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Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber in Dialogue

Fall/Winter 2002

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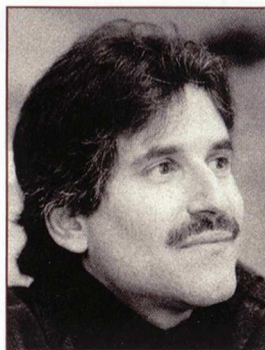


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# what is Enlightenment? magazine

"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



**ANDREW COHEN**, founder of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine, 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 enlightenment is an *evolutionary* matter, and that ultimately the spiritual development of each one of us is not separate from the evolution of the whole human race. In sharp contrast to the cynicism that is so pervasive today, yet with full awareness of the challenges that we face, he has dared to teach and to show that it is indeed possible for human beings to transcend the self-centered ego and consciously embrace our responsibility for the future of life. This powerful teaching, which he calls Evolutionary Enlightenment, 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 each year giving public talks and intensive retreats. Communities dedicated to living his teachings have formed throughout the world, with a network of centers in Europe, India, and the United States, 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, he is the author of numerous books, including *Enlightenment Is a Secret, Embracing Heaven & Earth*, and the recently released *Living Enlightenment*.

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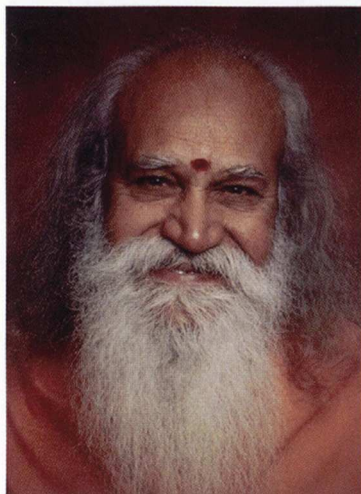
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# in memory



**His Holiness Reverend  
Sri Swami Satchidananda  
Maharaj  
1914–2002**

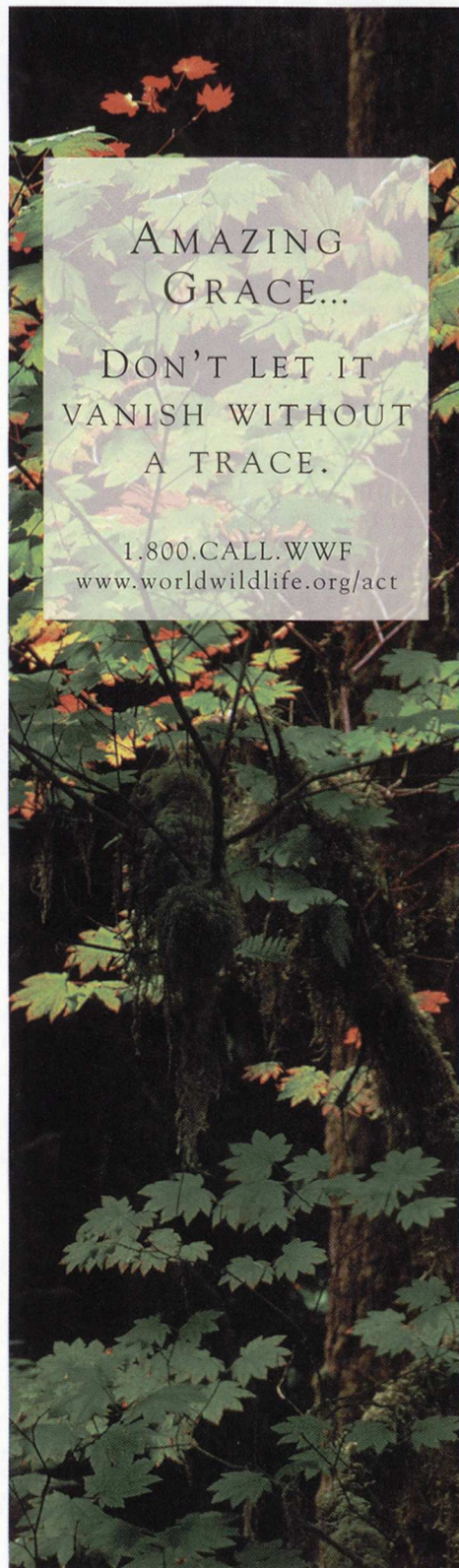
**IN 1966 HIS VISA** identified him as “Minister of Divine Words.” Invited by artist Peter Max, Swami Satchidananda intended to come to America for two days but instead ended up becoming the essence of East-meets-West spirituality for a generation. Perhaps best remembered as the guru of Woodstock, he opened the festival with blessings and a call to a higher purpose. “The

whole world is watching you,” he told the crowd. “The entire world is going to know what the American youth can do for humanity. America is helping everybody in the material field, but the time has come for America to help the whole world with spirituality also.” In the heyday of hippiedom, Swami Satchidananda’s “Integral Yoga” became a popular path to higher consciousness and personal development. He had a gift for making Vedantic truths accessible through an American vernacular spiced with humor. “If people could truly let go of ego and begin serving each other instead of thinking only of the self,” he once said, “then the world would change big time.”

Less well known, perhaps, is his passionate interest in bringing people together across faiths. An early leader in the interfaith movement, “Truth is One, Paths are Many” was his motto. “Read the Bible, read the Koran, read the Torah, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita,” he said. “They all say: ‘Refine yourself. Get out of these definitions.’ It’s the definitions that divide us.” He received numerous prestigious awards in recognition of his mission of unity, such as the Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Award, the Anti-Defamation League Humanitarian Award, the Juliet Hollister Interfaith Award at the United Nations, and this year, 2002, the U Thant Peace Award.

His monastic name means “existence-knowledge-bliss,” given to him upon taking vows of renunciation in 1949 from his teacher, the great Swami Sivananda. In our travels in India, we at *WIE* have been blessed to stay at the Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh and to call Swami Satchidananda’s brother monks, Swami Chidananda and the recently deceased Swami Krishnananda, our spiritual friends. The wisdom of these contemporary saints has graced the pages of *WIE*, inspiring us with their limitless love of the Divine. While we never had the opportunity to speak with Swami Satchidananda, we deeply appreciate him and his spiritual brothers as twentieth-century pioneers of the sacred, combining pure spiritual ardor with world-changing service. Swami Satchidananda gave bustling America a taste of this sacred life. “When you looked in his eyes,” Peter Max recently recalled, “nobody was home except an ocean of love.”

—ED



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# contents

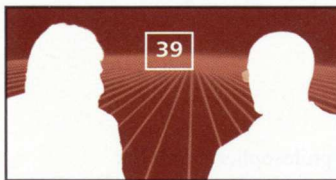
## departments

- 10 **Letters**  
From our readers
- 16 **In the Beginning**  
A word from the editors
- 176 **Enlightenment for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**  
by Andrew Cohen  
Are You Ready to Change Now?

## section 1 what is spiritual transformation?



- 22 **A Philosopher of Change**  
*An Interview with Yasuhiko Kimura*  
One of the new breed of evolutionary philosophers, Twilight Club Director Yasuhiko Kimura rails against the conspiracy of mediocrity plaguing the postmodern world, and shares his vision of the future human: *homo universalis* and beyond.  
by Carter Phipps



- 39 **The Guru and the Pandit**  
**Breaking the Rules**  
*Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber in Dialogue*  
The West's foremost cartographer of consciousness joins the founder of WIE to discuss the anatomy of modern spiritual transformation. Together, they confront the prevailing cultural disposition that must be challenged if humans are to take the next evolutionary step.



- 55 **Boomeritis and Me:**  
**Not Just a Book Review**  
One of our editors peers deep into Narcissus' mirror to reflect upon the spiritual implications of a pervasive cultural virus called *boomeritis*—the subject and title of Ken Wilber's recent novel.  
by Elizabeth Debold

special

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION

Inspiring accounts from timeless masters, seekers, and adventurers who have opened their lives to Spirit's transformative power.

## section 2 miracles & transformation



### 66 "I am not the body; I am the soul."

*Breaking Limits with Sri Chinmoy and Ashrita Furman*

Find out how multi-Guinness-world-record-holder Ashrita Furman, a mild-mannered limitation-buster, is capable of accomplishing feats most of us couldn't—or wouldn't—even imagine.

by Elizabeth Debold



### 82 Where Two or Three Are Gathered in My Name

*An excerpt from Father Arseny*

Witness a modern miracle as Father Arseny, a Russian Orthodox priest imprisoned for over twenty years in Stalin's death camps, demonstrates the remarkable power of prayer.

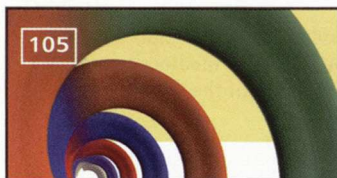


### 93 The Fantastic Buddhaverse of Robert Thurman

It's a bird, it's a plane, it's . . . Buddha! Join Buddhist scholar and professor Robert Thurman as he spins amazing tales of the otherworldly capacities of cosmic Buddhahood.

illustrated by Nadir Balan

## section 3 the dynamics of transformation



### 105 The Never-Ending Upward Quest The Practical and Spiritual Wisdom of Spiral Dynamics

*An Interview with Dr. Don Beck*

Change-wizard Don Beck guides us on a monumental and mind-bending journey through spiraling stages and "colors" of consciousness. Editor Jessica Roemischer explains why, when it comes to spiritual transformation, it ain't easy being "green."

by Jessica Roemischer



### 128 Transformation by Design

*An Interview with Dee Hock*

Founder of Visa International and self-made philosopher Dee Hock invokes the new science of complexity theory to show how human organizations can become powerful agents for evolutionary transformation.

by Melissa Hoffman



### 143 Epistemology, Fourth Order Consciousness, & the Subject-Object Relationship

*or . . . How the Self Evolves with Robert Kegan*

Psychologist and professor Robert Kegan illuminates the intricate processes of human transformation, and describes how consciousness needs to evolve to master the demands of a rapidly changing world.

by Elizabeth Debold



### 157 Who's Transforming Anyway? Stacey Heartspring Encounters the Postmodern Craze of Neo-Advaita

Join Stacey, *WIE*'s newest correspondent (and loosest cannon), to find out just what makes the neo-advaita world tick!

# letters

from our readers

Please send your letters to the editor to:

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fax: 413.637.6015

*Letters may be edited for length and clarity.*

## **The Evolution of Enlightenment**

### **An Infinite Journey**

I found it most gratifying that both Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber remain open-ended in their understanding and pursuit of the spiritual journey and evolution itself. I believe that almost all of us, being products of Western acculturation, at least subconsciously have a linear, Newtonian understanding of both the terms “evolution” and “enlightenment.” Scientists and seekers want to go back to the “big bang,” a linear regression in linear time. This is now being belied by science itself in a recent spate of articles positing multiple big bangs. Also, a little known but very traditional Catholic theological teaching posits “creatio continua” (continuing or continual creation), or the ever-present pouring forth of creation from the Godhead, not a linear one-time event—the error of both linear scientists and creationists. As if God created the cosmos and left town. This only reflects the limitations of our own constricted consciousness. Similarly, the term “enlightenment,” for most of us Westerners, carries the sense of some arrival at a permanent, unchanging state, whereas the journey into the infinite is just that—infinite. A prospect I find awe-inspiring and exciting.

David J. Spillane  
Chiang Mai, Thailand

### **Forever Involved**

I was delighted with the breathless and clearly youthful enthusiasm with which Craig Hamilton revisited the teachings and writings of Sri Aurobindo in the Spring/Summer 2002 issue of *WIE* as the issue strove to uncover ways of considering “evolutionary enlightenment.” If the term “evolutionary enlightenment” suggests anything in its languaging, it is that rather than an endpoint, a higher realization is just the beginning of a process by which individuals can participate in the evolving Kosmos (as Wilber might say). For myself, rather than using terms rooted in eighteenth century (Western) notions and far older (Eastern) precepts with their associated linguistic and conceptual baggage, I like to use C.S. Pierce’s “ongoing semiosis”—the process by

which an individual can engage in the continuous perception of the phenomena of the universe to arrive at ever deeper and richer cognitions and conceptions of one’s existence in it. There is nothing static and final about this process. Once we engage, we are involved until we die.

Joe Arredondo  
Austin, TX

### **The “We” Dimension**

I support Wilber’s advocacy for an integral spirituality (all quadrants, all levels). Although there is a tremendous amount of information concerning the *individual’s* experience with the spectrum of consciousness, little attention has been given to the interior collective—*We*—dimension of the transpersonal journey. The sacred traditions, in defining this dimension, have provided a safe container for the individual to grow through various levels of consciousness. Evolution has brought us to a new developmental edge. Stage capacity (operating from the Yellow or Turquoise meme) is pushing against the transcendent or transpersonal dimension of consciousness. The interior collective can no longer be upheld by a tradition but will become a conscious creative act of individuals involved in any group or organization. As the article *The Evolution of Enlightenment* pointed out, much of this needs to be discovered. This discovery and unfolding is an exciting aspect of the evolution of enlightenment.

