned that to fulfill our purpose as Homo sapiens sapiens, or "doubly wise humans," is to "discover our place in this living universe." Could you explain how realizing our potential for double wisdom allows us to discover our place in the universe?*

DE: First of all, I think it's very important to look at nature's designs as we try to understand our evolutionary journey. And if we come into alignment with nature, my sense is that our evolutionary journey is going to be much easier and smoother. If you look at what nature's doing, whether at the atomic level, the human level, or the galactic, you see this common signature, a common shape that emerges, which, in a static form, looks like a doughnut and in its dynamic form could look like a tornado, a hurricane, or a whirlpool. Called a "torus," this is the simplest structure of a self-organizing system. Atoms have that structure; galaxies have that structure. And so what I infer is that at every level the universe has a central project, and what the universe is doing is creating self-organizing systems. Now *Homo sapiens sapiens* is the capacity to be consciously self-organizing. If you know that you know, you have the capacity to center yourself, to organize yourself, and to take charge of your life. Becoming a fulfilled *Homo sapiens sapiens* is the fulfillment of what the universe is all about. So as it turns out, we have given ourselves a name that is completely in alignment with the fulfillment of the universe's common purpose.

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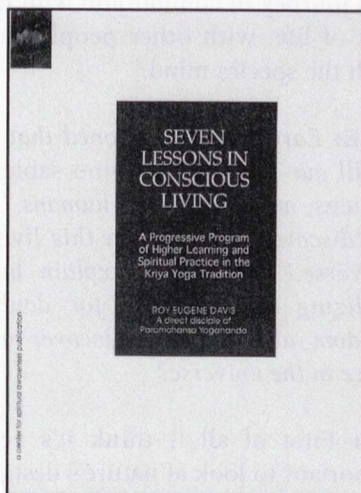
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WIE: You have also written about our common purpose in more explicitly spiritual language, suggesting that part of the human journey is the pursuit and discovery of who we are at the level of the soul, far beyond the confines of our physical bodies. In the evolutionary process, we can ultimately recognize ourselves to be, as you put it, “a body of light and knowing.” Could you explain what you mean by this “body of light and knowing,” and do you believe that this is the final endpoint of human evolution?

DE: Physicists talk about the basic building block of this reality as being the photon, which is light. Now that means we already live in an ecology of light, that we already are beings of light, right now. It's just that it's fairly dense here. So you could say that the endpoint of evolution is already in front of us, in that sense. As we fulfill our potential for knowing that we know, often this awakening is described as being bathed by a light with immense wisdom and compassion. I feel that we are immersed in that light right now in the midst of a living universe. Evolution seeks to allow that light to flow into our being and then out into expression in the world. Now, is that the final endpoint of evolution? I don't think so. What I think is happening is something perhaps even more extraordinary. As we come to our center of knowing that we know, that's really just the beginning of evolution. When we are stabilized in our own deeper sense of self, we can then move in the deep ecologies of eternity as conscious, active, co-creative participants. So rather than the endpoint, it's really the starting point. I think the cosmos is a place for life-forms to come to self-referencing knowing freely. Realizing our potential for double wisdom marks the beginning point of a whole new phase of evolution. ■

call "comprehensive compassion." What do you mean by "comprehensive compassion"?

BS: Well, when we use words like compassion, we tend to limit them to the human world. And part of this goes back to what I said before, that we think of the rest of the universe as being *stuff*, and we don't use words that are spiritual or warm or emotional concerning them. The scientific tradition has always called that "projection"—projecting your own qualities upon the universe as a whole or upon nature. And that's supposed to be a terrible thing to do. But I think that's breaking down as we begin to realize that it's all one energy event. It's one journey, one story, so that the qualities that are true of the human are in some way or another true of other parts of the universe. So I talk about compassion as a multilevel reality.

It's not just something that's true of humans.

My interpretation is this. I think that gravitational attraction is an early form of compassion or care. If there weren't that kind of care at the foundation of the universe, there would be no formation of galaxies—and we wouldn't be having this discussion. This care or compassion begins to show up in the organic form when you have a bond developing between a mother and her offspring. You know, for a long time, there's no bond. There's no care—at least no visible way of seeing care—for instance, with bacteria. They replicate. There could be care there, but we haven't recognized it yet. But by the time you get to mammals, two hundred and twenty million years ago, you have this bond between the mother and the child. That arrives as a genetic mutation. But because of that, the offspring have a higher chance of

surviving. So that mutation then spreads and starts to characterize the entire population. That's just the bond between a mother and an infant. Then other bonds develop between siblings, and they have a higher chance of survival. All of what I'm saying fits into Darwinian biology. This isn't outside of mainstream science. What it says is that the dynamics of Darwinian biology *favor* the appearance of compassion. It shows up between mother and child. It shows up between siblings, and it even develops between kin groups. And it starts to spread.

Now the human comes into existence. We are the first species that actually has the possibility of caring about *all* of the other species. You see, chimpanzees are our closest relatives, and they certainly care about one another, but their care doesn't extend over in any visible way to other species, even though they may share territories with

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baboons. I've asked naturalists if they've seen a chimpanzee take care of a baboon, and they haven't. But with humans, suddenly you have the possibility, largely through the human imagination, of actually caring. I mean, I care. I care so much about the cheetahs. And I've never even been around a wild cheetah. My point is that the human being is that space in which the comprehensive compassion that pervades the universe from the very beginning now begins to surface within consciousness. That's the only difference. We didn't invent compassion, but it's flowing through us—or it could. The phase change that we're in seems, to me, to depend upon that comprehensive compassion unfurling in the human species.

WIE: You're suggesting that throughout evolution, Darwinian natural selection has favored the formation of bonds of care and concern, but that

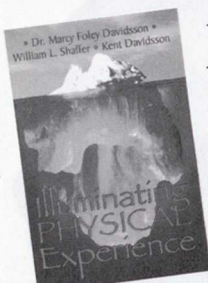
now, in the human, we have the opportunity and the responsibility to extend that care and concern consciously beyond what is already genetically determined. In your video series *The Earth's Imagination*, you say: "It's terrific that you love your family members, but what about the species that are outside the reach of your genes emotionally? That's the challenge. Doesn't it seem ungrateful of us if we are just carried along by the emotional bonds that have been established by the past? What if we devote ourselves to developing a more profound concern for all species?" Can you speak about how to actually do this—how to extend the reach of our care and concern?

BS: My conviction is that the first step is just paying attention. What's amazing is that, as humans, if we dwell on anything, after a while we become fascinated by it. It doesn't matter what it is. The ability to

dwell on things is uniquely human because we don't have such fixed action programs as other species do. We can forget about everything else and just dwell on something. I call it the power of gawking. We can pay attention to whales or to the hummingbirds and just become fascinated by them. It's noticing in a deep way, or contemplating, and my intuition is that as humans allow themselves to be fascinated by the other creatures, these species will awaken the psychic depths in the human that respond to their beauty. And then we become convinced that in some amazing way, they are essential to us. We can become amazed by how essential they are for our zest, our sense of well-being or happiness. Chief Seattle said that if the animals were not here, we would die of loneliness. I think that a deeper feeling of care begins with allowing ourselves to move into awe—with

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all of the different creatures, no matter which ones we've picked. If we would attend to them, we would see their colossal grandeur. Abraham Heschel said that awe is the first step into wisdom. You can just sit and watch fish and think of how they've developed over hundreds of millions of years and imagine what they're experiencing, and after awhile you're sunk into contemplation of ultimacy. This is what I think is the first step toward compassion.

WIE: Many spiritual traditions speak about transcending self-centeredness and expressing profound care for others as being the whole point of the spiritual path. Changing our fundamental motivations and making the leap from fundamental self-concern to a condition in which one's life is based on genuine care and concern for the whole of life is quite a radical transformation. Spiritual paths committed to this kind of transformation usually involve enormous dedication, and often years of extensive spiritual practice. Yet the situation that we're in now on this planet is critical. Do you think that it is still possible for enough people to make this leap quickly enough to see us through our current crisis?

BS: Well, I think the universe is carrying this out. But we get to participate in it consciously. And in a real sense, it's very important that we participate. At the same time, it's important to remember that we're not doing it. I mean, the universe has been working on this for a long time, and right now, it's exploding within human consciousness. But we're not in charge of it. So I haven't got the slightest idea if we have enough time. That's almost a secondary question to me. It just seems so *deeply* right that we be thinking about this and working

on this. But I think all of the spiritual traditions are going to be accelerated as they learn about this new cosmology and this moment that we face as a human species. There'll be an amplification taking place. So, it could go very quickly. Or it might take thousands of years. I don't know.

WIE: Your vision of spiritual awakening is an embrace of the cosmic evolutionary journey of the universe as ourselves and a shift from seeing ourselves as separate individuals to identifying with the universe itself as the greater Self. What do you think about the Eastern mystical traditions that direct us to solely look within for enlightenment, and about statements such as this one by renowned Hindu sage Ramana Maharshi: "All controversies about creation, the nature of the universe, evolution, the purpose of God, etc., are useless. They are not conducive to our true happiness. People

try to find out about things which are outside of them before they try to find out 'Who am I?' Only by the latter means can happiness be gained."*

BS: I can only tell you my orientation. It's just that there are so many things that we care about, that we carry in our hearts, that we want to help. People are suffering. Animals are suffering. So how can I interact in a way that would be helpful? That's my focus. All that I think about is somehow related to that. Just to be responsible and to participate in a process that will deepen joy. That's the only way I can put it. That's my high hope. There can be such a tendency for the individual to focus on "my enlightenment" and so forth. But it just doesn't seem to be what is really needed right now. Or it's not enough. ■

*Be As You Are: The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi, ed. David Godman (Arkana: New York, 1985)

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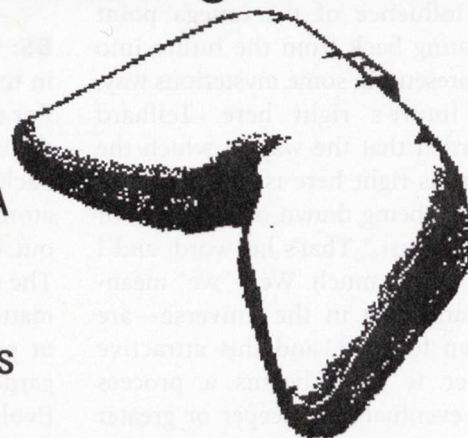
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process. And he makes the point that one of the difficulties is that, up until the present moment, we have tended to see ourselves *inside of these traditions*. But now, he says, it's the *universe* that is our home. So it's a way of valuing them but seeing them from the proper perspective of the ultimate context—which is the universe as a whole.