James R. Jones  
Falls Church, VA

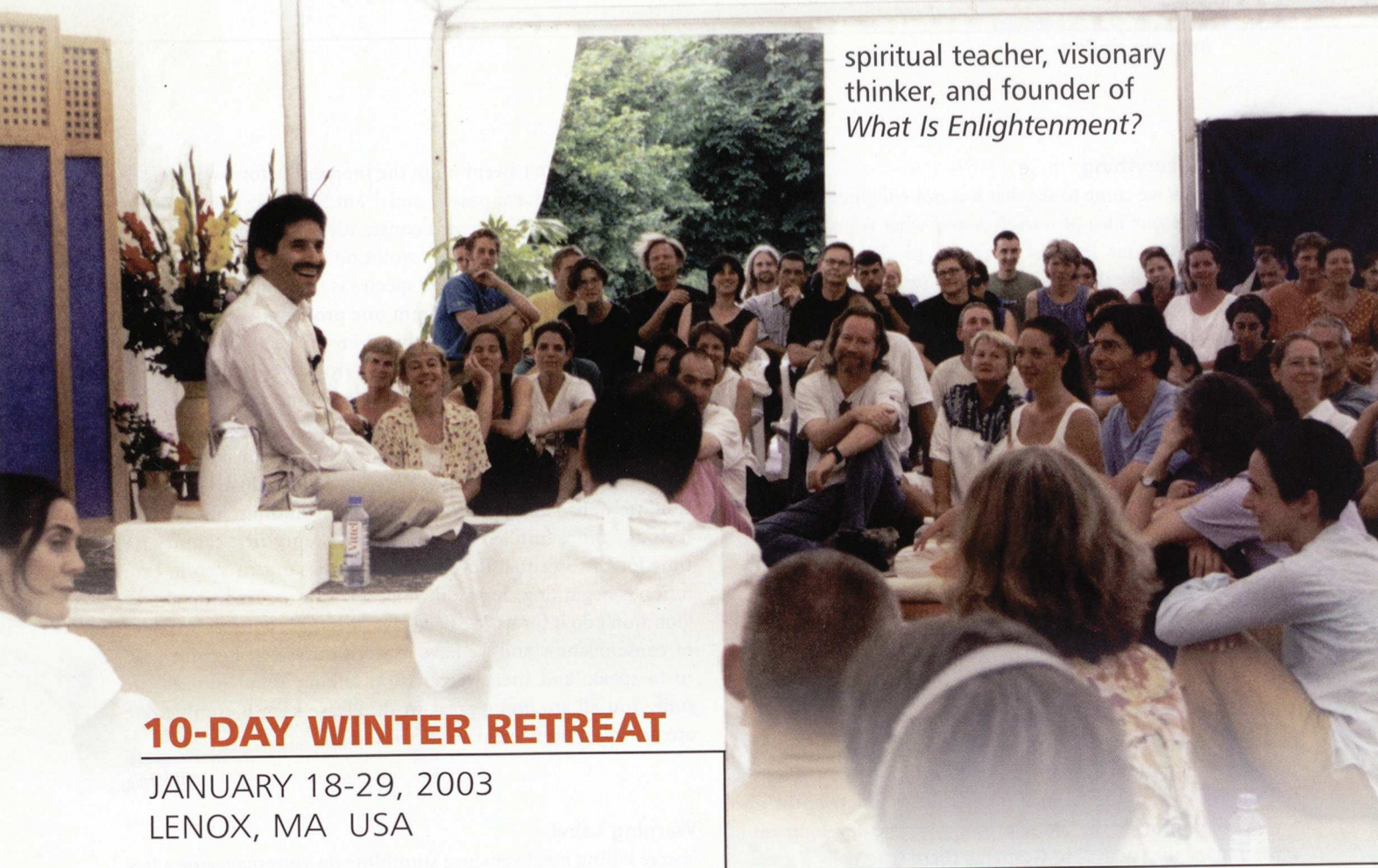
### **Group Illumination**

Thank you for the thoughtful articles on evolution and enlightenment in the twenty-first century. You’ve touched on some concepts that I think are pivotal to emergent varieties of enlightenment. I would like to point out that these concepts are not so recent, radical, or original as you presented them. For example, Andrew presents his remarkable story of simultaneous group illumination among some of his students as a radical new thing, and Ken seems to agree. Yet Alice Bailey wrote extensively on this theme in most of her twenty-some books back in the 1920s through the 1940s. She explores in depth why this type of phenomenon will be emerging over the next few centuries, the problems and opportunities it will bring, group techniques and meditations to hasten its development, implications for humanity and civilization, and so forth. Ken and Andrew say this is all so new we will have to develop a new tradition around it, to figure out how it works and what it’s about. Bailey provided an extensive amount of literature on just this theme, as well as organizing a group of students who experimented with group progress.

James Davis  
email

# on retreat with andrew cohen

spiritual teacher, visionary  
thinker, and founder of  
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Andrew Cohen

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# letters

continued  
from our readers

## Let Go of Everything

As we awaken we come to see that it is not enlightenment that is evolving, it is our idea of ourselves and what is possible that is evolving. From our level of sleep we produced the idea of enlightenment. Like the idea of god. For our maximum potential we need to let go of our idea of everything, even the ancient teachings. Everything. When we stop holding, and allow, our cells revert to their natural frequency, and like the particles that let go of their separateness to become cells, humanity will evolve into something that is beyond what we can even imagine from this perspective. Enjoying the ride.

Paul Lowe  
email

## The Great German Fear

Thank you for this brilliant issue! I am living in the city of Berlin, Germany and the themes are very challenging. As Carter Phipps put it [in *From the Editors*]: "... Ken Wilber and Michael Murphy trace the beginnings of evolutionary spirituality back to the late eighteenth century, when the German idealists such as Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling began speaking about human history as the greater and greater unfolding of spirit in this world. Inspired by the burgeoning Industrial Revolution, the notion of progress was then all the rage in the West, a notion that would, over the next few decades, provide the underpinnings for the development of evolutionary theory. . . ." In Germany there is actually a great—unconscious—fear of exploring the transpersonal realms. It seems that the terrible shipwreck of the Nazi past has created a psychic contraction. This contraction is expressing itself as a great confusion. Ken Wilber describes it as pre/trans fallacy. The land of the "poets and thinkers" is afraid of great visions and the possibility of an evolutionary quantum jump because of this chapter of its history. Ken Wilber describes it in *One Taste*: "What happened in Germany is, among a million other causes, a classic case of the pre/trans fallacy. In fact, the entire German tradition is a study in the pre/trans fallacy, producing now a Hegel, now a Hitler." Therefore, your issue is extremely helpful to stimulate new impulses in the German-speaking countries and I hope that it will be translated as soon as possible. [*What Is Enlightenment?* is now available in German translation through *Visionen*.]

Albert Klamt  
Berlin

## God Won't Do It for Us

I would just like to say that I think *The Future of God* is a landmark issue in the spiritual revolution that is taking place worldwide. I had to let a couple of weeks pass after digesting it

to be sure I wasn't swept up in the moment before writing, but a couple weeks have passed and I am STILL swept up in the moment but that moment is constantly changing. I am on fire day and night. The spiritual revolution [that] is just beginning is so urgently necessary if the species is to survive. Humanity's various problems all result from one problem: We think we're separate. Separate from everything! From each other, from the earth, from god, from our thoughts, from our actions, etc. It's endless, but all stems from this basic misconception of separation. We have advanced so much technologically in the past few thousand years, but spiritually we haven't advanced at all. We're cavemen with suits on! We've had the industrial revolution, we've had various other kinds of revolutions, but nobody feels any more fulfilled. So now in the twenty-first century it's time for the Spiritual Revolution. The next urgent step in evolution is beginning, and God won't do it for us. Traditional religion won't do it for us. We need and must have a transformation of consciousness and we have to do it ourselves. Become god, so to speak, and then we can stop talking about him all the time. You all are doing great work. Please keep it coming. We are tearing it up like a pack of wild dogs!

Brian Piergrossi  
California

## Warning Label

You're killing me. Ever since stumbling on your magazine a few years ago, my worldview has been grabbed by the throat, shaken like a limp rag doll and throttled to death. I thank you with all my heart. The latest issue on evolution was simply the most creative, inspiring, and mind-smashing magazine I have ever had the privilege to read. You leave my mind swimming with nothing to grab on to, and no perspectives to uphold. All sacred cows have been slaughtered and fried, leaving only limitless unbound potential and freedom. There should definitely be a warning label on the cover.

Aaron Wray  
Gig Harbor, WA

## Why Sri Aurobindo Is Cool

### Titan of the Spirit

Thank you for the excellent article on Sri Aurobindo, *Why Sri Aurobindo Is Cool*. Aurobindo has always been difficult for aspirants to understand, and this is even more so in today's climate of "pop" spirituality and the "advaita shuffle," quick-fix mentality. This article in *WIE*, while necessarily only scratching the surface of this titan of the spirit, may give serious spiritual practitioners some inkling that there truly is work to be done after "personal

awakening.” In my own work with students, I try to get the point across that the realization of individual truth and peace is only the first step on an infinite journey of enlightenment, like a pebble in a lake that produces ever-widening circles of influence. Those with the heart and mental determination to grapple with the works of Aurobindo will invariably become convinced of this.

Petros  
Los Angeles, CA

## Even Cooler

Last month I read and enjoyed your article on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I hope it does turn people on to this man who is cool beyond anything than most of us will ever understand. I hope you follow your studies towards Patrizia Norelli-Bachelet because she is a crucial extension of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s work. She is REALLY cool. AND she is ALIVE. Bachelet’s work points interested students toward being able to see the harmony and perfection beneath All Circumstance, toward being able to recognize the Supramental Force already active in the world, toward an ever evolving perception of the Whole. To talk of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and not reveal the possibility of their current extension is curious. Patrizia’s work is an inseparable extension of the amazing Duo.

Lori Tompkins  
Monterey, CA

## Making God Real

Somewhere in his writings Aurobindo said words to the effect that God-realization is only a “middle term” in the process of enlightenment because after realization comes transformation. And transformation is not simply of the individual’s psychophysical being into a body of light; it is transformation of the entire creation through descent of the Supermind, so that the entire world becomes a body of light. You could say that is a “different kind of enlightenment,” but from my point of view, its difference is simply that of a more advanced understanding and deepened commitment to God-realization. It is commitment to realizing God or making God real, visible, tangible throughout the material realm. Everything is changed—all human activities and institutions—such as economics, marriage, social relationships, law, trade and commerce, education, politics, government, communications, etc. That transformation, in turn, provides the platform for still higher stages of personal evolution which, as more and more individuals attain it, feeds back into society for still higher stages of cultural evolution.

John White  
email

## In Search of Babaji

### Don’t Believe Them

Your article about Babaji is extensive and interesting. As you have discovered, there is much speculation and many irrational claims made by some people. Shortly before Paramahansa Yogananda’s *mahasamadhi*, he told some of his disciples that, after he was gone, many people would claim to be Babaji, and many others would claim to be represent him. He also told us that some mediums (channellers in today’s jargon) would claim to be Babaji, and many other gurus in this Kriya Yoga lineage spoke through them. I remember Paramahansa’s words: “Don’t believe them. Neither I, nor any of the great masters, will ever speak through mediums.”

Roy Eugene Davis  
Lakemont, GA

### Internet Babaji?

I enjoyed the Babaji article, especially the ending—What did Internet Babaji tell you? Babaji is the union of all opposites. Human evolution started as Spirit Beings according to Shiva Purana and evolved organs and more density. Or as Thomas Troward says, “Evolution can start at any point and proceed in any direction.” Very practical concept—so can healing, and success. Thank you for reporting my info on Babaji accurately.

Leonard Orr  
Staunton, VA

### In Over Our Heads

**EDITORS’ NOTE:** No written piece in *WIE* has ever proven as controversial or elicited such strong reactions as the “Did Babaji and Yogananda have a falling out?” section of the article *In Search of Babaji*, featured in our Spring/Summer 2002 issue. A great many of our readers strongly objected to our reporting the controversy surrounding whether or not Paramahansa Yogananda, revered master of Kriya Yoga and founder of the Self Realization Fellowship, strayed from the straight and narrow. Our initial intention was to print a balanced selection of the many substantive responses we received regarding this article. However, due to the gravity of the allegations, accusations, and counter-accusations contained in these letters, we have been strongly advised by legal counsel not to print them. We very much appreciate the many sincere, informative, and heartfelt letters we received, and apologize to our readers that we cannot present them at this time.

letters continued on p. 173

# in the beginning

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a word from the editors

"DIFFERENCE WITHOUT HIERARCHY" is a phrase I remember well from my college years. I remember hurriedly scribbling those three words in my notebook as my English teacher, the cool teacher, the hippie-radical-whose-classes-everyone-wanted-to-take teacher, intoned their significance from the front of the room. And he was right. They *were* significant. A person can be different, believe differently, see the world differently, follow a different creed or religion, live in a different culture, live an entirely different kind of life than you or me, and it's okay, it's not a problem—live and let live, different strokes for different folks. Now, believe it or not, that *is* a revolution in thinking. You don't have to grow up next to hot-blooded, high-minded Southern Baptists dead set on converting the world to their brand of Christianity come hell or high water to appreciate the revolution of liberalism, of pluralism, of tolerance and respect for differences without hierarchy—differences, that is, without a very nasty hierarchy of me looking down on you, or perhaps you looking down on me. And you don't need to watch CNN for very long to understand that for far too much of the world this is quite a difficult concept to grasp. But if you're reading these words, it's more than likely that the notion of respect for difference is something that has sunk deep roots into your way of understanding this multi-cultured and multi-creatured world. And I don't have to look too far around the offices of *What Is Enlightenment?* to feel quite confident that the same can be said of those editing this magazine (give or take a few days before deadline). But before we get all warm and fuzzy and start congratulating our enlightened selves on our highly evolved outlook on life, we may want to stand back for a moment and take a second look at this notion of "difference without hierarchy."