WIE: *Teilhard is probably best known for his idea of the “omega point.” The term has become quite popular, but it seems that few people really understand what he meant by it. Can you explain Teilhard’s omega point?*

BS: By the “omega point,” Teilhard meant a universe that had become God. He meant God *in embodied form*. He regarded the omega point as two things. It's an event that the universe is moving toward, in the future. But what he also imagined, which is difficult for us to really conceive, is that even though the omega point is in the future, it is also exerting a force on the present. When we think of the omega point, in our Western consciousness it's hard to escape thinking in terms of a line with the omega point at the end of the line. His thinking wasn't that way; it was that the omega point permeates the whole thing. He imagined the influence of the omega point radiating back from the future into the present. In some mysterious way, the future's right here. Teilhard regarded that the way in which the future is right here is in the experience of being drawn or attracted, or in our “zest.” That's his word, and I love that so much. We—“we” meaning anything in the universe—are drawn forward, and this attractive power is what begins a process that eventuates in deeper or greater being. That attraction he regarded as love, and it is evidence of the presence of the omega point. When

you experience that attraction, that zest, you're experiencing the future. You're experiencing the omega point. You're experiencing God. You're experiencing your destiny.

WIE: *What does it mean for the universe to become God?*

BS: Because we're in the midst of this process, at the best we can have crude images, metaphors. We have little glimmers and insights. The image that I like is this: You have molten rock, and then all by itself, it transforms into a human mother caring for her child. That's a rather astounding transformation. Of course, it takes four billion years. You've got silica, you've got magnesium. You've got all the elements of rock, and it becomes the translucent blue eye and beautiful brown hair and this deep sense of love and concern and even sacrifice for a child. That is a deep transfiguration. Love and truth and compassion and zest and all of these qualities that we regard as divine become more powerfully embodied in the universe. That would be an image of how I think about the universe becoming divine.

WIE: *So it's a process of God becoming more and more explicit or embodied in the forms of the universe?*

BS: Yes, exactly. Teilhard also spoke in terms of “giving birth to person.” For example, your colleague Craig is there across the room. But if you go back five billion years, all of the atoms in Craig's body were strung out over a hundred million miles. The process, as mysterious as it is, of matter itself forming into personality or personhood, is what Teilhard regarded as the essence of evolution. Evolution isn't cold. He saw the omega point as that same process of giving birth to or actualizing this new, encompassing Divine Person—

through not just all the atoms interacting with one another, but also the ‘persons’ of all the humans and other animals. All of us together are part of this same process, so that the entire universe becomes God's body. To really get how radical Teilhard's view is, think about an animal and dissolve the animal back in time in your imagination, back into individual cells. There weren't any multicellular organisms until about seven hundred million years ago. For over three billion years, there were just single-cell organisms. If you get to know an animal well, the animal really has a personality. But the personality is something that is evoked by the cells of the animal. It's truly mysterious. The animal's personality is real, but that personality is evoked by the cells. So in Teilhard's view, the individual members of the universe are actually in a process of evoking a Divine Person. We are actually giving birth to a larger, more encompassing, mind-spirit-personality.

WIE: *In one sense, that was no less true sixty-five million years ago than it is now. But at the same time, humans are now becoming conscious of our own evolution and our conscious participation in this larger process. How do you think that has changed this process?*

BS: Well, I think the difference is that while every member of the universe participates in the construction of the cosmos, that participation proceeds without a conscious reflection upon it. We, too, are participating in constructing the cosmos, but we have the awareness that we're doing that. That's the essential difference of being human. We recognize this process as happening, and we can actually awaken to the fact that we are actively doing it. We're not just doing it. We're awakened to the fact

that we're doing it.

This then calls for spiritual development so that we can find our way between the two extremes of how we tend to respond to this. On the one hand, we can be so overwhelmed by what that means, so frozen by the responsibility, that we divert ourselves from really embracing that destiny. And I think that happens a lot. Right now it's what our civilization is about, for the most part. But the other extreme actually is just as bad. We become so inflated with the thrill of that role that we lopsided into thinking that we are the real action of the universe and that the human, and human enlightenment, is all that really matters. But I think it's not that. It's rather that we're participating in this huge, vast, intricate event, and we're a member of the community, but we seem to be especially destined to reflect upon this and to participate in it consciously. So I try to emphasize

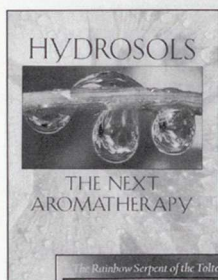
the fact of uniqueness here—but at the same time there's an equality. There's both. We're unique in our particular role. But on an ontological level, there's an equality. We're not somehow superior to the moon or to the phytoplankton or to the spiders or to anything else. Everyone is essential.

WIE: *What is the importance of Teilhard's understanding of evolution and the role of the human being for our current planetary crisis?*

BS: There are two points I'd want to make. First, Teilhard's thoughts on evolution enable us to begin to appreciate the true significance of our moment. It's extremely difficult for us to really understand what it means to make decisions that will have an impact on the next ten million years. Even if you understand the idea, it's only at one level of your mind. So studying Teilhard's thought

and his work can be considered a spiritual practice for beginning to think at the level that is required of humans today—to think in chunks of ten million years, for example. It's so hard for people to get that.

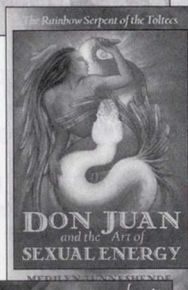
The second thing I would say is that much of ecological discussion is framed in negatives because the destruction is so horrendous that anybody with any intelligence whatsoever, once she or he looks at it, becomes gripped by just how horrible it is. One of Teilhard's great contributions is that he enables us to begin to imagine that this transition has at least the possibility of eventuating in a truly glorious mode of life in the future, and his vision provides the energy that we need for enduring the difficulties of this struggle. That, to me, is extremely important. He can activate the deep, deep, deep zest for life and existence that I think is required for true leadership in our time. ■



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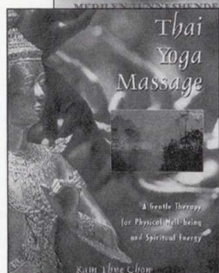


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just deeply disappointed. Other people have turned their backs on them when they opened themselves and made themselves vulnerable. And as a result, they are fearful of making themselves vulnerable again. So out of fear of that humiliation, people begin to develop a deep cynicism about where everyone else is. I've found that the most cynical people are the ones who, at earlier stages in their life, opened themselves up to hope and were disappointed by others—and often were disappointed by others who themselves had been disappointed by others. So there's a cycle of despair in which we believe that nothing fundamental can happen, and then we convey this to others. And that develops a cynicism.

AC: You express a fiery optimism that displays an unusual strength of conviction in the inherent goodness of the human heart, and you demonstrate that optimism while remaining firmly rooted in the trenches—passionately fighting for true sanity, real equality, and justice for all in a brutal world where man's capacity for selfishness and inhumanity often seems literally overwhelming. Without the kind of optimism that you are grounded in, it would be impossible to fight the good fight for as long and as hard as you have without becoming discouraged and disheartened. What's the source of your enduring optimism, and how can others realize the same strength of conviction that you have to fight the good fight for everyone else's sake?

ML: My own optimism is based on the history of the human experience as I have understood it—in particular, the history of the Jewish people and how we came from being in the most degrading of all possible positions, slaves, to becoming free. And how we shaped our path and faced,

over the course of the past thirty-two hundred years, an incredible amount of suffering and pain and yet, at the same time, were able to transcend that and keep going. So the experience of the Jewish people is the one in which my own particular optimism is rooted.

And then, of course, there's an act of faith—because in the end, there is no set of facts about the universe that will be sufficient to generate a basis for either optimism or pessimism. The facts can be arranged in such a way as to sustain an optimistic account, or they can be arranged in such a way as to sustain a pessimistic account. And in the end, there's a faith act there, and the only thing I want to say about that faith act is that it's as much a faith act to choose to believe in the triumph of evil and negativity as it is to choose to have faith in the triumph of hope and goodness.

AC: The experience of enlightenment, or nonduality, reveals to us that what is happening here in this world is only a part of the whole of reality, only a part of the totality. And it is said that the direct experiential knowledge of that totality alone has the power to liberate the individual from the distorting and corrupting influence of the human ego. Indeed, from the perspective of enlightenment, it is only freedom from the fears and desires of the ego that enables the human heart and mind to experience what could be called true objectivity in relationship to all temporal experience. Without that degree of objectivity, how would it be possible to fight the good fight that we all have to fight if this crazy world is really going to change without making important errors of judgment? Interestingly enough, a respected enlightened master, Eckhart Tolle, recently responded to a question I asked him about right action in the world by saying that it absolutely

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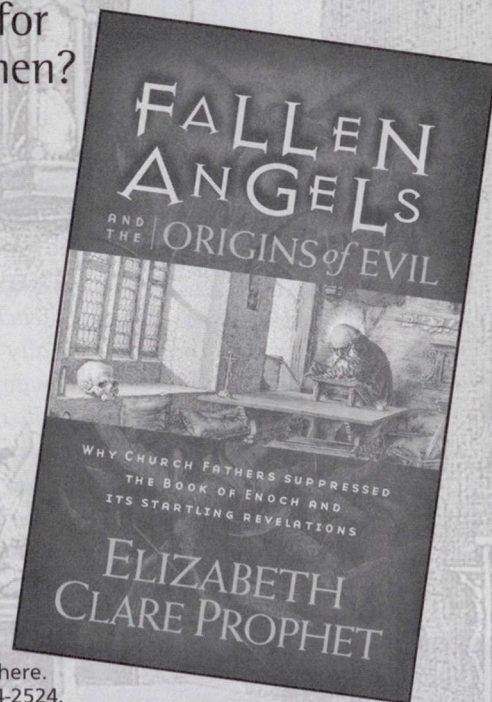
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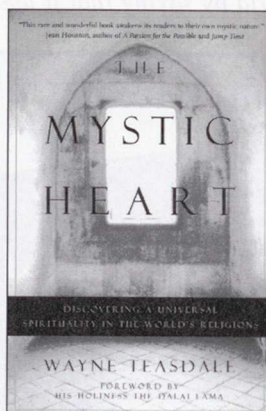
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wouldn't be possible for a human being to truly live the Ten Commandments or the teachings of Jesus, such as "love your neighbor as yourself," unless they were already fully enlightened. What is your view on this?