You see, a number of outspoken voices in today's spiritual culture are telling us that in order to face the complexity of a changing world that seems to be hurtling a little faster toward Omega every day, we must ourselves be ready to embrace the process of change, of development, of spiritual evolution and transformation. But unfortunately, there is no hope of doing that, they tell us, until we get beyond one very big obstacle—difference without hierarchy. The once-revolutionary concept of "live and let live" that helped inspire the entire generation of

baby boomers to make the world a kinder, gentler place for all shapes and sizes of people has, in its latest incarnation, we are told, spawned some rather unpleasant side effects, most notably an antihierarchical, antiauthoritarian, antievolutionary, politically correct, pseudo-spiritual world in which real transformation is paid only lip service and hardly anybody truly wants to change. Now if that seems like quite a mouthful, don't worry, because integral philosopher Ken Wilber has a simple term to describe this malady—*boomeritis*. And, as you will see in the pages that follow, he is hardly the only person with a few choice words to say about this culture-wide phenomenon.

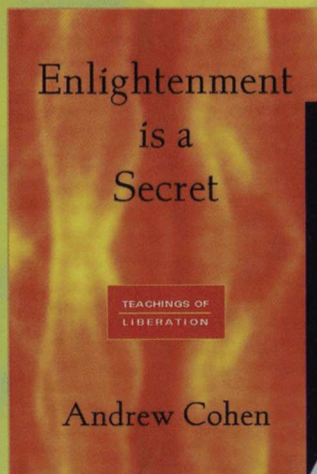
Don't get me wrong. The issue you hold in your hands is not solely about boomeritis. It is, first and foremost, an issue about change, about transformation, and about the higher reaches of our evolutionary potential. Indeed, in this edition of *WIE*, we examine new models of individual and cultural transformation that are revolutionizing the way we understand the spiritual life. We explore new philosophical and metaphysical worlds that are opening up as the human race pushes ever further into the upper realms of human potential. We present glimpses of some of the great men and women in history who have shown us, through their own profound transformations, the untapped possibilities that lie dormant in the human race. And we venture a few steps out beyond the known to take a look at the mysterious nature of spiritual transformation, at stories of the miraculous that can never quite be understood by our material minds. This issue is about all of that, and yes, it is also about the resistance to change that today finds its most malignant expression in a cultural virus called boomeritis.

Now before I turn you loose on what we hope is our most provocative, inspiring, and eclectic spiritual adventure to date, let me inject one small note of caution. None of us can escape the influence of the times and culture in which we live and that may very well mean that all of us carry active, or at least dormant, strains of this postmodern virus—boomers and nonboomers alike. At the very least, make room for the possibility. We did. And as you will see in several of the articles that follow, boomeritis, it turned out, was indeed thriving quite well in the offices of *What Is Enlightenment?* ■

—Carter Phipps

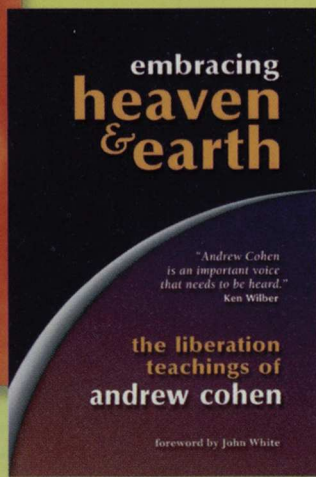
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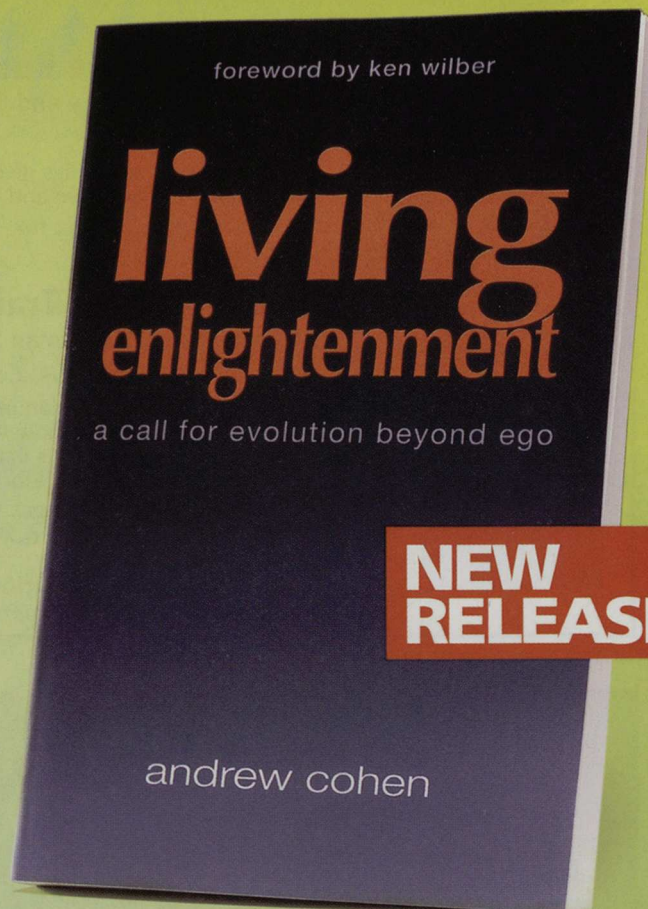
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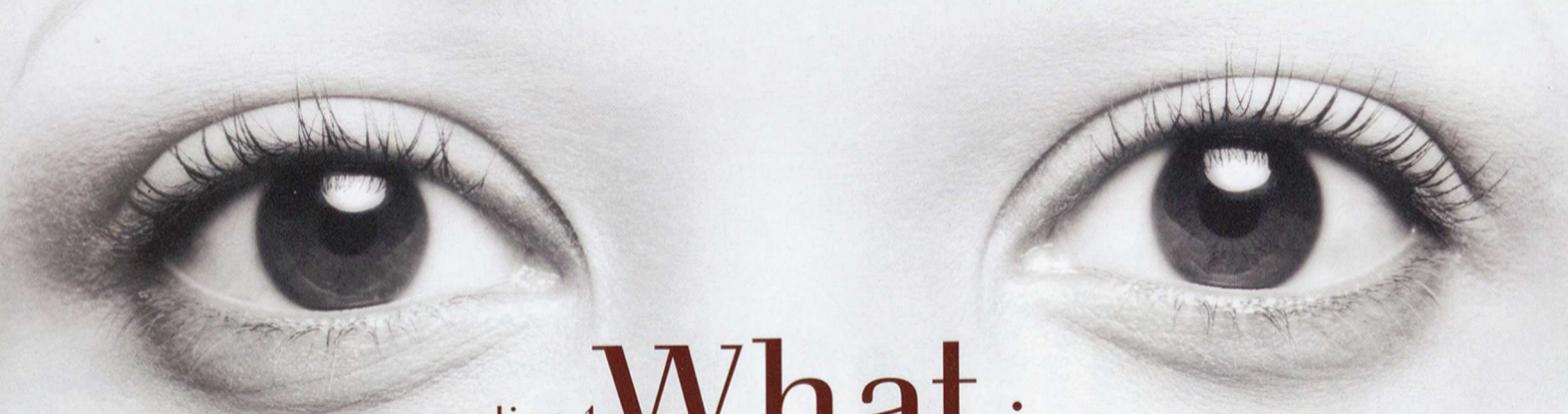
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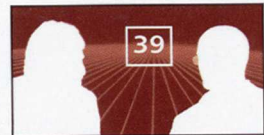
section 1 **What is  
Spiritual  
Transformation?**

*What unprecedented opportunities for individual and collective transformation are emerging at this critical point in history?*

*What are the unique obstacles to transformation in the 21st Century?*



**A Philosopher of Change**  
*An Interview with Yasuhiko Kimura*



**The Guru and the Pandit**  
**Breaking the Rules**  
*Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber in Dialogue*



**Boomeritis and Me:**  
**Not Just a Book Review**



# A Philosopher

an interview with

Yasuhiko Kimura

by Carter Phipps

# of Change



"TO BE A PHILOSOPHER," Henry David Thoreau once wrote, "is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school. . . . It is to solve some of the problems of life, not theoretically, but practically." In this day and age, when philosophical considerations, not to mention philosophers themselves, seem to have long abandoned civilization's center stage for relatively minor roles in the drama of history, such musings may strike us as rather quaint. After all, in a light-speed, Internet-driven, postindustrial, just-on-time, globalized world, philosophy seems a little stuck in the slow lane of change, regularly lapped by science, psychology, technology, and even, many would say, spirituality. Just imagine, for a moment, the type of person that comes to mind when I say the word *philosopher* . . . Okay, I rest my case.

Now take a deep breath and clear your mind, because philosophy is about to break out of the box, shake off the cobwebs of the twentieth century and become hip once again. That's right, welcome to the revolution, or a least the new evolution, of this ancient science—introducing the integral philosopher/visionaries of the twenty-first century. After a modern age of intellectual specialization and a postmodern age of philosophical hesitation, a new breed of up-and-coming thinkers are ready to

take their turn at understanding the affairs of our troubled world. Hailing from various disciplines and backgrounds, what makes these eclectic twenty-first-century lovers of wisdom so unique is their conviction that deeper and higher knowledge about the nature of life and the workings of human evolution *is* important, can make a difference, and, rightly applied, may even deliver us into a new world characterized by a little more Plato, as one book recently put it, and a little less Prozac.

Yasuhiko Kimura, the Japanese-American author of *Think Kosmically Act Globally*, is one of these new integral philosophers, and his work embodies many of the traits of this emerging paradigm. Passionate about science, he is also deeply grounded in the spiritual dimension of life, having spent several years as a Zen priest in his native Japan. While he is not a spiritual teacher in the traditional sense, he does teach, and in fact has dedicated himself to a wide range of educational activities designed to bring transformational ideas into the mainstream of our culture. Drawing on a number of fields of study, and open-minded enough to incorporate the ideas of others, Kimura's work, like that of many of his contemporaries, is, above all, aimed at divining the patterns of evolution at work in the human family and inspiring individual and collective transformation up the evolutionary ladder.

Of course, it is almost impossible to mention integral philosophy without acknowledging the large footprint put down by the comprehensive and invaluable work of Ken Wilber. But the rising tide of ideas that is driving these new visions—integration, holism, evolution, chaos, complexity, spirituality, choice, emergence, change, and, of course, transformation—seems destined to outstrip the work of any one person. Kimura himself owes much to others' trailblazing, but he is also quite clearly intent on making his own mark in this emerging field. And to do so, he has drawn on some rather unlikely inspiration. Born into one of the most collectively oriented societies in the world, Japan, Kimura has, during his nineteen years in America, positioned himself to carry on the traditions of some of this country's greatest champions of individualism—the transcendentalist philosophers of the nineteenth century, men like Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Walt Whitman.

Though the line of evolution from nineteenth-century Walden Pond to twentieth-century Japan to twenty-first-century California, where Kimura now resides, might seem more than a little implausible, it can in large part be attributed to the influence of an unusual book that Kimura read in the early nineties, a book that was destined to change the course of his life. Entitled *The Man Who Tapped the Secrets of the Universe*, it tells the remarkable story of the life and times of Walter Russell. Russell was an early-twentieth-century artist, philosopher, activist, and mystic whose spirituality, ethics, and radical notions about science resonated deeply with Kimura's own experience. It was through Russell that Kimura was first exposed to the work of an organization known as The Twilight Club. The Twilight Club was originally formed in the late nineteenth century by a long list of illustrious

figures, including Emerson, Whitman, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Andrew Carnegie. These great men had sensed a moral decline in the society during that "Gilded Age" and had come together to explore ways to bolster the spiritual and ethical life of a nation chafing under the harsh social realities of the industrial economy. A great number of civic organizations, including the Lion's Club, the Kiwanis Club, the Rotary Club, the Boy Scouts, Carnegie Libraries, and even the Better Business Bureau, had their roots in The Twilight Club, inspired by its members' strong conviction that the fate of the nation and, indeed, our entire modern civilization, rests squarely on the ethical and ultimately spiritual character of the individual. Over a century later, Kimura is picking up the baton and attempting to draw together those who can help him in his own quest to fight the ills of a society now chafing under the harsh bit not of modernism but of a postmodern spiritual malaise that he feels has spawned a culture-wide "conspiracy of mediocrity," undermining the drive toward higher human potential in our global village.