ML: My view is that there is no possibility of saving this world without overcoming all the distortions that our ego presents to us. And that the more we're able to do so, the more we are potentially able to be engaged in the struggle to transform the world. So spiritual practice, to me, is absolutely central to building a transformative social movement and to sustaining oneself as an agent of transformation. Having said that, I then want to say that from my perspective, most people who claim to be enlightened seem to *not* be where I would want to be. The reason I say this is that I think there are far too many people in the spiritual world who seem to be involved in a process of overcoming ego that doesn't lead them to action to transform the pain and suffering of everyone around them. And that is a level of consciousness that is not close to what I understand by enlightenment. I simply cannot understand how somebody could be a spiritual being and not be *actively* involved in transforming the world.

AC: Although there are exceptions, teachers of enlightenment are generally not passionate idealists. In fact, many tell us to be less concerned with the chaos of the world, and more concerned with the cultivation of liberation from it. They say that idealism is merely a construct of the unenlightened mind and that excessive concern about the transformation of the world is a sign of a lack of self-knowledge in the individual. They say that the perfection and wholeness that the idealist strives to manifest in the world is in fact already the inherent

state of all things at all times—which the individual would recognize if only they could let go of their need to see things in any particular way, if only they could let go of their idealism. And yet, one of the fundamental tenets of Judaism is *tikkun olam*, which is also the name of your magazine—*Tikkun*. *Tikkun olam* speaks of the obligation, as you described earlier, to be God's partner in the healing and transformation of the planet.

So my question to you is, What is the relationship, if any, between the revelation of wholeness, perfection, and completeness—the revelation of enlightenment—and the commandment to bring the perfect goodness of God into the world through our own actions in the world? What's the relation between the inherent perfection of all things and *tikkun olam*?

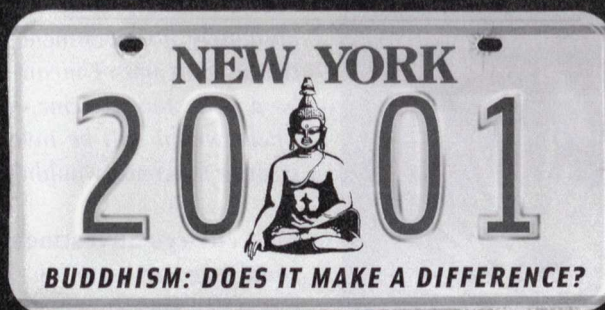
ML: When one has a true understanding of all of reality, and is present to all of reality, one also understands one's role as part of the unfolding of the goodness of the universe and one's obligation to act to transform and heal it. And that is *not* in opposition to an understanding of the totality—

AC: But there are some perspectives that would say that any desire to do anything except absolutely nothing is ego. They say that from the highest position there would be no desire whatsoever to do anything other than absolutely nothing.

ML: Yes. But to that I would say, this is a way of doing nothing. This is a way to transcend all ego desire and simply be a manifestation of God in the universe. The way to be a manifestation of God in the universe is to heal and transform the universe, as a transcendence of all desire, ego, and particularity—not as an expression of ego-driven desire.

AC: Teachers of enlightenment often tell us that it is our attachment to the world and to everyone and everything in it that is the root cause of our suffering—of all false and wrong views. They say that true compassion for the world can only be a result of detachment from the world. They say that as long as we are attached to the world, our passions, our lusts, our fears, and our desires will obscure or distort our vision, making the emergence of true or enlightened compassion impossible. At the same time, when we put too much emphasis on the cultivation of detachment, there's always the danger of becoming lost in a not-so-subtle form of spiritual narcissism and even indifference to the suffering in the world. And also, if we all wait until we're fully enlightened and have become perfectly fit vehicles for enlightened compassion before we are ready to respond to the overwhelming needs of this world, nothing will ever change. So in your view, what is the relationship between compassion and detachment in our response to the suffering of the world?

ML: Detachment is an extremely important element in moving to the level from which one can engage in compassionate transformation of the universe. When one is truly detached from one's ego and one's own needs and one's own desires, one can simply be a manifestation of God's energy in the world. And the way that one will be a manifestation of God's energy in the world is to be passionately involved in social change movements to transform the world. But that passion is a passion that is a manifestation of nonattachment to any particular outcome or to a fulfillment of one's own needs. One would merely be a clear vehicle through which God, the energy of the totality of all Being, pours itself out into the universe.



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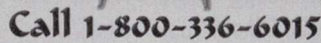
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ML: Well, I'd say two things. On one level, *I* am not in a position to know all the possible ways to serve God and bring God's goodness into the universe. So it seems to me perfectly possible that the total spiritual unfolding of the universe requires both people like me and people like the ones you just described. But the second level of my answer is that, from my limited perspective, I actually don't understand how somebody could be a full manifestation of the goodness and love of the universe and not be so deeply affected by the pain and

suffering of others as to want to alleviate it directly. Now, I know that the answer of some people in the traditions you're referring to would be, "Yes, this is the way to alleviate that suffering, through this kind of spiritual practice." To which I would say, "As far as I can see, over the last few thousand years that hasn't actually been working so well in those communities where this kind of view is held by the spiritual leadership." For example, within the Hindu world, I haven't seen the level of suffering decrease so dramatically there. The accounts of suffering that I hear from that world seem not to have been affected enough by that form of spiritual action. So I want a different form of spiritual action, one which, for example, pays attention to not having a caste of people who are untouchables. Or that is concerned about a way of treating women that involves, among other things, having widows throw themselves on the burning funeral pyres of their husbands. There are a number of things that happen in that world in which the suffering of people doesn't seem to have been dramatically decreased by the spiritual traditions. The sensitivity to these issues didn't emerge from the spiritual traditions you're talking about. Now you might say, "Well, that isn't real suffering. The only real suffering is attachment." But from my standpoint, that's another way of saying, "I don't really care about the suffering of certain kinds of people." And to not really care seems to me to be a lower level of consciousness, a consciousness that really doesn't connect to the totality of all Being. So again, from my standpoint, I see many people who put themselves forward as spiritual masters as actually being people who have absorbed a certain amount of powerlessness into their

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consciousness. I actually believe them to be caring people who have given up on the possibility of eliminating the suffering in the world on any level except the one that they themselves could immediately control—which is very different from what it would take to change the rest of the world. Because to change the rest of the world would mean having to work with other human beings. And when you're working with other human beings, you can't control them. Whereas you have at least a better chance of being able to control what's going on in your own mind. And so because of this despair about the difficulty of working with others to change the world, people then enter into a spiritual tradition which says, "Okay, go as far as you can by yourself." That, I believe, is a misunderstanding of the unity of all Being and the interconnection of all human life; it's actually a spiritual consciousness that isn't evolved enough. I think there needs to be a different level of evolution in which one could get to the point of recognizing that, yes, the world is in pain. It needs healing and the healing requires working with others.

Now once you get to that, you then find this next point: In order to work with others, you're going to have to work with others who are not fully evolved, who are not as developed in their consciousness as you are, let's say. And I want to emphasize here that I don't put myself forward as being at the highest level of that evolution of consciousness myself. But what I argue, what I believe, is that to heal this planet, to save it from the ecological destruction that is facing us, to keep us from the various ways in which we are on a fast-track toward the destruction of the human experiment or the human experience, we are going to have to recognize that

we need each other to transform this world. And to need each other means that we have to build social transformation with millions and millions of people who are themselves deformed—psychologically, spiritually, emotionally, at every possible level. In my view, that's all there is on the planet. There is nothing else. There is nobody who hasn't been somewhat spiritually deformed and that includes these people who sometimes put themselves forward as fully realized beings. What's their deformation? That they have given up on hope and have isolated themselves to a point where they think that the highest goal is to get themselves into this place of transformed consciousness and are able, as a result, to turn their back on the pain and suffering of so many others. That is a form of deformation that is every bit as much a deformation in my view as all the other forms of deformation. There's nothing else on the planet but us deformed beings, and it's us deformed beings who are going to have to build the transformation to save this planet from destruction. So consequently, the appropriate attitude is one of much greater compassion for our own failure to be fully at the point of enlightenment and for the failure of everybody else to be fully at the point of enlightenment. The movement that will change this world will be made up of limited, unenlightened human beings who, through more compassion, can move toward that enlightenment. But we can't wait for everyone to achieve it before we act to at least stop the greatest crazinesses that are going on at the present moment.

AC: And part of that compassion is also that uncompromising urgency.

ML: Absolutely.

AC: In your message, there is an interesting paradox. A paradox between your revolutionary call that is defined by an inspiring unwillingness to compromise with the status quo and, at the same time, your plea to always be compassionate with ourselves and others. On one hand, you stress the need to be compassionate, yet on the other hand, you passionately shout, "Hey, everybody, wake up because there's no time to waste." And the waking up you're referring to means right now. So I see a great tension between these two positions: "Be compassionate and gentle with yourself" and, at the same time, "Wake up right now!"

ML: That's exactly right. I think you put it very beautifully. There's a tension. And spiritual life is about balance, and getting the right balance between those two—between, on the one hand, the pull of hearing the spiritual voice of

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the universe screaming out, "The world can be healed and transformed, and you have to be part of it. You must be a manifestation of the goodness and love of the universe," and on the other hand, the other voice that says, "Be compassionate and recognize the limits that we have, and don't judge, don't be harsh, don't be hurtful toward the ways in which you can't fully transcend. Accept the limitations." And so, yes. These are two different pulls.

AC: Yes, but isn't that "balance" you're referring to actually a completely non-static position—a mysterious place in which both extremes dissolve?

ML: Yes, absolutely.

AC: Because you're describing a position or a place of incredible evolutionary tension.

ML: Yes, the spiritual evolution of the universe moves in this way.

AC: In a previous issue of *What Is Enlightenment?*, Ken Wilber wrote an article for us called "A Spirituality That Transforms." In that article he describes the difference between what he calls "translative" and "transformative" spirituality. Translative spirituality he defined as that spirituality that consoles the ego or the separate sense of self and gives it a vitally important and empowering sense of purpose, place, and security in what, from the perspective of the ego, seems to be a deeply insecure universe. Transformative spirituality he defined as being not that which consoles the ego but that which literally shatters it. The former he called horizontal spirituality, and the latter he called vertical spirituality. So what I'd like to ask you is, What is the role of translative spirituality in

the awakening of humanity to its responsibility to save the world for the sake of all sentient beings and all of life? And what is the role of transformative spirituality in the awakening of humanity to its responsibility to save the world for the sake of all sentient beings and all of life?

ML: First, I don't see these as so counterposed. That is to say, although I very much loved Wilber's distinction, I see them often as occurring in the same human being. People often have both elements within them. Now, with regard to translative spirituality, I believe that the task of overcoming the pain and distortion in the universe involves, on the one hand, healing some of the pain that the ego generates. And on the other, it also involves healing some of the pain that generates the ego. Translative spirituality can work at both of those levels. It can help people overcome some of the

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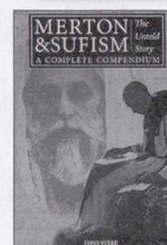
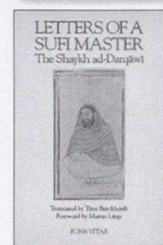
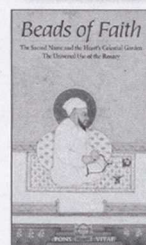
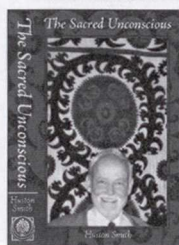
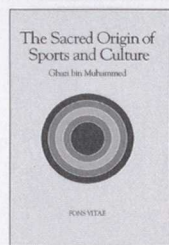
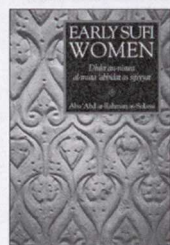
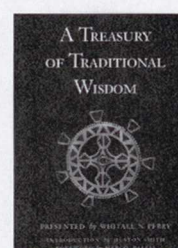
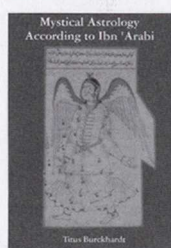
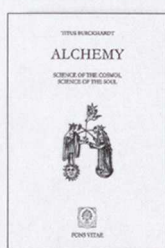
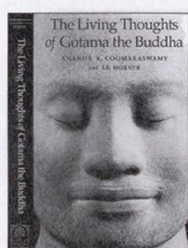
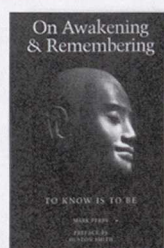
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ego, and it can also help people have compassion for the levels in which they have ego distortions. And that can be an important element in moving them to a point where they would be open to seeing some changes that are possible in the world. You can't get people to be involved in social transformation when their own personal pain is so overwhelming that they can't see anything but that pain. And translative spiritual consciousness and spiritual practice sometimes can help that. So even though it has some of the elements of accommodating oneself to ego, it can also assuage some of the worst pain that one is facing.

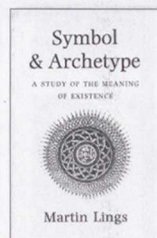
This translative spirituality allows for the development of reformist movements. And a reformist movement can be a really good thing to have at any particular moment. A reformist movement might, for example, save the whales

or it might protect the redwoods in northern California. They are really good things to have, but there are limits there. Because truly revolutionary movements, that is, the movements that would actually save the planet from ecological destruction, require something more. They require a new bottom line, a new bottom line of love and caring. And they require a new definition of productivity, efficiency, and rationality in which institutions and social practices are understood to be efficient and productive, not simply to the extent that they maximize money or power but to the extent that they maximize people's capacity to be loving and caring; to be ethically, spiritually, and ecologically sensitive; to be able to respond to the universe in a nonutilitarian way. To respond with awe, wonder, and radical amazement at the grandeur of creation. Now, that consciousness, that ability to go

for a new bottom line, cannot be achieved in translative spirituality, because translative spirituality too often reinforces a narrow vision of self-interest. That's why truly revolutionary movements need a transformative spirituality, or what I call an "emancipatory" spirituality. Because the ability to transcend ego enough to see oneself as part of the totality of all, and to see the universe from that consciousness, is critical if we're going to transform this world, to save the world from both ecological destruction and from spiritual degradation. To get that new bottom line, to be able to see oneself as fundamentally part of the totality, requires transformative spirituality. That's a form of spirituality that I think many spiritual traditions tend to encourage, and that's why I believe that the fundamental transformation of the universe is going to be a spiritual transformation. ■



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BG: No, when he saw me, somehow he knew. Of course, he was talking with Koryu Roshi so he had a sense of where I was at, and he also could tell by my movements or whatever. He just broke me out of it. He stood behind me when I was in meditation and in that state, and just screamed in a way that pushed me right out of that place into a much deeper space, a space of acting.

AC: We could probably find a contrast there with some interpretations of Vedanta, where it could seem like the whole goal was to—

BG: Get into a deep trance.

AC: Yes. To get out of here.

BG: Sometimes we've used the expression "samadhi freaks" for people who want to get to that place

because it can be very beautiful. But for others it can be very terrifying.

AC: Because it's too much?

BG: Yeah.

AC: If the Buddha were alive today, do you think he would no longer advocate the intense practice of meditation and renunciation of the world in order to experience transcendence and nirvana? In light of the present crisis, do you think he would instead advocate the practice of meditation in service of passionate and committed social activism, as you do?

BG: Well, you know, from an egocentric standpoint, I would say sure. The one thing we know about him—or at least that we get from the texts—is that he was certainly very broad. So he would incorporate

all of the things going on in his time and all of the traditions.

AC: But there seemed to be a big emphasis in his teaching on leaving the world.

BG: Well, that was part of the Indian culture of that time. My sense—and I can only say this because of who I am—is that he would be moving in the bigger world. Like His Holiness the Dalai Lama—I think he's a beautiful example.

AC: What's the source of the extraordinary love, passion, courage, and profound commitment that you have to alleviate the suffering of others?

BG: I don't see them as others. It's pretty egocentric—I want to have less suffering! ■

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think that's by far a greater mystery than the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Because you actually have to do something with your own being.

AC: What do you mean?

MJ: You actually have to do something with your own being in order to do something for somebody else's being. You can't just run in and rage, "That son of a bitch gave that child Drano!" and leave the kid there without any hope. So you have to say, "I can get past this. I can be detached enough to look at this." First of all, you have to look at it, and then, you have to take care of the situation. It's not shirking any kind of responsibility, and that's the mystery. And somebody's going to come back next lifetime full of love because they weren't left to die alone in agony and pain. The

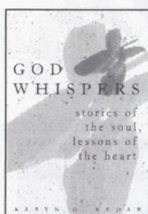
mystery is that every one of us, I don't care who you are, every one of us has the ability to be detached and take care of what has to be taken care of.

AC: What is the source of your passion and compassion?

MJ: Well, my mother, who died in Coney Island Hospital in a charity ward, really showed me how to take care of people. One day I said to her, "Mama, why are you suffering so much?" One breast removed, the other breast removed, the kidney removed, the lung removed—this was in the late '40s. She turned to me and slapped me, and she said, "Don't you ever ask why!" And so I looked right at her, and I said, "Why?" So she laughed and slapped me again. She said, "Because nobody's going to answer you. Who's going to give you an

answer?" And I remembered that all my life. And I teach that. Instead of asking why, just *do*. We *all* are capable of doing. I'm not on a soapbox. If I was on a soapbox, I wouldn't have time to accomplish everything I've accomplished in my life. You see, I want *change*. I want to see a change in a child's eyes that are misted over with pain. I know that if we help one human being, it's going to touch the world. It has to. I may not know how, but I know it will. I'm *doing*, and everybody with me is also doing. It's been incredible to see how many children are growing, not because just *one* person cares, but because I've taught *many* to care. And if I died this second, this day, I have coming after me many, many children, students, and *chelas* who care. I'm not going to hide. I'm not going to just bear witness. I'm from Brooklyn. I'll go down fighting. ■

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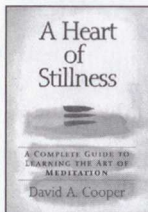
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JW: As I see it, the full emergence of *Homo noeticus*, that is to say, to the point where it is the dominant life-form on the planet, is still several hundred years away, at least. Now that seems like a long time from the point of view of us sitting in a room with a watch on our wrist. But anthropologically or evolutionarily speaking, that's just the blink of an eye.

The first form of life on the earth theoretically emerged from the primordial ooze four billion years or so ago and held sway for one or two billion years. The next higher succeeding form emerged and held a dominant position for a successively briefer period, and each emerging new higher form of life has dominated for a decreasing period of time. In other words, the emergence of higher forms is *increasing*. So when you reach the human level, we're talking about you and I sitting here in this room on the basis of a mere five million years since our progenitors stood upright in the center of the African plain. And Neanderthal was three hundred thousand years ago; Cro-Magnon, thirty-five to forty thousand years ago; *Homo sapiens sapiens*, modern man, ten thousand years ago.