Today, Kimura runs the University of Science and Philosophy, an organization originally founded by Walter Russell, and he is also the executive director of the modern incarnation of The Twilight Club. Through conferences, educational courses, writings, and the quarterly journal *The Cosmic Light*, Kimura is working on many fronts to help create a new cultural ethos in which the higher possibilities of human transformation have become established in the culture as essential to our understanding of life, in much the same way that the once-radical ideas of psychology have now become established as essential to our understanding of the self. In this effort, he and his philosophical brethren are armed with more knowledge about human evolution and transformation than has ever before been assembled in the history of humanity, and they are bringing a fresh spirit of urgency and optimism to this awesome task.

The great evolutionary thinker Alfred North Whitehead once said that all of Western philosophy could be seen essentially as footnotes to Plato. But neither Plato nor any other philosopher in history had to grapple with the sheer magnitude and complexity of the problems that confront our society today. New times call for new thinking, as the saying goes, and there is little doubt that today's world is desperately in need of a few with clear vision who can see through the complexity and find a deeper order amid the chaos. Perhaps these new visionaries, whose philosophical ancestors once advised kings, have again found their moment to shine in history's spotlight. But without question, a tremendous amount has to change before we get to that point. In fact, the question of how we change, that is, the question of how human beings transform themselves—individually and collectively—is exactly what prompted me to seek out Kimura last June for an interview. Speaking from his office in southern California, with a soft Japanese accent, Kimura shared with me what he has learned in his years as priest, teacher, scientist, and philosopher about spiritual transformation and the challenge of change.



Yasuhiko Kimura

## A Philosopher of Change

### WIE: *What is spiritual transformation?*

**YASUHIKO KIMURA:** Instead of trying to define the term, I would like to first look at some of the facets of what we call *transformation*. Transformation, to me, is a uniquely significant dance between *being* and *becoming*. Being is in becoming and becoming is in being. The term *enlightenment*, or spiritual awakening, points more to the movement from becoming to being, whereas the term *transformation* points more to the movement from being to becoming. Enlightenment is a movement that is primarily from becoming to being, a *return* to being. Transformation is a movement that is primarily from being to becoming, into *creating*. So transformation is a part of this evolutionary cycle, this dynamic complementarity of being and becoming.

**WIE:** *Can you describe the process that the individual undergoes in this movement from being to becoming? What is actually being transformed?*

**YK:** In the last several years, I have been teaching a particular model of transformation, which I call the *Triformal Learning Matrix*. *Tri* means, of course, three, and so the formational element comprises three formations: *information*, *metaformation*, and *transformation*.

Informational learning is what we normally go through in our educational system and in our own lives. We read books, we listen to people, and we gain knowledge and experience. We develop a more and more comprehensive body of knowledge based on some principle of organization. Metaformation is

sometimes called inspiration or intuition; it is a higher form of knowledge that sort of knocks on your door and you become aware of something that is eternal. So when this higher intuition, or metaformation, gets integrated into your own informational learning, you then start to reconfigure the whole context within which you have held the body of knowledge that you already have. And at the same time, you are able to incorporate the higher metaformational knowledge into your own body of knowledge. In this dance between information and metaformation, a *transformation* takes place. Metaformation is returning to the source of your being, the ground of your being from which you intuit a new form of insight. Then, when that insight is successfully married with the body of knowledge that you already have, transformation takes place. That is my way of understanding transformation.

So on the one hand, there is a dynamic binary of being and becoming, and on the other hand, there is a trinity, with transformation emerging from the creative dance between metaformation and information. It's like alchemy. People used to try to transform lead into gold. And spiritually speaking, gold is the symbol of the transformed state and lead is the raw material. But what happens when this lead becomes gold is that somehow the lead dissolves itself into the noumenon, the cosmic wholeness, and then from there you create the new dimensionality of being, which we call gold. That is the process of transformation, where the ego structure dematerializes itself and then merges into the whole. From there you actually create a new you, so to speak, on the basis of the knowledge that you

gain through your metaformation. So you become your own creation, based on the cosmic knowledge that you have received. And once this process takes place, it is an ongoing evolution. Enlightenment then becomes like a trigger, or the beginning of a continual transformational evolution. That is how I see transformation.

## TRANSFORMING TRANSFORMATION

**WIE:** I'd like to ask you about how the process of transformation is changing to accommodate life in the twenty-first century, especially considering that one primary characteristic of the modern age is an ever-increasing rate of change. As the inventor and futurist Ray Kurzweil recently said:

Centuries ago people didn't think that the world was changing at all. Their grandparents had the same lives that they did, and they expected their grandchildren would do the same, and that expectation was largely fulfilled. . . . What's not fully understood is that the pace of change is itself accelerating, and the last 20 years are not a good guide to the next 20 years. We're doubling the paradigm shift rate, the rate of progress, every decade. This will actually match the amount of progress we made in the whole 20th century, because we've been accelerating up to this point. The 20th century was like 25 years of change at today's rate of change. In the next 25 years we'll make four times the progress you saw in the 20th century. And we'll make 20,000 years of progress in the 21st century, which is

almost a thousand times more technical change than we saw in the 20th century.

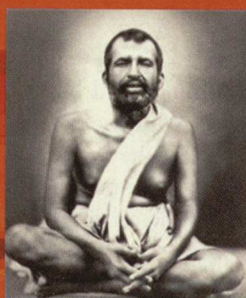
*Dee Hock, the founder and former CEO of Visa International and author of Birth of the Chaordic Age, who is also interviewed in this issue, echoed this point recently, saying that change is not going to happen, nor is it likely to happen, but that change is the very nature of what is happening. So in this context, how must our modern understanding of spiritual transformation take into account our rapidly changing world and the complexity it creates?*

**YK:** It's interesting because what is also happening with all this rapid change is that change itself is changing. The process of evolution itself is evolving. There is a meta-evolution, or a meta-change that is taking place. And in that process what you see is actually an increasing contrast between change and the eternal or the unchanging. I become more and more aware of that which does not change in the context of this continual change you're describing. So the more you tune in to change, the more you become tuned in to that which does not change. In a way, the contrast between the immutable and the mutable becomes much more distinct. To put this in the language I used earlier, not only is the body of information growing but also the accessibility of metaformational insight becomes greater. Compared to hundreds of years ago, people are really becoming much more aware of that which is eternal. So we live at an exciting moment in history, when both metaformation and information are gaining tremendous momentum. We are transforming transformation itself.

## TALES of TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa

Hindu Saint  
19th Century India



TOTAPURI ASKED THE DISCIPLE [Ramakrishna] to withdraw his mind from all objects of the relative world, including the gods and goddesses, and to concentrate on the Absolute. But the task was not easy even for Sri Ramakrishna. He found it impossible to take his mind beyond Kali, the Divine Mother of the Universe. "After the initiation," Sri Ramakrishna later said, describing the event, "Nangta began to teach me the various conclusions of Advaita Vedanta and asked me to withdraw the mind completely from all objects and dive deep into Atman. But in spite of all my attempts I could not altogether cross the realm of name and form and bring my mind to the unconditioned state. I had no difficulty in taking the mind from all the objects of the world. But the radiant and all too familiar figure of the Blissful Mother, the Embodiment of the essence of Pure Consciousness, appeared before me as a

living reality. Her bewitching smile prevented me from passing into the Great Beyond. Again and again I tried, but She stood in my way every time. In despair I said to Nangta: 'It is hopeless. I cannot raise my mind to the unconditioned state and come face to face with Atman.' He grew excited and sharply said: 'What? You can't do it? But you have to.' He cast his eyes around. Finding a piece of glass he took it up and stuck it between my eyebrows. 'Concentrate the mind on this point!' he thundered. Then with stern determination I again sat to meditate. As soon as the gracious form of the Divine Mother appeared before me, I used my discrimination as a sword and with it clove Her in two. The last barrier fell. My spirit at once soared beyond the relative plane. I lost myself in samadhi."

Swami Nikhilananda, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1970), pp. 48-49.

*Authenticity is fundamental, more fundamental than spiritual enlightenment. Without authenticity, no genuine spiritual enlightenment is possible.*

**WIE:** *One characteristic of this increasing rate of change and the complexity that it presents seems to be an increasing amount of stress on our systems. It is interesting that some scientists, including the evolutionary biologist Elisabet Sahtouris, feel that this stress may be a critical component in our own evolution. In fact, she has said that stress is the only thing that creates evolution in natural systems. Do you agree that stress is an essential part of the transformational process?*

**YK:** It depends on how you define stress. And I have discussed this same issue with Sahtouris. You see, we generally attach negative connotations to the term stress. It can be seen as negative, but it also has a positive impact. My definition of stress is that it is the psychophysical response that is triggered by the perception that you are out of control. For example, when you are faced with a problem that you cannot solve by the body of knowledge that you currently have, you are under stress. When you are faced with a challenge or problem that is bigger than anything that you have encountered before, you are naturally under stress. In this sense, it is the most salient element that triggers and compels transformation. That's why I often tell my students to ask themselves a question for which they have no answer, or read a book that they cannot readily understand. That causes stress. And by the time they become able to answer the question or understand

the book, they have evolved. So in that sense I agree with Elisabet completely. You can see that same process in biological evolution.

**WIE:** *What is it, fundamentally, that allows us to transform ourselves at all? What drives this process of human transformation?*

**YK:** What drives transformation and evolution is the very nature of the universe itself. There is an evolutionary thrust for optimization that is inherent in the universe, so the more you are tuned in to that evolutionary thrust for optimization, the more chance you have to utilize that thrust for your own evolution. The universe, to me, is like a drama or a play between zero and infinity. In between, we have all possible ways of being and this one dynamic flow of evolution. You know, we often use the term *guru* to indicate an enlightened human being guiding others. But if you look into the meaning of the term *guru* in Sanskrit, or *lama* in Tibetan, you'll find that it means the force of intelligence working inside yourself and the universe as the syntropic (anti-entropic), order-creating, meaning-bestowing evolutionary principle. So the term *guru* means your own awareness of that principle. The more you tune into this *guru*, this *lama*, or this evolutionary principle within yourself and the universe, the more you have the harmonious sense of cosmic evolution, within and without. That is what

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Flora Courtois

*Founder of the Zen Center of Los Angeles  
20th Century USA*

**SOMETIME IN APRIL**, Easter vacation arrived and I went home to Detroit to spend a week with my parents. There, about three days later, alone in my room, sitting quietly on the edge of my bed and gazing at a small desk, not thinking of anything at all, in a moment too short to measure, the universe changed on its axis and my search was over. . . .

In a way that is utterly indescribable, all my questions and doubts were gone as effortlessly as chaff in the wind. I knew everything and all at once. Yet not in the sense that I had ever known anything before. . . .

Sitting in wonder on the edge of my narrow bed, one of the first things I realized was that the focus of my sight seemed to have changed; it had sharpened to an infinitely small point which moved ceaselessly in paths totally free of the old accustomed ones, as if flowing from a new source.

What on earth had happened to me? So released from all tension, so ecstatically light did I feel. . . . With a wondrous relief, I began to laugh as I'd never laughed before, from the soles of my feet upward. . . .

Over a period of many months there took place a ripening, a deepening and unfolding of this experience which filled me with wonder and gratitude at every moment. The foundations had fallen from my world. I had plunged into a numinous

openness which had obliterated all fixed distinctions including that of "within" and "without." A Presence had absorbed the universe including myself, and to this I gave myself up in absolute confidence. . . .

If "God" was the word for this Presence in which I was absorbed then everything was either holy or nothing; no distinction was possible. All was meaningful, complete as it was, each bird, bud, midge, mole, atom, crystal, of total importance in itself. As in the notes of a great symphony, nothing was large or small, nothing of more or less importance to the whole.

*Flora Courtois, An Experience of Enlightenment (Tokyo: Shunju-sha, 1970), pp. 29-31.*

drives transformation. It is in the nature of the universe. That evolutionary thrust is there within you. You can try to reduce it, ignore it, or be oblivious to it, but it's like a rocket ship—if you get on it, you'll be going to the moon.

**WIE:** *So are you saying that to really harness the transformative power of this natural principle, we have to personally decide to join in the evolutionary process?*

**YK:** Yes. Unless you intend to consciously evolve and transform, your spiritual evolution is not going to be able to take place. That's one of the five salient points, or tenets, of enlightenment that the founder of your magazine, Andrew Cohen, writes about. He calls it *Clarity of Intention*. You know, it is essential—the volitional participation in the process of evolution is essential.

## INTEGRATING ENLIGHTENMENT

**WIE:** *I wanted to ask you some questions about Spiral Dynamics,\* the system of human development pioneered originally by Clare Graves and more recently by Don Beck, who is interviewed in this issue of WIE [see page 105]. I know you've used Spiral Dynamics in your own work, and that you postulated at least two stages of spiritual development beyond Beck's basic model, which includes eight stages (and some preliminary evidence of a ninth stage). What are these higher stages of spiritual development, and why do you feel they need to be added to his model?*

**YK:** I attended Don Beck's seminar in 1999, and it was the first time that I had seen a model of evolution that has thirty, forty, fifty years of research behind it. Clare Graves, Don Beck, Beck's former partner Chris Cowan, and, of course, Ken Wilber have done extensive research. It is no longer just a speculation. It's really based on actual human beings and their experiences. So to me, the value of Spiral Dynamics is that we can use this model for social transformation as well as for personal transformation.