If noetics rather than genetics is governing the changes in evolution, as I feel is the case from here on, and with the potential we have for mass communications and technology to spread information, we are in effect taking control of our own evolution at this point. We have the capacity to disseminate information for transformation. And so I'm very hopeful that this change not only is proceeding but is accelerating. Even so, it's still several hundred years away before *Homo noeticus* would be the truly dominant life-form. But we don't need to think that it's going to be three hundred years before we deal with all the

global crises facing us. One transformed being in the world can affect hundreds and thousands.

WIE: As you've said, there are obviously a number of positive signs, and more and more people are becoming interested in bringing greater awareness to the challenges that we face. But you've also pointed out that the mass of humanity still seems stuck in an extremely materialistic, egocentric worldview driven by short-term self-interest. You've written, "Simply saying that humanity can accelerate its own evolution is not the same thing as convincing humanity it can, let alone should." What do you see as the most important factor in convincing human beings to take up the evolutionary call and transform themselves?

JW: I would point to two factors. One is the presence of enlightened teachers in the world whose very being just radiates the message. In their example, we have the demonstration of our human potential. Second, we have the increase of suffering, and suffering is the first grace. It's nature's way of giving us a kick in the astral when we won't learn through gentler means. If we aren't drawn by attraction, we're going to be driven by repulsion. And that has probably been perennially the case. The level of suffering is so great in the world in certain areas, and at the same time the level of awareness of our potential for transformation is so great in the world in certain other areas, that there's now a synergistic process in which those who are enlightened, awakened, and compassionately concerned with the suffering of the world are directing their attention in ways which immediately and practically address that suffering. So that's why I say that I'm very, very hopeful. I see this transformation happening before my very eyes. ■

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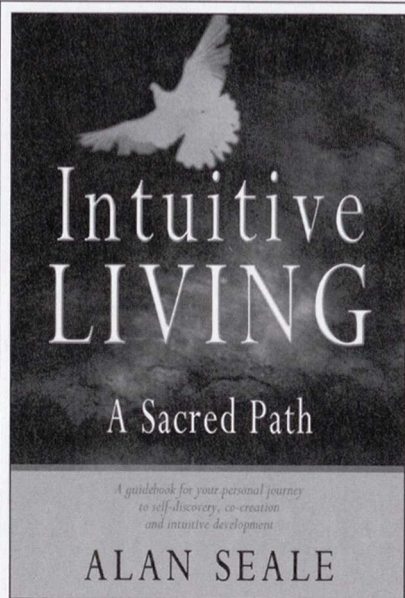
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I asked

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personal salvation, and our anxiety about sickness and death, rather than the misery created by collective indifference and callousness.

We have reached the point, however, where we no longer have the luxury to indulge in self-centered comfort and personal acquisition or to escape into religious pursuits at the cost of collective interests. For us there can be no escape, no withdrawal, no private arena in which we can turn our backs on the sorrows of humanity, saying, "I am not responsible. Others have created a mess; let them mend it." The writing on the world's wall is plain: "Learn to live together or in separateness you die!" The choice is ours.

The world today forces us to accept, at least intellectually, our oneness, our interrelatedness. And more and more people are awakening to the urgency of arresting the accelerating madness around us. As yet, however, our ways of responding are superficial, unequal to the complexities of the challenge. We do not take or even consider actions that threaten our security or alter our habitual ways of drifting through life. If we continue to live carelessly, indifferently, emphasizing private gain and personal indulgence, we are essentially opting for the suicide of humanity.

We can become involved in many acts of social service, according to our resources, without ever moving one inch from the center of our private interests; in fact, the very act of social service typically enhances self-image and self-centeredness. But we cannot become involved in true social action, which strikes at the roots of problems in the society and in the human psyche, without moving away from ego-centered motivation. We must look deep into the network of personal motivations and discover what

our priorities are. Our yearning for peace must be so urgent that we are willing to free ourselves from the immaturity of ego-centered action, willing to grow into the sane maturity required to face the complex challenges that affect our existence. If we are motivated by desire for acceptance either by the dominant culture or the counterculture, clarity of right action and passion of precise purpose will not be there. We may be praised for our contributions, but unless there is a deep awareness of the essence of our lives, a penetrating clarity about the meaning of human existence, our contributions will not penetrate to the roots of human misery.

To be ready for social responsibility, we will have to be mercilessly honest with ourselves. Wherever we are, we are responsible to resist injustice, to be willing to put our comforts, securities, our lives at stake in fearless noncooperation with injustice and exploitation. If we adopt all the habit patterns of the enslaved—the fear, the acceptance of tyranny, the intellectual and emotional blindness to injustice—we deserve the inevitable consequences that are descending upon us in a dark storm cloud. If we are submissive, clinging to our small islands of security, naturally terror will reign. If we are willing to allow all others to perish—the peoples of other countries, races, castes, cultures, religions; the other creatures of the earth—so that we may flourish and endlessly increase our network of pleasures and comforts, obviously we are doomed to rot and decay. The callousness of letting others be abused so that our petty little lives will be undisturbed, so that all the comforts of a lovely home, pleasant meals, and good entertainment will not be threatened, portends doom for us all.

When we come face-to-face with the actualities of human and

planetary suffering, what does the powerful moment of truth do to us? Do we retreat into the comforts of theories and defense mechanisms, or are we awakened at the core of our being? Awareness of misery, without defense structures, will naturally lead to action. The heart cannot witness misery without calling the being to action, without activating the force of love. We may not act on a global or national scale; it may be only on a community or neighborhood scale—but act, respond, we must. Social responsibility flowers naturally when we perceive the world without the involvement of the ego-consciousness. When we relate *directly* to suffering, we are led to understanding and spontaneous action—but when we perceive the world through the ego, we are cut off from direct relationship, from communion that stirs the deepest level of our being.

The Force of Love Is the Force of Total Revolution

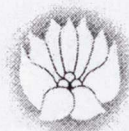
A TENDER, LOVING concern for all living creatures will need to arise and reign in our hearts if any of us is to survive. And our lives will be truly blessed only when the misery of one is genuinely felt to be the misery of all. The force of love is the force of total revolution. It is the unreleased force, unknown and unexplored as a dynamic for change.

We have moved very far away from love in our collective lives, dangerously near destruction, close to starvation. Perhaps we have the wisdom now, the awareness that love is as essential to human beings as the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat. Love is the beauty, the delicate

mystery, the soul of life, the radiant unspoiled purity that brings spontaneous joy, songs of ecstasy, poems, paintings, dances, dramas to celebrate its indescribable, never-to-be-fully-captured bliss of being. Can we bring love into the marketplaces, into the homes, the schools, the places of business, and transform them completely? You may call it a utopian challenge, but it is the only one that will make a significant difference or that is fully worthy of the potential of whole human beings.

Compassion is a spontaneous movement of wholeness. It is not a studied decision to help the poor, to be kind to the unfortunate. Compassion has a tremendous momentum that naturally, choicelessly moves us to worthy action. It has the force of intelligence, creativity, and the strength of love. Compassion cannot be cultivated; it derives neither from intellectual conviction nor from emotional reaction. It is simply there when the wholeness of life becomes a fact that is truly lived.

Compassion does not manifest itself when we live on the surface of existence, when we try to piece together a comfortable life out of easily available fragments. Compassion requires a plunge to the depths of life—where oneness is reality and divisions merely an illusion. If we dwell at the superficial layers of being, we'll be overly conscious of the apparent differences in human beings on the physical and mental level, and of the superficial difference in cultures and behavior. If we penetrate to the essentials, however, we will discover that there is nothing fundamental that differentiates



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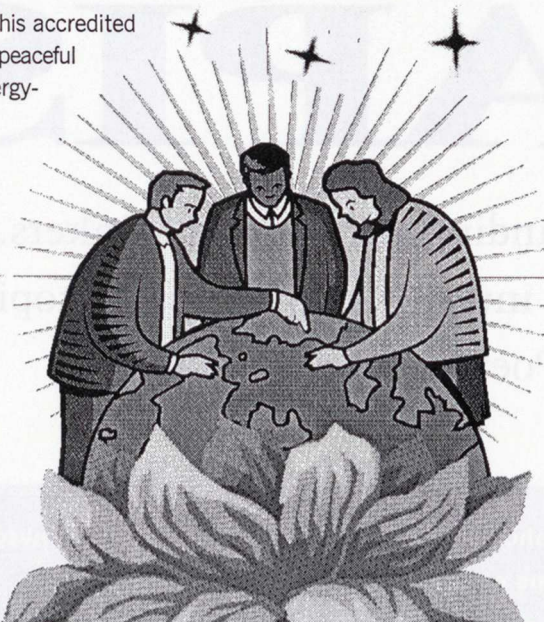
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any human being from another, or any human being from any other living creature. All are manifestations of life, created with the same life principles and nurtured by the same life-support systems. Oneness is absolute reality; differentiation has only transitory, relative reality.

It is not sufficient that a few in society penetrate to the depths of living and offer fascinating accounts about the oneness of all beings. What is necessary in these critical times is that all sensitive and caring people make a personal discovery of the fact of oneness and allow compassion to flow in their lives. When compassion and realization of oneness becomes the dynamic of human relationship, then humankind will evolve.

We are suffering throughout the world in the darkness of the misery we have created. By believing in the

fragmentary and the superficial, we have failed to live together in peace and harmony, and so darkness looms very large on the horizon. It's in such darkness that common people such as you and I feel the urgency to go deeper, to abandon superficial approaches that are inadequate and to activate the creative forces available to each of us as expressions of wholeness. The vast intelligence that orders the cosmos is available to all. The beauty of life, the wonder of living, is that we share creativity, intelligence, and unlimited potential with the rest of the cosmos. If the universe is vast and mysterious, we are vast and mysterious. If it contains innumerable creative energies, we contain innumerable creative energies. If it has healing energies, we also have healing energies. To realize that we are not simply physical beings on a material planet, but that we are

whole beings, each a miniature cosmos, each related to all of life in intimate, profound ways, should radically transform how we perceive ourselves, our environments, our social problems. Nothing can ever be isolated from wholeness.