Before I came across Don Beck, I had my own model of evolution, which was pretty much aligned with what he was speaking about. He talks about a First Tier of development with six stages and a Second Tier with basically two stages. But in my model, there were nine stages, so there was one more. When you carefully read the Spiral Dynamics description of the last stage—there are people who have actually gone beyond it. In my own life, I have met people who are actually beyond what I would call *Homo Sapiens Holisticus*, which is equivalent to the last stage, the TURQUOISE stage in Spiral Dynamics. The next stage I call *Homo Sapiens Universalis*, and it is the fulfillment of the promise and possibility of self-consciousness, which Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke talked about in his book *Cosmic Consciousness*, published over a century ago. This is the stage at which the involuntary movement of cosmic consciousness takes place for the first time. At this stage, one has the experience of spiritual illumination,

cosmic epiphany, and cosmic awakening and becomes conscious of the ground of being of the whole. One comes to know the causative realm of existence. There are a few spiritual legends (perhaps like Babaji, whom you wrote about in your last issue) who point to an even further evolutionary possibility, *Homo Sapiens Cosmicus*, which is, I believe, another stage of evolution—the evolution of cosmic consciousness itself. So, based on my observation and my own thinking, I would say that there are other possibilities beyond the eighth stage of Spiral Dynamics. The individual examples are so few and far between that obviously Clare Graves wasn't able to interview those people. But through my own experience and through meetings with people I have known, I can infer these next stages of evolution from the eighth stage that Beck and Graves described.

**WIE:** *Are there more stages beyond those as well?*

**YK:** Yes, I assume so, because there's no end to the process of transformation, there's no beginning and no end. I don't know what kind of form the next stage would take, but the process goes on. I don't think we can really know the stage that is two stages beyond our own stage at this point. One stage beyond is pretty much all that you can have a sense of.

**WIE:** *How does one move along these higher stages of development? In your book, Think Kosmically Act Globally, you write, "In fact it is only when you attain the stage of Homo Sapiens Integratus [YELLOW meme in Spiral Dynamics] that you start to have the awareness of the identity of the spiritual forces acting in the universe and in your consciousness." That is the stage of integral development, or Second Tier in Don Beck's model. You describe this stage as follows, "One becomes conscious of the interconnectivity of all humanity at all stages of development and starts integrating all humanity within oneself." So are you saying that spirituality, in a sense, really only begins at that stage?*

**YK:** In my book, I talk about this in terms of peak experiences. At any stage it is possible to have these experiences, but until you reach *Homo Sapiens Integratus*, I don't think you can really integrate that spiritual force, that spiritual insight, into your evolutionary stream.

**WIE:** *What makes that so significant?*

**YK:** Well, you may have met people who have had some kind of peak experience but somehow their ego takes hold of it and then it is no longer there. It's become a fortification of the ego structure. And oftentimes what happens is that people stop their evolutionary growth right there. Some people live off their one spiritual experience the rest of their lives, writing books and teaching. So this state of being, state of consciousness, state of enlightenment can be achieved by anybody. But unless your informational learning leads

\*The developmental model of Spiral Dynamics is explored in detail in an interview with Don Beck in this issue of WIE. For a quick reference model of the basic stages see page 108.

Transformation,  
*ongoing* transformation,  
implies that you need to continuously  
dissolve the old meaning of your life  
and create your life anew.  
And you actually need to recognize  
the central meaning of your life  
to be the evolutionary process itself.

## The Ascent to Cosmic Consciousness

The Stages of  
Cosmic Consciousness

The Stages of  
self-consciousness  
as Self-Knowledge

The Stages of  
self-consciousness  
as self-identification

10. Homo Sapiens Cosmicus
9. Homo Sapiens Universalis
8. Homo Sapiens Holisticus
7. Homo Sapiens Integratus
6. Homo Sapiens Humanisticus
5. Homo Sapiens Materialensis
4. Homo Sapiens Absoluticus
3. Homo Sapiens Exploiticus
2. Homo Sapiens Mysticus
1. Homo Sapiens Survivalus



to the point of integration, or this integral level of development, you won't be able to integrate metaformational insight into your being and consciousness, and so you won't be able to use it as an engine of creation, an engine of transformation. However, if you can, then enlightenment becomes a beginning, an initiation into further evolution and further transformation. Until then, enlightenment is like a sporadic, almost accidental, event.

**WIE:** *So you're saying that at this integral level, you're able to consciously take up the process of your own transformation.*

**YK:** Yes. That's what P.D. Ouspensky and many others mean when they talk about conscious evolution. It begins with the initiation of awareness into the further reaches of human potential. And then you see that so much more is possible for your consciousness, and you begin the process of learning and participating in that syntropic (anti-entropic) spiritual force existing within the universe. Many people may have genuine spiritual experiences, even children. I did. But I was not able to integrate it, and it became an agonizing experience for me. My ego was not mature enough to let go of itself and be able to integrate that experience into my own growth.

**WIE:** *Agonizing because you were aware of a different possibility?*

**YK:** Yes, because I had read so many books by that time about the possibility of enlightenment and about the Buddha and all kinds of spiritual people. So I knew there was something to my experience, but I didn't know what to do with it. But when something similar but more profound occurred later in my life, then the learning process, the evolutionary process, was able to begin.

**WIE:** *In your quarterly journal, The Cosmic Light, you have written about authenticity. You say that this is one of the characteristics that is most essential in order to prepare for these higher stages. You write:*

Authenticity is fundamental, more fundamental than spiritual enlightenment. Without authenticity, no genuine spiritual enlightenment is possible. Authenticity is the state of being committed to truth. . . . Truth is simple, utterly so. . . . And no matter how simply a truth is stated, only those who have walked the path of understanding and evolution on their own can know and understand it authentically. The path of truth is the path least traveled. . . . Authenticity is the clarity of being in which there is no self-deceit.

*Why is authenticity so fundamental, and why is it more important than even spiritual enlightenment?*

**YK:** You see, our mind is extremely clever, and it has a tremendous capacity for delusion and self-deception. Authenticity is a counteraction for that self-deceit and tendency to delude one-

self. I often quote P.D. Ouspensky's simple statement that the most difficult thing in life is to know what one knows and to know what one doesn't know and to know the difference between the two. It requires a kind of honesty and authenticity to be aware of this difference and to really examine one's body of knowledge. What is it that one really knows and that one doesn't know? This is the kind of discipline that one needs to exert in one's own life. It is essential for taking advantage of the spiritual experience that one has. Otherwise, it can turn into another form of self-delusion utilized by the ego. So a person needs to have humility and authenticity with regard to the truth of the experience that they do have. And this authenticity leads one to higher and higher levels or into a more whole knowledge and understanding of the truth that is revealed to one.

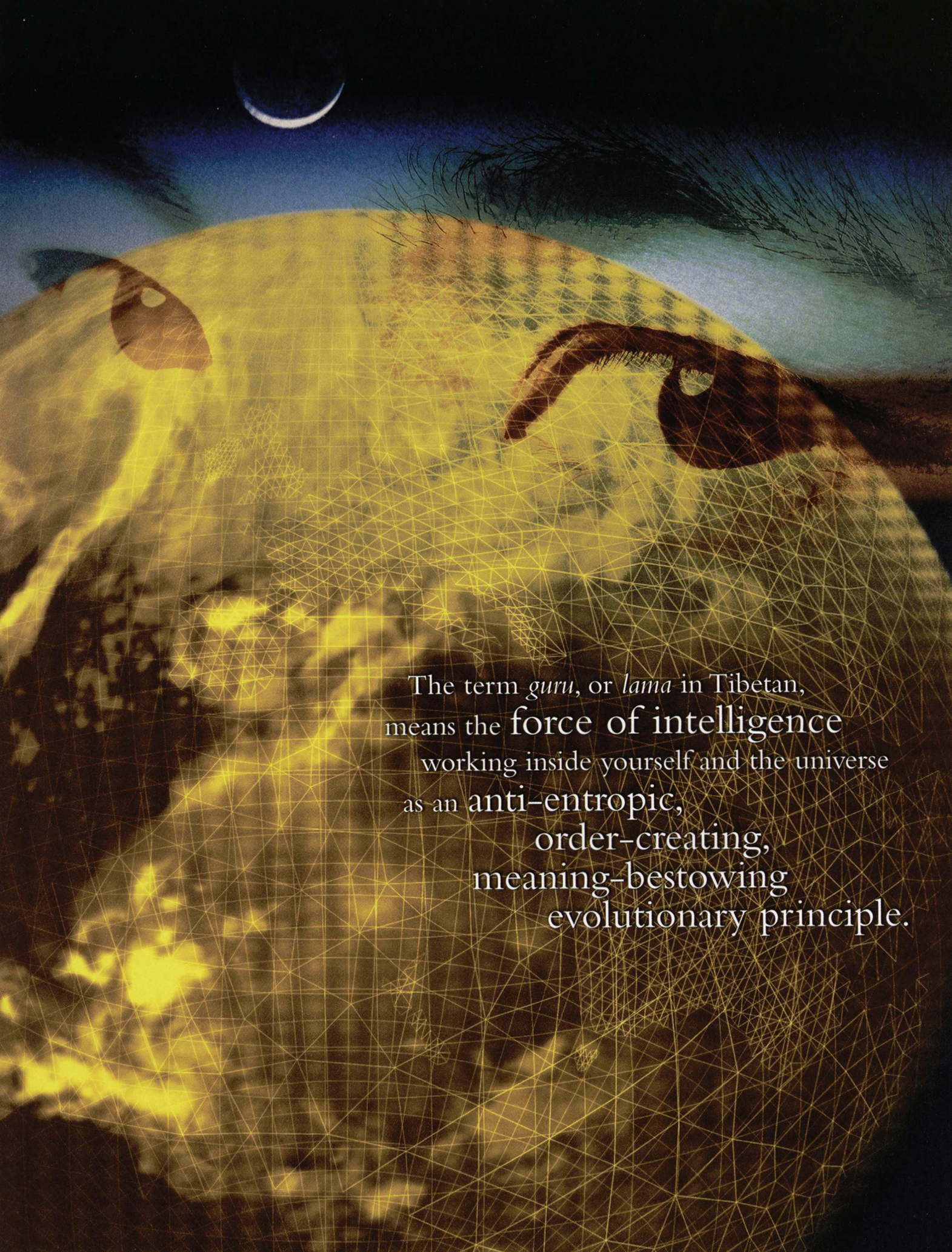
When one is true to oneself, when one is authentic, one becomes true to the evolutionary thrust for self-optimization that exists within oneself and within the universe. And that evolutionary thrust is a continuous unfolding process.

## A CULTURE OF TRANSFORMATION

**WIE:** *Ken Wilber, in his new book Boomeritis, writes, "Psychologists who track adult lifespan development find that most individuals go through a series of major transformations from birth to adolescence, whereupon transformation tends to taper off. Although many horizontal translations subsequently occur—the 'seasons of a person's life'—vertical transformations to higher levels tend to completely stop. From age 25 to around 55, very few vertical transformations occur." He concludes, "It's almost impossible to get an adult human being to transform." And Dee Hock, who I mentioned earlier, also says in this issue that there is so much resistance to change in individuals that it will likely take several cataclysms to provide the impetus for us to truly begin to transform our lives in significant ways. Do you agree with these sobering assessments of the capacity of human beings to transform themselves? And, if so, why is human transformation so difficult?*

**YK:** First of all, in the whole educational system and in our culture, transformation is not a major topic of discussion. Of course, today, you and I and many of us are speaking about transformation, enlightenment, and spirituality, but this group is still a small minority of people. In our society, most people don't even know that the possibility of spiritual transformation exists. Children learn from the adults, and what is available for them is what Ken Wilber calls *horizontal translation*, which is more like an expansion of the same kind of experience and information over and over again. *Vertical transformation* may take place in the Himalayas, in the ashrams, in the monasteries, where people who are a little bit eccentric go, but it is not a part of the common culture in which we live.

So I think Ken Wilber and Don Beck and several others are making a great contribution to humanity through their writings,



The term *guru*, or *lama* in Tibetan,  
means the **force of intelligence**  
working inside yourself and the universe  
as an **anti-entropic,**  
**order-creating,**  
**meaning-bestowing**  
**evolutionary principle.**

*What is missing in the New Age community is real intellectual rigor. If you feel good, you're enlightened. It is mediocrity, and a conspiracy toward mediocrity, and those people who conspire very well can become excellent speakers on the conference circuit and make lots of money.*

which are very accessible. They are helping to make evolutionary thinking and transformational ideas part of the human culture, which is essential for our next evolution. Otherwise, it will be merely a local phenomenon, because most people don't have any model; they just don't know. I will give you a very mundane example. People are now into eating sushi in this country. And coming from Japan, sometimes I am appalled by the kind of sushi they're eating. But they think that it is real sushi, because they don't know the real thing. They haven't been exposed to it. And most people are not exposed to the transformational possibilities of being human. Even for very intelligent, educated people, transformation is an entirely foreign concept. So that is something that we must change.