There is much unexplored potential in each human being. We are not just flesh and bone or an amalgamation of conditionings. If this were so, our future on this planet would not be very bright. But there is infinitely more to life, and each passionate being who dares to explore beyond the fragmentary and superficial into the mystery of totality helps all humanity perceive what it is to be fully human. Revolution, total revolution, implies experimenting with the impossible. And when an individual takes a step in the direction of the new, the impossible, the whole human race travels through that individual. ■

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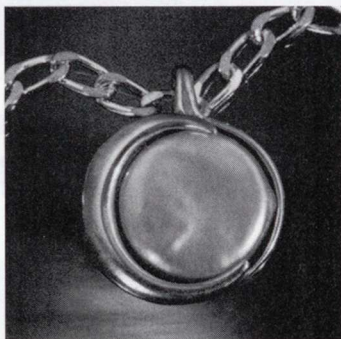
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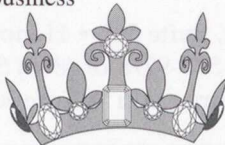
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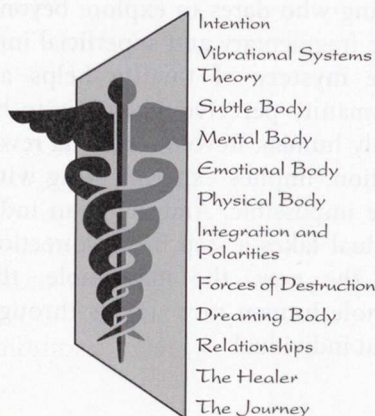
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Daphne Michaels
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Readers' Forum *continued from p. 14*

real and lasting ground in beingness, it was quite natural for me to side with those spiritual luminaries who recommend the rigorous path of formal renunciation as the only true way to attain a lasting state of enlightenment. At some point in an individual's quest for self-knowledge, whether it takes one year or five years out of his life's pursuits, there must be experienced a burning realization of the world's insubstantiality, of its basic emptiness and impermanence, and a renunciation of one's attachment to the things and concepts of this world.

It was heartening to see the undisciplined and sloppy thinking of such personages as Elizabeth Lesser and Jack Kornfield being shown for what it is. In the case of Ms. Lesser, she tied herself up in so many knots in her interview with Craig Hamilton ["At Play in the

Fields of the Lord"] that one is amazed that such a display of contradictions in thinking can exist in one place. Her true colors, showing her immaturity of thought, are nowhere better expressed than in her answer to the question: "So the path of self-authority is for people who haven't cultivated that intensity of focus and purpose?" EL: "Absolutely." What she's admitting to here is that it is okay *not* to cultivate an intensity of focus and purpose and therefore remain immature in one's thinking even when one comes up against the mighty barriers one needs to tear down in order to grow spiritually. People who think this way, in the words of Penor Rinpoche ["The World Is Unreliable"], who was commenting on those who delude themselves with the idea of following a democratic spiritual path, are "just wasting time."

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In the case of Jack Kornfield, his statement that "the sacrifices of family are like those of any demanding monastery, offering exactly the same training in renunciation, patience, steadiness, and generosity" is just plain half-truth. When Andrew Cohen asked Penor Rinpoche, referring to this statement, "Could that be true?" His Holiness replied, "It is not true. When you are in a household . . . there is always more attachment."

To expand on this, while it can be rightly stated that there may be the development of patience, steadiness, and generosity in the raising of a family, the two endeavors—raising a family, on the one hand, and undergoing monastic training, on the other—are mutually exclusive in their main aims. In raising a family, one is attempting to acculturate one's progeny to the outside world, to show them how to get

along in the world, while in monastic training, the very opposite is happening, or rather should be happening, which involves training the acculturation *out* of a person. In other words, one regimen is involved in teaching attachment to the world in the development and implementation of social concepts, while the other is dedicated to teaching release from attachment to the world and those same concepts.

And finally, one stands in awe of the unwavering and one-pointed questioning that your interviewers, to a man and woman, display in the pages of *WIE*. It can only be hoped that the acute intelligence and penetration of these individuals is not lost on your readers. We are truly fortunate to have such a talented staff of people working together at the same time and for the same organization, and at such a crucial time in the history of modern man

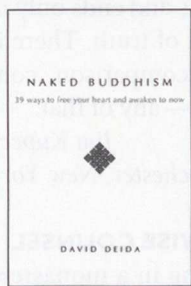
when the resurgence of spirituality is beginning to take hold. Your magazine's uncompromising honesty and truthfulness is indeed the breath of fresh air that we need.

Ian Allan Andrews
Yuma, Arizona

NO ROOM FOR COMPARISON

Thanks for the new and all previous *WIEs*, every one of them thought-provoking, inspiring, and heartening—particularly, I believe, to many of us who have been in spiritual practices twenty, thirty years, or more, and are sorting out our experiences to see if we actually have anything worth passing on to a newer generation. Anyway, here is some response to the latest issue. There seems to be some discussion stirring over the catch-all phrase "New American Spirituality" that falls into two related areas: 1) the preservation of great traditions

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Foreword by Ken Wilber

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always used that rapture to reveal Spirit's innermost
secrets. David Deida is such a wise one"*

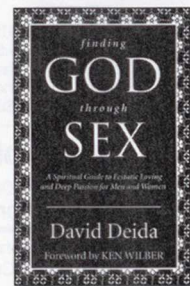
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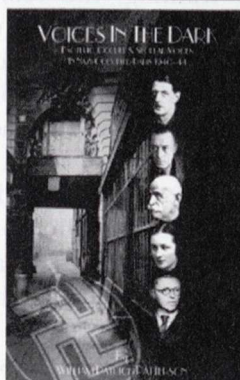
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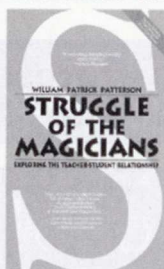
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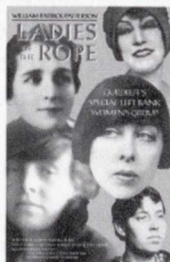
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—Colin Wilson, author
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vs. newer pared-down or eclectic teachings and 2) the vow-taking life of the discipleship/monasticism/ celibacy/dedicated-community-thing vs. the individual layperson/householder life.

Having read the review of Jack Kornfield's *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry* and some of the other material in the new issue, I was left with a nagging feeling. For myself, these questions of one or the other being "better" have little or no interest. I've experienced some of both, and both have their advantages and drawbacks. It's a shame that people in these camps waste their energy taking potshots at each other. As Vivekananda said, "Let the sects proliferate until, finally, there is some approach to God suitable to every human being." The repeated questions about whether this or that approach has sufficient challenges; whether this or that life will provide deep enough experience; the comparison of this against that . . . it's all nonsense, really, like ten-year-olds bitterly arguing over whether Chevys or Fords are better cars. Spiritual practice begins and ends only in this living moment of truth. There is no room here for comparison, controversy, challenge—any of that.

Jim Kupecz
Rochester, New York

THE NEED FOR WISE COUNSEL

I am a hermit living in a monastery on the west coast of Ireland. Just read your magazine for the first time and was very impressed.

I would like to comment on "New American Spirituality." There are many positive aspects to it. But "self-authority" concerns me. In my own ancient Celtic tradition, no one would travel the inward path without an enlightened "anam-chara," or "soul-friend"—the equivalent of a spiritual director. It would be like traveling at

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night without a light. The ego-self is so insidious that even with the guidance of my abbot, Father William McNamara, I have gone over the edge a couple of times. His Holiness Penor Rinpoche also remarked on the need for wise counsel. Without direction there is also the danger of people skipping from one spiritual path to another, skimming the surface and never plumbing the depths.

Sister Nora Tunney
Holy Hill Hermitage
County Sligo, Ireland

WE ARE THE WORLD

I was completely taken with Elizabeth Lesser's interview. She has the right way of thinking: We are the world; we're made from the world, our cells are from the world. Taking it to a bigger step, we are the universe; we are all made of the cosmic dust that created the universe. We are all bonded together, and when we all realize that, just perhaps, this will be a better world to live in. Take it from the song that many rock singers gathered around and sang: "We Are the World."

Paul Dale Roberts
Elk Grove, California

EQUAL REPRESENTATION, PLEASE!

Although your articles in the most recent issue were interesting, you forgot something essential. It's called women.

Out of the nine featured articles, only *one* was with a woman. That's sad. As primary caregivers, women have such a rich heritage to offer on being in the world. And, in each of the traditions you featured, there are at least several prominent women you could have interviewed. So next time, *please* think more about equal representation.

Ann Schmidt
Barre, Massachusetts

AFTER THE LAUNDRY . . .

I would like to thank the person who wrote the most truthful and articulate review of Jack Kornfield's new book *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*. I agree, he dwells entirely too much on suffering, anger, disappointment, etc. It only more deeply engraves this false or impure perception into his own mind and those whom he comes in contact with at his Spirit Rock Meditation Center. I reside in Marin County, but I have only been to Spirit Rock maybe three times in almost ten years. I never realized quite why, but your review clarified the main reason for me. I also wonder, since so many people are influenced by Jack, especially here in Marin, how much this feeds into the incredible increase of greed, materialism, and aggression in this county.

Zopa Yeshe Sonam Wangmo
via email

THE ESSENCE OF SURRENDER

Issue 18 was in many ways a gem, prompting me to call up an old friend and advise him to read the issue. I think the interviews with Eckhart Tolle ["Ripples on the Surface of Being"] and Joseph Goldstein ["There's No Escape from the World"] are particularly valuable, and I congratulate Andrew Cohen for the way in which he conducted these two interviews.

Both Tolle and Goldstein illumine the essence of surrender, which is saying "Yes" to this moment or "not my will, but Thine be done." As difficult as this may sometimes be, when a loved person or animal dies, or when we must transcend our self-centered view to take into account a more *karuna* or "divinely" holistic take on the situation, *surrender*—and not whether we live in a household or a monastery—is the

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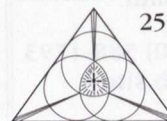


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I do have a problem with what
looks like the occasional confusion
or fusion of two different ideas:
“transcendence of the world” and
“transcending attachment to the
world.” I wish to commend particu-
larly Tolle and Goldstein for avoid-
ing that kind of confusion.