**WIE:** *Yet even for people who do know about these models of transformation, too often that knowledge, in and of itself, doesn't seem to provide the impetus to change. What other factors make transformation difficult for humans?*

**YK:** Well, even though I'm from Japan, I was educated in the Western kind of educational system, where we are so deeply immersed in the kind of thinking that is reductionistic and dual-

istic. So when we talk about transformation, we divide individual transformation and world transformation. And there is a difference, but they're complementary. One does not exist without the other. So one of the points that is very important is that there can be *no* authentic transformation of the world without an effort on our part toward self-transformation. It is essential for those people who are engaged in the transformation of the world to be willing to *be transformed* in the process of their own engagement. But what happens is that people go out and try to change and transform the world, but individually they are stuck where they are. Transformation always and necessarily calls for a transformation of oneself *and* one's environment. But I don't see that happening. People are stuck with their own positions that never change.

So first, we don't have a culture in which transformation is an essential component of the conversations that comprise humanity. And second, people are not willing to be transformed in the process of transforming the world.

**WIE:** *One of the people we spoke with for this issue was developmental psychologist Robert Kegan. He speaks about a force that he calls "dynamic equilibrium." As he writes:*

Is any effort at personal change—our own or that of

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Peter of Mystic Mountain

*Spiritual Teacher & Healer  
20th & 21st Century USA*



**Question:** Were you very unusual from birth or were you like everyone else?

**Peter:** I have to answer that in two ways. One, I am very ordinary. I am just like everybody else except for one difference—I have a knowing. I know who I am. That knowing comes in much the same way as the blooming of a flower. Up until it blooms the plant has to struggle and deal with the obstacles of the earth—pebbles, or being stepped on—then all of a sudden the flower blossoms.

**Q:** Did this happen to you gradually, or was there a particular event?

**Peter:** There was a particular event. I had spent an immense amount of time meditating, praying and going through all the rubbish that everybody else does. I say rubbish, but it's not really rubbish because it does lead you to a certain point.

One day I just stopped expecting anything. I love to sit by the fire. One day I was sitting there thinking, "Oh well, it's my time to sit by the fire . . . for no reason at all . . . because if anything was going to happen, it would have happened years ago." I never expected anything, I wasn't even interested in having an experience. And then something consumed me. I had never been so frightened. I was terrified. I was dying. Physically my body felt like it had turned to stone. I did everything I could to stop it, but once it started there was no stopping it and "I" died.

Now here I am, it's the same world—with cars and houses, where you eat food, go to bed, take showers and brush your teeth—but it's not the same.

The above selection is from an interview with Peter, which appeared in the Jan/Feb 1990 issue of *Body Mind and Spirit* magazine. The full interview appears on [www.roaringlionpublishing.com/about.htm](http://www.roaringlionpublishing.com/about.htm)

others we may seek to lead—likely to be powerful without better understanding of this . . . force in nature, our own immunity to change? Specifically, is change likely without grasping how this . . . force expresses itself in the unique particulars of our own lives? And yet, one of the things that makes gaining this understanding so difficult is that we tend to be held captive by our own immune systems. We live inside them. We do not “have them”; they “have us.” We cannot see them because we are too caught up in them. . . . How can we secure for ourselves the supports most likely to foster real change, change that actually escapes the immunizing gravity of our own dynamic equilibria and leads to new concentrations of energy, enhanced capacity, greater complexity?

*Is this dynamic equilibrium something you’ve come across or seen in yourself or in others?*

**YK:** Well, it is similar to what Andrew Cohen calls ego, or homeostasis, where people get to a certain point and they just want to stay there. It definitely exists.

**WIE:** *How does one deal with that?*

**YK:** You see, all conscious and cognitive beings are meaning-seeking beings. We are somehow trying to find meaning in life. And unless a human being finds meaning in what he or she is doing, he or she is not going to engage in that action for too long.

Now, some people find meaning in the very act of transformation. And if you consider conscious evolution, ongoing growth, and transformation to be the *essential* meaning of life, then you will engage yourself in the act of transformation. But for most people, transformation does not provide meaning. “What’s the point in continuously growing and continuously transforming? I’m fine where I am. I have my house and my job, so don’t bother me. Don’t even try to destroy the edifice of meaning that I have built over the years.” And I respect that. They’re just being human. They have found some measure of meaning in their lives and they don’t want to change. They don’t want to see that what they thought was meaningful may actually be meaningless. But transformation, ongoing transformation, implies that you need to continuously dissolve the old meaning of your life and create your life anew. You actually need to recognize the central meaning of your life to be the evolutionary process itself. And unless we build a kind of culture in which that is so, people are not going to ongoingly engage themselves in a syntropic (anti-entropic) evolutionary process. They will want to stay in this dynamic, or static, equilibrium.

## A WAKE-UP CALL

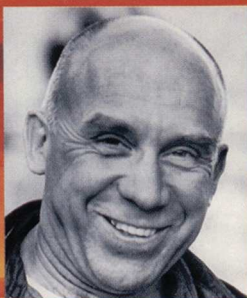
**WIE:** *So you’re saying that the goal is to get to the point where the meaning you’re making as a human being in the world actually has to do with a continual engagement in the transformational process itself.*

**YK:** That’s right. In my own life, I was crazy enough to shave my

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Thomas Merton

*Christian Mystic & Author  
20th Century USA*



**THE TRUEST SOLITUDE** IS not something outside you, not an absence of men or of sound around you: it is an abyss opening up in the center of your own soul.

And this abyss of interior solitude is created by a hunger that will never be satisfied with any created thing.

The only way to find solitude is by hunger and thirst and sorrow and poverty and desire, and the man who has found solitude is empty, as if he had been emptied by death.

He has advanced beyond all horizons. There are no directions left in which to travel. And this is a country whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. You do not find it by travelling but by standing still.

Yet it is in this loneliness that the deepest activities begin. It is here that you discover act without motion, labor that is profound repose, vision in obscurity, and, beyond all desire, a fulfillment whose limits extend to infinity.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1961), pp. 59-61.

head at age eighteen, go to a monastery, and then spend three years in India and five months in the Himalayas all by myself. Why? Because I found meaning in the transformational process itself.

**WIE:** *Another way of saying that would be that we have to completely embrace the process of change.*

**YK:** Yes, to stay unstuck wherever you are. Ecstasy means being unstuck, ongoingly *ex-static*. So you must commit yourself to an ecstatic life.

**WIE:** *It seems that in order to live that way, one would not only have to continually transcend any movement in oneself toward rest or stasis, but one would also have to resist the cultural tendency toward inertia. In fact, you've spoken about a "conspiracy of mediocrity" in the larger culture, which one must resist. Could you say what you mean by that?*

**YK:** Yes. Mediocrity is not *being* average; mediocrity is *conforming* to the average. And if your value system and your meaning in life is to fit into the society successfully and make a good living and so on and so forth, you are conspiring with others to conform to the average. Mediocrity takes place when conforming to the average becomes the highest meaning of life—to fit in and to succeed in the existing society and make a good living and be happy. And unless a person realizes the meaninglessness and emptiness of success in life at that level, he or she is not going to shave his or

her head and become a monk or nun or go to see a spiritual teacher. That is the bottom line. But even within the New Age community and in today's spiritual culture, the conspiracy for mediocrity exists.

You know, the first time I became interested in *What Is Enlightenment?* was when I read the issue in which you dealt with authentic spirituality [WIE Issue 12, *The Modern Spiritual Predicament*]. I liked that one very much. And this is exactly what needs to be examined continuously. What is missing in the New Age community is real intellectual rigor. If you feel good, you're enlightened. So feeling has taken the place of real awareness. And that permeates the whole culture. It is mediocrity, and a conspiracy toward mediocrity, and those people who conspire very well can become excellent speakers on the conference circuit and make lots of money.

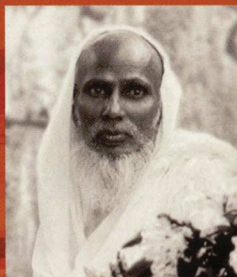
**WIE:** *Have you found yourself becoming the target of this conspiracy?*

**YK:** Yes. Even within The Twilight Club—particularly with the people who were here before I came onto the scene. I'll tell you one strange anecdote. I came to this country when I was twenty-eight years old, nineteen years ago, and I attended one of those New Age group meetings. I went to this meeting and they were talking about the "hundredth monkey." Everybody was talking about this hundredth monkey, and I said to them in my broken English, "What about the first monkey? It is more important for us to really struggle to be the first monkey than the one hundredth."

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Bawa Muhaiyaddeen

Sufi Master  
20th Century Sri Lanka



IT HAD ALWAYS BEEN my intention to find out what my Father was like, to know who God was, to understand His nature. I wanted to discover some way to see Him and undertook to work hard at this with all the clarity of my wisdom. . . . I started the search for my Father when I was still very young, I searched and searched and searched, trying hard to understand; yet all I learned concerned the world. . . .

I went through indescribable difficulties, countless troubles and great danger until I came to the point where it was imperative to understand who my Father was. At that moment I heard a sound, "My son, approach, no one who has ever roamed around searching

for Me has ever found Me. I exist everywhere, I am in everything, there is no reason to wander around in search of Me since I exist everywhere. Come, look here, do you see all the messengers, my vice-regents and prophets who left the world, look they are here. . . ."

"You can see Me if you see them, look at the prophets and you will see Me."

Then a range of understanding was given to me: certain sounds spread from that voice, each sound carrying with it a particular fragrance, a particular light, fragrances and light which struck me. As each blow fell it gave me life and strength, it raised me higher and higher, as each fragrance and each light

Nobody liked that. Then one person in the group called me later and asked me about my background, and he said, "If you shave your head again, wear the monk robe, and make me your manager, I'll make you rich and famous." I said, "No thank you." But when you look at the gurus coming from India, and Tibet, and Japan, most of them are, I'm sorry to say, very mediocre. That has been my experience. So in my own way, through my writings, I have been ongoingly talking about that particular aspect of contemporary spirituality.

But the conspiracy for mediocrity exists in any segment of society. And I have many friends in physics, science, who have the same experience.

**WIE:** *Some pundits and scholars are already calling September 11, the World Trade Center disaster last year, the end of the postmodern age—a culture-changing wake-up call that demands new thinking in recognition of the extraordinary complexity of the world we live in. In fact, Don Beck recently described it as an inflection point in history. So I wanted to ask if you see any signals on the horizon indicating that a new transformation in human consciousness may be under way in our culture.*

**YK:** Yes, it really was a wake-up call, and many people globally became aware of the dysfunctionality of existing systems, and of the fact that no amount of effort based on the old paradigm is going to solve the problems that we are facing. It was a great source of positive stress. One doesn't need to be a scholar or an

enlightened person to realize the dysfunctionality of society.

When September 11 took place, there were basically two kinds of reactions. To use terms from Spiral Dynamics, one was a BLUE, more militaristic reaction, and the other one was a GREEN, more liberal, egalitarian reaction. In the existing White House, we have basically a BLUE organization, and the people who are criticizing the Bush administration are more inclined to be GREEN. The rest of us are seeing that neither of these approaches is going to solve the problem. The military isn't going to solve the problem, nor is the egalitarian effort to try to understand the Arabs going to solve the problem. There's something else that we need. And people can see that.

You see, we want to have a new world, based on your and my profound creative vision for ourselves and for humanity. And that kind of thinking can only be understood by integral thinkers, those who have reached the Second Tier on Beck's model. So the September 11 event can be utilized as another call for Second Tier thinkers to gather together to really make an impact on society. That's a fundamental purpose of The Twilight Club. What we are trying to do is to get all of these thinkers together and mutually support and empower one another's work so that we can actually create a Second Tier, or integral, culture in accordance with the evolutionary prime directive and thereby make a difference in the whole culture of humanity. In the last four years, my colleagues and I have been doing exactly this. So yes, September 11 can be a watershed event for a new kind of civilization to emerge. But a lot more needs to be done. ■

touched me it lifted me up, it strengthened me. But how can I describe something you cannot even imagine? While I was being raised higher and higher, I looked at each sound, seeing into all the atoms and non-atoms of the eighteen thousand universes. My whole body was resplendent with light, and I could see everything, everything in existence.

Then it was all pointed out to me, "There is *awwal*, the beginning, the time of creation, and there is the *duniya*, the world, over there is *akhirah*, the hereafter. See the world of the soul, the world of heaven and the world of hell. This is the

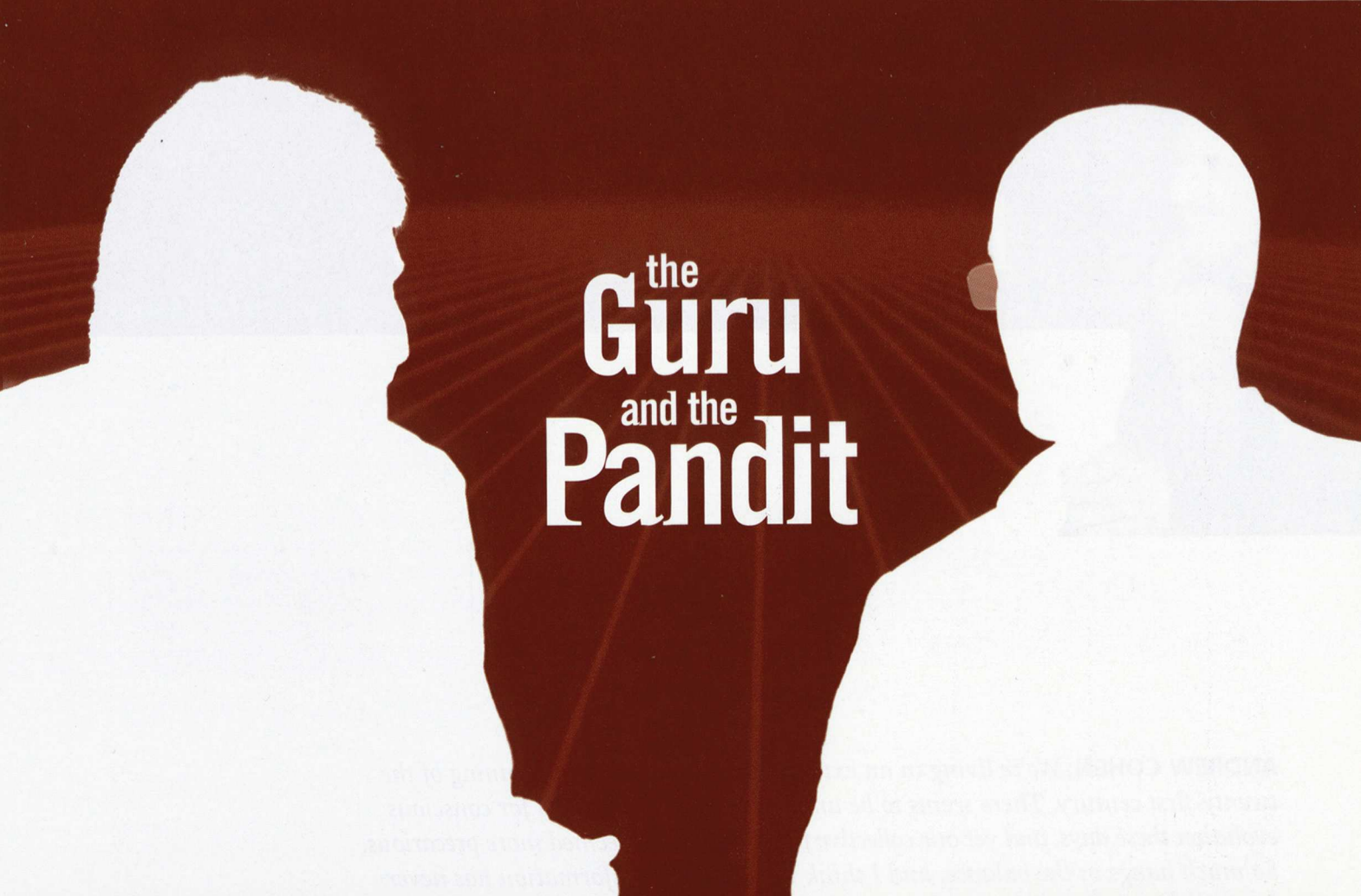
world of souls, this is the world of grace where God and His plentitude exist, this is the world of hell." The three worlds and their meaning were revealed to me, and I understood them.

I spoke, "Well, this is what You have created, but I want You, I want to see my Father." I looked again, and wherever I turned I saw a blinding light, everywhere I turned I heard His sound and His speech.

"This is Myself, My son, wherever you look you will hear My voice, wherever you turn you will hear My sound. This is My form, there is no other form. Nothing is greater than I am; everything I created can

be contained in a particle within a particle. How could that contain Me? I am massive, extensive, I cannot be contained by form. The world is just a particle within a particle, how could you contain Me in that? This is the reason I am called Allahu. *Hu* is resonance, it is sound and that sound is Myself; light and the sound of *hu* are Myself." So many explanations were given to me then.

Material printed with permission of The Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship, (M.R. The Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, *The Tree that Fell to the West* (Philadelphia, PA: Fellowship Press, In Press).



# the Guru and the Pandit

## Breaking the Rules

DOES RADICAL TRANSFORMATION BREAK THE UNWRITTEN RULES of our postmodern spiritual culture? In this dialogue between guru and pandit, spiritual teacher and founder of *What Is Enlightenment?* Andrew Cohen and integral philosopher Ken Wilber take a piercing look at the contemporary spiritual scene and ask us how serious we are about *really changing*. And, in fact, change itself defines the cutting-edge spirituality that they explored in our last issue where this new *WIE* feature made its debut. In that issue, these two pioneers explored the unorthodox conclusion that they each had come to: the bold claim that *enlightenment is evolving*. They discussed how the deep spiritual recognition of nonduality—the union of emptiness and form—takes on a new significance in light of the knowledge that the world of form is itself *changing*, ever-complexifying, forward-moving, and increasingly conscious.

So, where do we stand on the question of change—profound, radical, evolutionary change? In this intimate dialogue, Andrew shares his experience of calling students to transform, as Ken provides an incisive assessment of the contemporary spiritual scene. Refusing to join the “conspiracy of mediocrity” that has flattened postmodern spirituality, they present an approach to spiritual transformation that calls us to *live* from the enlightened perspective. Together, these two, the guru and the pandit, transform spiritual transformation, revealing the possibility not only of changing ourselves but of participating in the evolution of global consciousness itself.

— ED

andrew **cohen** & **wilber** ken in dialogue



## the Guru and the Pandit

# Breaking the Rules

**ANDREW COHEN:** *We're living in an extraordinary time, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. There seems to be an unprecedented potential for conscious evolution these days, and yet our collective future has never seemed more precarious. So much hangs in the balance, and I think the issue of transformation has never been more important. But after sixteen years of teaching a spiritual path that calls for radical transformation, I can say unequivocally that the simple truth is that everybody wants to get enlightened but nobody wants to change.*

*Actual transformation is something that the ego, or the separate self-sense, inherently resists in the unenlightened state. In fact, the ego lives in profound fear of the kind of insecurity that change creates, and is constantly endeavoring to create the illusion of permanence in a world where everything's changing all the time, and these days, faster than ever! But there's no doubt, as we agreed in our last dialogue, that enlightenment for the twenty-first century demands that we not only cease to resist the fact of perpetual change but actually embrace it through a dynamic surrendered engagement with the life-process. That's what I call Evolutionary Enlightenment, and it's incredibly thrilling and consistently inspiring.*

*Now, as you express passionately in your recent book Boomeritis, the fact is that unless we are able and willing to evolve—and at this point, evolve quickly—we're probably not going to be able to prevent a very disastrous phase in human history. You also shed much-needed light on the state of our contemporary culture, and identify a postmodern cultural disease called "boomeritis" as the major obstacle to our next evolutionary step. Can you explain briefly what boomeritis is?*

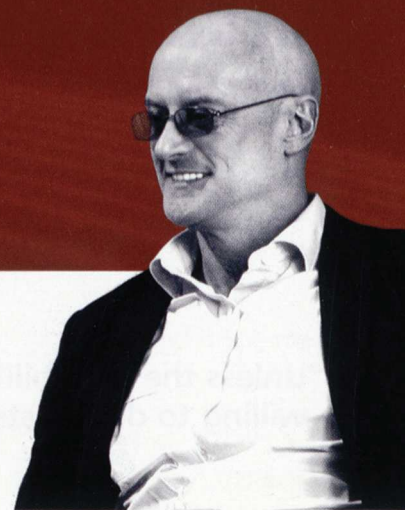
**KEN WILBER:** In order to understand boomeritis, it might help to have a general understanding of the historical context. Many sociologists have identified three general phases of cultural

development: a *traditional* culture, a *modern* culture, and a *post-modern* culture. And those correspond in some sense to three types or levels or waves of consciousness.

The *traditional* culture has a kind of mythic-literal religious orientation, a very fundamentalist orientation, such as a belief that the Bible or the Qu'ran is literally true, and so on. It is marked by a belief in an absolute and unyielding truth—for example, nobody can achieve salvation without believing in Jesus or Allah. Such cultures are usually nationalistic, ethnocentric, patriarchal, with an emphasis on family values and good ol' time religion.

The *modern* culture has a more rational, scientific, business type of orientation. It classically started with the Western Enlightenment and is the dominant mode of governance of most industrialized democracies. It believes that there are scientific truths and they are universal, but they have to be established by research and empirical studies.

The third major phase is the *postmodern* culture. In distinction to the traditional mythic orientation and the modern rational mode, the postmodern orientation maintains that there actually is a *plurality* of worldviews—there's a relativistic series of cultural beliefs, and you can't really say one of them is right and one of them is wrong because so much of what we call



truth is really an interpretation. So the whole notion of post-modernism is that reality is not merely given—it's *constructed* and *interpreted*.

Now there are elements of truth, so to speak, in each of these orientations, although most developmentalists, including myself, see each successive wave as being a higher, wider, or more complex level of development. So general development tends to move from traditional to modern to postmodern. And a lot of us believe there are even higher levels or waves of consciousness, but these are the three that are present on a widespread scale among adults in today's world. And, of course, in any given society, you find a mixture of these cultures and individuals.

In this country, for example, sociologist Paul Ray [author of *The Cultural Creatives*] estimates that about 20 percent of the people are at the traditional mythic level, about 50 percent are at the modern, universal, rational level, and about 25 percent are at postmodern pluralistic, which includes the cultural creatives. And frankly, most of the people who would be listening to what we have to say come out of that postmodern, pluralistic, cultural-creative context. And that's both good news and bad news. The good news is that it is indeed a higher, deeper wave of consciousness development than what came before, and therefore it's open to higher, deeper, and wider truths, including certain spiritual realities. The bad news is that each of these great waves of development has a pathology, or shadow side, or downside, and the pluralistic wave is no different. Its downside is, "Since all views are equally correct, nobody is right and nobody is wrong. My truth is true for me and you cannot say that my truth isn't true."

**AC:** Boy, that sounds familiar!

## THE DOWNSIDE OF PLURALISM

**AC:** As you make clear in *Boomeritis*, this pluralistic-postmodern level of development you've been describing, which in the system of *Spiral Dynamics* [see page 105] is also called the "green meme," is a position that tends to be inherently anti-evolutionary and anti-transformational.

**KW:** It does tend to be that way. But it gets tricky, because what the green meme, or the pluralistic-postmodern wave of development, likes to *talk* about is transformation. And there's a grain of truth to the fact that the green meme really does want to transform, even if it badly fumbles the ball on occasion. But remember that this particular pluralistic wave really is a very high level of development. That needs to be kept in mind, even though we're talking about the pathological version. This wave didn't become really widespread until the sixties, and the boomers were the first generation in history where a significant percentage was in fact at this fairly high pluralistic level of development. The previous level or wave, which is still prevalent, the universal rational wave, became widespread with the Western Enlightenment and is itself only around three hundred years old. But the green meme, the pluralistic wave, came into widespread existence only about thirty years ago. So, all of the great positive aspects of the sixties, including environmental protection, feminism, health care reforms, and, most importantly, the civil rights movement, were products of healthy pluralism and healthy post-modernism. Those were the positive gains of the cultural creatives, the green meme, the pluralistic wave. So in that sense, it was a transformative event because transformation means any vertical move in the developmental scale. And the boomers, the cultural creatives, were a transformation from modern to postmodern, or

the Guru and the Pandit

# Breaking the Rules

**"Unless the possibility of genuine transformation is actually declared, unless one is willing to demonstrate it publicly, no one is even going to know that it's possible."**

Andrew Cohen

from rational to pluralistic, from orange to green—whatever terms one prefers.

But once they settled in there, boy, they settled in! And you're not going to get them to move now because the downside is that once you're there, you are not allowed to make judgments, because "Everybody's expressive truth is the same." So you can't challenge somebody and say, "Look, you have to grow. You're being self-contracted. There's a higher spiritual reality." They'll say, "How do you know it's higher? How dare you judge me!"

So when boomers engage in a spiritual path, their fundamental desire is not to transcend the ego but to confirm it, to express it, to be told that "What I'm doing is wonderful and divine, *just like I am*." They are there to celebrate the self-contraction, to embrace the self-contraction and to *feel it* really hard and call that god or goddess or spirit. And you can't talk them out of it because then you're being *judgmental*.

Under the guise of pluralism—which holds that no truth is better than another—not just higher realities but also all of my petty, shallow, narcissistic tendencies can find a happy home. The higher significance of pluralism gets swamped with lower impulses, contracted tendencies, and egocentric expression—all now parading under the banner of pluralism.

To put it simply: *boomeritis is pluralism infected with narcissism*. It's the very high truths of pluralism completely corrupted and derailed by an ego that uses them to entrench itself firmly in a place where it can never be challenged because there is no objective truth that can get rid of it.