Jim McCurry
Galesburg, Illinois

COMING HOME

I found your interview with Eckhart
Tolle deeply touching. It was a com-
ing home at last. Eckhart's clear-
sighted yet simple way of expressing
the basic issues of human life gave
me an overwhelming recognition of
what I truly am. He gave me the
ultimate taste of freedom. He beauti-
fully explained that everything is
working out for the good, always—
and that conditional surrender isn't
surrender at all.

Johan Veldman
via email

FAMILY MATTERS

I greatly enjoy your magazine. How-
ever, I do not necessarily agree with
everything written in it. (Hence,
another reason I enjoy it; Lord save
us from unprovocative spiritual
writing.) One such example is in
the anti-family interpretation of the
words of Jesus by psychologist
Stephen Mitchell [“What Do You
Think?”].

As I tell my congregations, the
most important line in the Gospels
is the last one in John: “There are
also many other things that Jesus
did, but if these were to be
described individually, I do not
think the whole world would
contain the books that would be
written” (John 21:25). The author
indicates that we have just a small
glimpse of who Jesus is and what
he said. For this reason, I do not

put too much weight on psycho-
logical analyses of Jesus that use
the Gospels as their base (or
for that matter, any psychological
analysis of Jesus). Hence, I do not
feel that Mitchell's interpretation
of Jesus' “anti-family” teachings
gives an accurate indication of
Jesus' personality, or of the points
he was making.

Any person who has chosen to
take the teachings of Jesus seri-
ously will come face-to-face with
the “anti-family” teachings of Jesus
in the Gospel by default. The
reality is not that *they* will reject
their family, but that *their family*
will reject them. Jesus is basically
indicating that those who cannot
follow Him to the level He demands
because of fear of rejection from
kin cannot be his disciples, for they
are incapable of making the com-
mitment Jesus requires.

An example: I have relatives
who do not agree with the idea that
I minister to the inner-city poor,
and especially to the incarcerated.
Had I chosen not to do this ministry
because I might offend them or
because my actions may put me at
odds with members of my family,
then I would have rejected doing
the service which I feel Jesus calls
me to do. *This* is the error of which
Jesus speaks.

On an opposite note, Father
William McNamara's interview [“The
e'M'pire”] was life-changing for
me. Thanks for challenging this
Catholic priest on all fronts.

Fr. Robert J. Carr
Chelsea, Massachusetts

A MORE INCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE

In reading the interviews on being
“in the world but not of it,” I
was surprised at the degree to
which the various contributors
appeared to believe that their
particular paths, interpretations,
or approaches to spirituality were



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better than those held by others. Those being interviewed had widely varying ideas about what constitutes the highest or most authentic spiritual path or lifestyle. When asked about other perspectives, they tended to openly disagree or to avoid answering the questions.

A more inclusive spiritual perspective might place greater emphasis on the idea that people have different temperaments, abilities, duties, destinies, and spiritual paths. For example, for some people the best path may be to spend a period of time renouncing the world and then return to the world. For others the best path may be to spend a period of time active in the world and then renounce.

If spirituality includes living and growing in accordance with our abilities and duties, then spiritual practices can extend into all activities of life. For example, some people may be born to be spiritual teachers, some to make scientific discoveries, some to create music and art, and some to have wealth. The Bhagavad Gita describes war as a duty for certain individuals. Some people appear to have relatively fixed destinies, and others to have greater free will. Some appear to have more obstacles than others. This perspective may allow people to be more understanding and supportive of those on different paths. It also implies that no "wisdom teacher" or lineage has absolute truth for all or even a majority of people. The idea that a particular set of beliefs or activities is more spiritual or higher than others may be relevant for those who share similar temperaments, duties, and destinies, but may be counterproductive for others.

Jim Kennedy
Denver, Colorado

UN'SUIT'ABLE

I question the magazine's motivation behind the publication of the distasteful image on the front cover of Issue 18. My negative reactions upon viewing the front cover are numerous—including shock and gross insult. I didn't realize that Buddhism, in the United States or in the West, was synonymous with capitalism! I interpret the juxtaposition of the Buddha's face with a business suit as suggesting that spirituality can be acquired through monetary wealth—a notion that insults my faith. This juxtaposition is insulting on the grounds that the revered historical image of the Buddha has essentially been decapitated. Furthermore, it has been juxtaposed with Buddhism's antithesis, capitalism and material wealth—since business suits are Western icons of economic power. This is a defacing of a sacred image and serves no potential for enlightenment. Instead this image has caused me much annoyance about the misappropriation of non-Western icons by irresponsible Westerners.

The Buddha renounced lay-life, and the manner in which he is clothed reflects this renunciation. In Theravada Buddhist countries, the image of the Buddha is revered and loved—and each aspect of this image is important to their faith. You may find you've alienated many of your Buddhist readers.

Ven. Walpola Piyananda
President of the Sangha
Council of Southern California
Abbot of Dharma
Vijaya Buddhist Vihara

A BIT AMISS

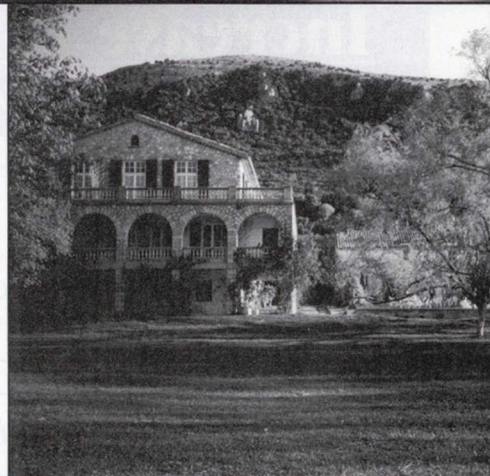
There's something missing from *What Is Enlightenment?* I'm not sure exactly what it is. Your sincerity is unquestionable; the topics are essential to anyone involved in spiritual

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life; the range of people you interview is wonderful; you present new and authentic spiritual voices to a broader public—compared to any mainstream publication claiming to deal with spiritual topics, you continue to shine. And yet, as a reader outside the bounds of your collective experiment, it has begun to feel formulaic, so that the genuineness of your exploration doesn't come through the way it has in the past.

Part of it is that the structure you are using no longer feels alive. How most of the reporters will relate to each interviewee is quite predictable. Based on your subject's predisposition toward the topic at hand, you compliment them on their incredible achievement/clarity/daring in their area of expertise while simultaneously questioning the validity of a non-absolute relationship to the issue's theme, etc. This structure was really suited to your material when it was first developed. At this point, however, it feels that it has served its purpose and something new is needed.

The issue of the format for presenting material is related to a more significant point about how you approach the people you speak with. This is something a couple of other published letters have touched on. It comes down to the fundamental question Andrew Cohen has often addressed: Are we truly willing to question our own views and assumptions? The delicate balance you've walked between openness and taking a stand on critical issues feels like perhaps it is shifting towards the side of rigidity. There have been instances where it felt like your reporters were hammering at their subjects in order to get their own points across rather than genuinely listening (the Deepak Chopra interview comes to mind)

or, conversely, were so committed to a favorable view (Ammachi) that tough questions weren't asked. Cohen's dialogue with Barry Long about sexuality remains a wonderful model of the opposite extreme: you can actually feel Cohen opening to a totally new perspective as the exchange occurs. He may not fully agree or advocate this perspective as truth, but he has opened to it.

The final element which leaves me feeling a bit amiss is the commercialization. This is partly because of the market you have chosen, of course, and no doubt a piece of it is just my personal preference. I imagine that you have mixed feelings about plenty of the ads you run, as well. But these ads form, in my mind, a sad contrast to the very authenticity in spiritual life that you are dedicated to.

My wish is that this feedback provides something useful for you

to consider in your ongoing exploration of the truth. Along with a renewal of my subscription, I offer my great respect for what you are attempting—in your own lives, most of all.

Joshua Leavitt
Little Rock, Arkansas

GOOD WORDS

You're good! No other 'zine is defining or contributing to what it means to live a holy life in our Western culture—especially in the recent issue, "What Does It Mean to Be in the World But Not of It?" The progression from the gross (Elizabeth Lesser) to the subtle (the review of Jack Kornfield's and Stephen Cope's books) was brilliant. Thank you.

Loring Palmer
Somerville, Massachusetts

I wish to express my deepest gratitude for your magazine. It has been



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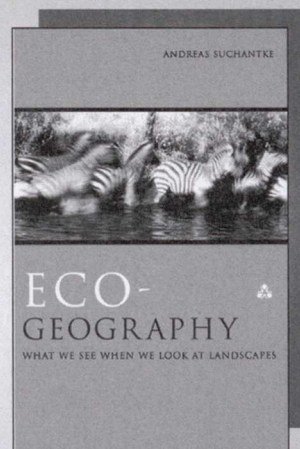
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very good for me, especially in the difficult situation in which I find myself—incarceration—to have such good and uplifting, inspiring reading. I have been sharing the issues with others here who, like me, have been benefiting very much therefrom. Keep up the wonderful service you are providing via *What Is Enlightenment?* It would be good to see articles and exposés regarding the poor and unjust state of the judicial and prison system—pros and cons, etc., and the long-term spiritual consequences.

*David Barker
Corcoran, California*

I am seventy-seven years old and have just finished reading all your back issues. Whew. Good stuff! It has been like getting acquainted with the best people and has brightened my life!

*Bea Bozich
via email*

Both my husband and myself really appreciate your magazine. I have been seeking the Lord with as much of my heart as I could for years—seriously for thirty-five years (I am fifty)—and have gone through many teachings and teachers and have learned a lot that way! But in these recent months, your magazine has been such incredibly wonderful spiritual food for us. I appreciate so much the deep, searching honesty—asking the deep, hard questions that so many avoid—and the wonderful combination of intellectual brilliance with true spirituality. So many seem to have one or the other, but it is rare and wonderful to find a combination of both. Keep up the good work!

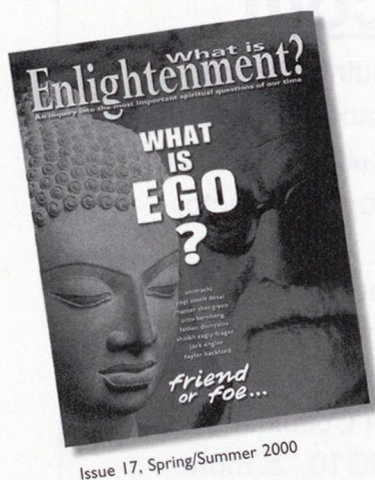
*Kathy Miller
via email*

I am thrilled to find your magazine. I wonder how your work could have been there so long without my knowing about it, and obtaining your back issues is like a big cake awaiting me. As a psychologist, I am beginning with the issue "What Is Ego?" Already you are speaking to my understanding, and insights are coming.

Joan P. LaMontagne
via email

While browsing in a new Borders store, my eye fell on the attractive cover of your Spring/Summer 2000 issue. The bold red letters, "What Is Ego? Friend or Foe . . ." immediately triggered long-unresolved questions of my own, so out of curiosity (and necessity) I purchased the magazine—and have been in dialogue with it ever since. Congratulations! I'm sure that this is one of your intentions!

Nancy Strode
Santa Barbara, California



Issue 17, Spring/Summer 2000

A MATTER OF CHOICE

As a Psychosynthesis psychotherapist, I read with great interest the series of interviews you conducted on the matter of ego [Spring/Summer 2000]. For me, thinking therapeutically, the central point about ego is the

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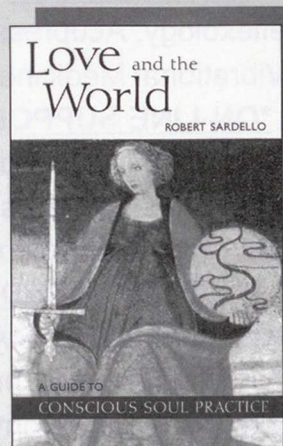
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relationship between ego-identification and choice, and it was surprising to me that it was only in the final interview with Taylor Hackford ["Who Is Satan?"] that the matter of choice was discussed.

I would suggest that the extent to which we are identified with ego is the extent to which we have no choice, and that choice—and thereby responsibility—is one of the keys to evolution through the levels of consciousness. I think it was Nietzsche who said that the truly moral man has the capacity for absolute good or absolute evil, and what differentiates the two is choice. We are always "in" choice, but the extent to which that is conscious (i.e., egoically disidentified), I would argue, directly correlates with the extent to which we are free.

Angus Landman
Bath, England

HALF RIGHT

First of all, you should be congratulated on publishing the best magazine on spiritual matters that I have ever seen—it's truly wonderful that you manage to present such "high" spiritual concepts in such a popular and readable format. The "What Is Ego?" issue is the best yet, and it's inspired me to offer you a few thoughts of my own on the matter.

As I see it, the spiritual masters who say that the ego has to be destroyed and the psychologists who say that it has to be nurtured are both half right (or half wrong). As some of your interviewees point out, the ego has many positive aspects. We need an integrated sense of self to function in the world—to make decisions, to concentrate on practical tasks, to interact with other people, etc. If we didn't have this integrated sense of self, we would be psychotics, not mystics. It's

often been pointed out that people with schizophrenia are awake to the same ultra-real and spiritually charged reality as mystics—but the difference between them is that the person with schizophrenia doesn't have a stable sense of self, which means that she can't control or order her perceptions and that she feels threatened by the intense *is-ness* around her.

The problem is not the ego itself, but the ego as it functions. Our sense of ego has grown too powerful. It chatters away to itself all the time, filling our minds with worries and daydreams, and alienating us from the world because our attention is always focused inside us, on our thoughts, rather than actually on our surroundings. It means that we have a fundamental sense of isolation, of being separate from the world "out there" and all our fellow human beings. And it

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also means that we are alienated from the essence of our own beings.

The ego has become so powerful that it's become a center of consciousness in its own right. It's like a city which has developed in the middle of a country—a center of communication and organization. The only problem is that the city has grown so big that it's become isolated from the country it's a part of and has begun to think of itself as an independent entity.

The solution—as Robert Frager points out [*“The Beast on Which the Buddha Rides”*—is to *tame* the ego, not to kill it. Its overdevelopment has to be undone. It has to be subdued and weakened, so that we no longer have a constant stream of thought-chatter running through our minds, and so that we no longer have such an acute sense of separation. And most of all, so that it's no longer the center of gravity in our being and we can make contact with the essence of our being again. At this point we would still have a sense of ego, but our ego would no longer be an isolated entity that tries to escape from its suffering by chasing after success and pleasure.

Steve Taylor
Manchester, England

THE TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITY

Congratulations on your tact and restraint in bringing us Amrit Desai's comments about “ego,” even if it was a rather oblique look at his own sexual involvement with his students [*“Yoga, Ego and Purification”*]. Sexual relations with students by one in authority is an unfortunate occurrence in many communities. I hope this is just the first step by your magazine in exploring this vital and all-too-common issue, which until now, has seemed too difficult to bring up for calm discussion in a public forum.

Desai admits he is imperfect. He

implies that his ego was operating when he made these mistakes. But with all of his brilliance, and with all of his gifts for teaching, he does not explain how a student who trusted him to be a spiritual guide is supposed to act toward him now. This is not about his sexual play—let him have prostitutes if he must. But he avoids owning his responsibility as a teacher—that he invited the trust of a student to lead to sexual intimacy (which is a misuse of the power given to him by the student). His denial of wrongdoing leaves me, as his past student, wondering how I can trust him today with my openness? If he won't even admit to abuse of his power over a fellow student, I ask myself, “Will he abuse his power again? Will he abuse me? Why should I give him trust if I suspect that he will only dismiss any responsibility for his actions and words?”

You refer to Desai as a “spiritual

master.” Yet in that same magazine, in the interview with Ammachi [*“When You Go beyond the Ego, You Become an Offering to the World”*], she says, “True spiritual masters have to set an example through their actions and through their lives. Those who abuse their power, taking advantage of others, obviously . . . cannot be realized masters.”

I fear that the greatest danger of a community remaining silent—remaining in “denial” rather than facing the consequences of its leader's violation of boundaries—is that we in the community become unconscious co-conspirators with the false-self of these teachers. They are holding us (as well as others) in the same delusion that they are caught in. Desai knows his ego deludes him. But until, and unless, the teacher's mistake is corrected and publicized—with the same



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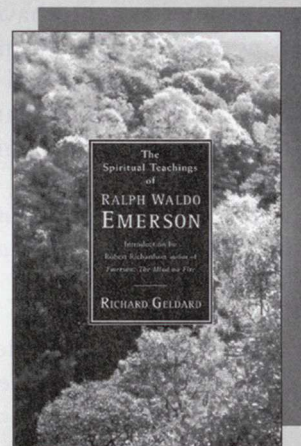
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energy and effort as his many other teachings—in lectures, books, pamphlets and the like, this cover-up will continue to taint all of his teachings, and taint all of our lives who live in these communities. As this topic is addressed openly, we will grow as a society, integrating high thinking and simple living into a form of self-governing community. We cannot rely on the human limitations of one person's view when that person is not Self-realized. This means that most of us must participate in all of the messiness of democratic involvement, without the luxury of a living, Self-realized teacher to guide us.

I believe that we cannot remain silent out of embarrassment, or else our quest for truth becomes hypocritical. We cannot ignore the consequences when our teachers violate the trust that we, as their students, place in their hands. Nor can we leave the community hanging in limbo when such a violation has occurred. That is why I am so pleased that this interview took place. The subject is now out in the open to be discussed. Maybe the next step is for you to interview those students who have been stung by teachers who dismiss the "betrayal" in their personal abuse of power. I do believe that with constructive dialogue, healing will take place.

Tom Rook
via email

A TALL ORDER

Ego, as many of the interviews in your Fall/Winter 2000 issue indicate, is a perennial problem. When does the "I" not enter into our being, our thinking, and our expression? And then there is the I, the One that is expressed through multiplicity that is nevertheless One. Even as a fractal expands through different forms, as each branch is exploded into greater detail, that primary

or unifying One is able to be seen and continuously unfolds from any point.

Rumi said in one of his poems (and Kabir has said likewise): "The drop is in the ocean, and the ocean in the drop." The collapse of dualism, of self and other, is possible in enlightened states. Unfortunately, the difficulty erupts when the ego (which may for a time be dissolved in an ecstatic state) returns to the fore. It is easy to be with the One on the prayer rug; it is more difficult when our attention is directed towards tasks that require our attention, whether they be driving a car or solving an equation.

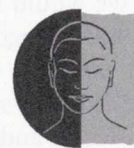
Expectation—both that of others upon me and my expectations of myself—can be necessary for the completion of a task and to maintain the faith of others. If the pilot of a plane does not expect to land the plane safely and is not to some extent constrained by the expectations of others that he can pilot the aircraft safely, he endangers much. On the other hand, being bound to the normative is a prison where expectations of "perfection" can lead to self-doubt and self-hatred (based on the belief and expectation that error is not acceptable). And here the ego is made manifest again in a very strong and destructive form. That it is a self-condemning ego does not negate it as ego.

How then is a person to translate or take the freedom that is found through meditational states and apply that within activities where some expectation legitimately exists? Can focus be limited (for the purpose of performing a complex task) and yet be sufficiently unattached to avoid the traps of a false self that is to some extent encouraged and defined via expectation?

And then, does memory strengthen and define a "false self"

each time a task is repeated that requires working within the bounds of expectations? This is a very difficult path, and it is one that confronts the modern person who continues to live and work within the structures of modern society while pursuing enlightenment. To die to self in the midst of ecstasy is not hard. To return to the world and be functional and retain the freedom experienced and learned through ecstatic states is notoriously difficult. The world of forms constrains, in some measure, the degrees of freedom that ultimately exist, and yet in real terms these constraints cannot exist except as normative forms. What is, IS; expectations notwithstanding. The challenge is to be able to work within constraints without becoming bound to those constraints as part of a self-definition. And *that* is a tall order.

N. Fulford
via email



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