**AC:** *This is the same kind of resistance that I've been endeavoring to penetrate for the whole sixteen years I've been teaching.*

**KW:** Alas, it's a green swamp.

**AC:** *With a vengeance! When I read Boomeritis, it was a revelation to me because it helped me to understand in a broader context why so many people have been deeply resistant in the face of my call for change. Ever since I began teaching, I have been consistently challenging people to evolve, to transform—to move from a*

*lower to a higher level of development. Very specifically, I have been asking them to make the noble effort to move beyond inertia, beyond resistance, beyond ego. Initially, when someone is inspired and wants to become a student, it's as if they have fallen in love. "Oh, this is wonderful," they say. "This is fantastic. This is everything I've ever dreamed of." But sooner or later the inevitable occurs: I ask them to change and they turn on me in a rage—a narcissistic rage.*

**KW:** Yes, that's boomeritis to the core. Everything is wonderful until you make a judgment, then narcissistic rage comes front and center, and now you, the teacher, and not the student's ego, are supposedly the problem.

## "THOU SHALT NOT JUDGE"

**AC:** *As long as the seeker after higher truths is firmly entrenched in the green meme, it renders the teacher-student relationship virtually dysfunctional. One comes to a teacher of liberation to evolve spiritually. But this particular entrenched position will often undermine the teacher's ability to help the person who came to them to evolve, because the teacher-student relationship, when authentic, is going to demand transformation—not just horizontal affirmation but vertical transformation.*

**KW:** And the student has to accept a "judgment" that they are at a lesser stance of consciousness, at least in this particular regard.

**AC:** Yes, exactly, this is the big problem. At a recent retreat that I gave, the issue of judgment became the topic of much heated discussion. I had to spend a great deal of time explaining that a big part of the evolutionary process has to do with the cultivation of the all-important capacity to discriminate—to see things more clearly. I had to bend over backward to help everyone understand that the manifest universe is made up of objects that are in relationship to each other, and that being able to see clearly what those relationships are doesn't necessarily imply a negative judgment, but is simply the expression of clear discrimination. If one aspires to have a liberated

*relationship to the human experience, then one has to be able to see things clearly in order to know how to make the right choices, how to respond in the most appropriate way in any given circumstance. And in order to do that, one is definitely going to have to be willing, God forbid, to make judgments!*

*I've noticed that especially for people who are engaged in the spiritual dimension of life, there is a tremendous fear, often to the point of becoming a superstition, of any conclusions about anything that could possibly be seen as being anything other than—*

**KW:** —accepting of all stances.

**AC:** Yes, which of course is inherently an impossible position to take!

**KW:** Again, that's part of the real downside, the pathological version, of this wave of development. Of course, there are certain types of judgment that a liberal, advanced, caring person ought *not* to make. There are certain ways we should *not* be judgmental. We ought not to make judgments based on prejudice—based on skin color, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and so on. But there are types of judgments and discriminating awareness that are positive and necessary—including, incidentally, the healthy part of the pluralistic stance. That is, the postmodern pluralistic stance is itself a huge judgment: that certain types of judgments ought not to be made. And there are other types of judgments, traditionally known as discriminating wisdom, that *do* have to be made. Those have to do with degrees of depth, not *between* human beings but *within* any human being. One can be, for example, prerational, rational, or transrational, and each of those is a progressively higher level of development. One's perspective can be egocentric, ethnocentric, or worldcentric—and each of those is a progressively higher level of development. A worldcentric person will correctly condemn an ethnocentric judgment. Hierarchies like that are very important because they represent degrees of truth and inclusiveness and compassion. But if you get stuck in the green meme, you're jammed. You can't make a choice. You can't make any more decisions because ALL judgments and ALL hierarchies are supposed to be bad. I call it aperspectival madness.

**AC:** And these hierarchies that you're describing represent actual structures that exist in reality, real developmental structures. They're not just subjective conceptual fabrications.

**KW:** Yes, the point is that there are these general waves of unfolding, and they represent what we call “nested hierarchies” or “holarchies” of development—such as that worldcentric is higher than ethnocentric, which is higher than egocentric. It is *better* to be worldcentric than ethnocentric, and hence you can be very judgmental about ethnocentric prejudice. The irony is that the green meme itself is involved in making hierarchical judgments all the time, even though it denies hierarchies.

**AC:** That's self-contradictory.

**KW:** Right. It's now pretty widely accepted by most philosophers that postmodernism is riddled with what's called a performative self-contradiction. It condemns in others exactly what it constantly does itself. It makes judgments constantly. For example, it has its own hierarchy that says “linking is better than ranking”—well, that's a hierarchy of value. So it hierarchically condemns hierarchies. Oops!

But the positive aspect, again, is that green is cleaning out bad hierarchies; the downside is that it's losing all the good hierarchies as well. And, as we were saying, that stance very quickly turns on itself and becomes self-contradictory. The green wave itself is the product of a hierarchical developmental unfolding from traditional to modern to postmodern, so when the green meme condemns all hierarchies, it's basically condemning the very process that produced its own higher position.

**AC:** That's what's so enlightening about this point—realizing that condemning all hierarchies inherently destroys the very ground one is standing on.

**KW:** When you're faced with this in students, what exactly do you do? How do you, on the one hand, appreciate the fact that they no longer want to make, let's say, ethnocentric judgments or homophobic judgments, but, on the other hand, help them understand that they *do* have to make other judgments? We all have to make judgments based on the degree of depth in our own consciousness, in our own awareness. And there are *higher* states and stages of consciousness that a spiritual aspirant has to orient him- or herself toward if there's going to be growth and evolution at all, and those higher states definitely pass judgments on the lower and lesser states, just as worldcentric correctly passes judgment on ethnocentric.

# Breaking the Rules

**AC:** Well, the answer to that question would be that a spiritual mentor, if he or she is authentic, should be able to demonstrate to the student that there is a living, breathing difference between their respective levels of consciousness that can be objectively recognized. And hopefully that's going to generate in the student a little humility and a lot of evolutionary tension, awakened inspiration, and real interest in meeting the mentor at his or her own level.

## THE CONSPIRACY OF MEDIOCRITY

**KW:** Let me just say that in a student who's got a really bad case of boomeritis—which is to say, pretty much any cultural creative out there, all fifty million strong—the internal stance is, “I'm holding on to my position and *nobody* can tell me what to do. My state, just as it is, has the same worth as any other.” And that stance effectively aborts any real transformation.

And so, for example, most of the people involved with what I call Boomeritis Buddhism even deny the importance of *satori* or Enlightenment or Awakening. Because that's saying some states are higher than others—and we shouldn't be judgmental. But guess what? Some states *are* higher. And so the entire *raison d'être* of Buddhism gets tossed out the door because it offends the pluralistic ego. Yikes!

**AC:** So the whole point is that with boomeritis, real radical transformation is against the rules.

**KW:** Yes. Well, it has to be.

**AC:** To dare to even speak about radical transformation, let alone call other people to a higher level, is against the unstated rules. And of course, one's definitely going to be put in one's place for doing something like that. But unless the possibility of genuine transformation is actually declared, unless one is willing to demonstrate it publicly and to call other people to the same, no one is even going to know that it's possible. And then unknowingly, everybody's going to be participating in the conspiracy of mediocrity.

**KW:** Yes, the conspiracy of mediocrity, which is basically the conspiracy to express your ego instead of transcending it or letting go of it. The idea is “If I can really emote and express my self-contraction with sincerity, I'm somehow spiritual.” So then we have a convention of the self-contractions, and that's basically

boomeritis spirituality. It's a problem, to put it mildly. And it's a concern to me that a lot of teachers actually embrace that kind of postmodern flatland pluralism.

**AC:** Well, I think that part of the reason for that is that many people are teaching now who actually have had little if any enlightenment experience or *satori* themselves. And if one is a teacher and yet has little authentic experience on which to base one's teaching, one is going to end up being in the kind of position you described.

**KW:** I think that's certainly part of the picture. Another part of the picture, which concerns me even more, is that I know some teachers who have had a very strong *satori*, but they still interpret it through the mental apparatus that they have in place. And so they interpret it through boomeritis, the mean green meme, pluralistic flatland. And that, frankly, is extremely unsettling.

**AC:** You know, over the years that I have been working with students, I've seen repeatedly that people who are at different levels of development can have a similar or even identical spiritual experience but will interpret what the experience means in a completely different way. And therefore it has become clear to me that the way we interpret our experience is far more important than the actual experience that we have.

**KW:** I think they're both very, very important. And certainly the interpretative component has an enormous hand in this. One of the things that I've tried to do in various writings, as you know, is develop a kind of matrix of various types of altered states. This matrix has two major components. There are levels or *stages* of consciousness, and there are also altered *states* of consciousness. And you may experience a gross, subtle, causal, or nondual *state* of consciousness, but it will inevitably be interpreted through whatever *stage* of development you're at. So developmentally, you can be at the traditionalist level, or the modernist level, or the postmodernist level, or the integral level, and you can have a subtle or even nondual experience, but you're going to interpret it through whatever apparatus you have. So if, developmentally, you're at the green meme, you can have a very profound *satori*, but you're going to interpret it in pluralistic, flatland terms.

**AC:** Yes, and one will interpret it through one's self-infatuation or narcissism.

**"Therapists are basically pimps for *samsara*. They want to hold onto the egoic self-contraction and make it feel good about itself."**

Ken Wilber

**KW:** That's the downside of pluralism—narcissism—that's the boomeritis form, the unhealthy form. And that's how we end up with Boomeritis Buddhism, or it could be Boomeritis Shamanism or Boomeritis Vedanta, et cetera.

**AC:** *Because in whichever case, the satori or mystical breakthrough is being used to affirm one's own ego.*

**KW:** Yes, alas.

**AC:** *The spiritual experience, which ideally should be a stepping-stone to less ego and greater transparency, can in fact be the opposite, a catalytic event that empowers the ego, making it even more solid—and then we end up with real enlightened narcissism.*

**KW:** That part to me is very disturbing, actually. And that's why I think Boomeritis Buddhism is the biggest internal threat to the dharma in the West—that's my own personal opinion. And we might as well come clean ourselves—I don't think any of us escapes some degree of boomeritis. You know, I've got a dose of it, I think you've got a dose of it, every human being who comes out of this culture has a dose of it. The question is, how much, what can we do about it, can we at least spot it, and is there *some* portion of us that's bigger than it? And I think that's of course why the student-teacher relationship is so important. Hopefully teachers like you and me and others have to some extent recognized this problem and moved a bit beyond it, or else we are not going to be of much help to anybody, but are simply going to reproduce our own boomeritis and now call it "spiritual."

**AC:** *That's true. And don't you think the real issue here is dealing with ego? I mean, declaring ego to be the main issue in relationship to spiritual transformation is definitely not cool if you have boomeritis. In the East-meets-West spiritual marketplace, more often than not, self-acceptance seems to have replaced the goal of enlightenment, or real ego transcendence. The goal of the spiritual path has always been radical, and very demanding—an enormous leap beyond ego. And now suddenly it's about accepting ourselves*

*the way we already are. And too often, powerful Buddhist and Vedantic enlightenment concepts are used as techniques to actually relieve the seeker of having to pay the price of transformation—to relieve them of the burden of having to really face themselves and change.*

**KW:** I think that's very true. It's part of our therapeutic culture, where we don't make any judgments because that would hurt egoic self-esteem, and so all we do is embrace, console, and celebrate the personal self. Sophisticated forms of the therapeutic culture replace "subjectivity" with an emphasis on communal awareness or "intersubjectivity," and now intersubjectivity has become the main home of boomeritis. But all are variations on a celebration of the entrenched green meme and its therapeutic culture.

**AC:** *So spiritual practice becomes nothing more than a form of therapy, where self-acceptance rather than ego-transcendence is the goal. The "practice" is being "nonjudgmental" under all circumstances and one ends up tying oneself up in knots trying to cultivate a dubious kind of compassion that often goes against all common sense.*

**KW:** Yes, what Chogyam Trungpa called "idiot compassion." That's the therapeutic culture that is such a large part of boomeritis. But again, there are positive sides to the therapeutic culture and the green meme, and we need to honor those. Some people have low self-esteem, they're devastated, they've been abused and beaten and all of that—of course they need to improve self-esteem. But once you've done that, you need to let go of it. You really, really, really need to let go of self and egoic self-esteem altogether. And the problem is that therapists are basically pimps for *samsara*. They want to hold onto the egoic self-contraction and make it feel good about itself.

And yet the fundamental stance of enlightenment is: "If you feel rotten about yourself—good! That's the beginning of a correct perception."

**AC:** *That's right!*

# Breaking the Rules

**"In the end, when we're under pressure, when our back is against the wall, the only thing that really counts is how much we care."**

Andrew Cohen

**KW:** "You *should* fundamentally hate yourself in order to start moving beyond this tangled, contracted mess called you." That is the awakening of discriminating wisdom that opens up the possibility of higher, wider, deeper states and stages.

You know, there's that enigmatic statement of Christ's in the New Testament: "He who hateth not his own soul cannot be my disciple." Of course that makes perfect sense, but it is exactly what the therapeutic society does not want to hear or allow.

And so if people come and they say, "Gee, I'm not feeling too good about myself," the initial response should be, "Excellent, let's see if we can increase that. At some point you will find that your real Self is radically free of your small-self ego. And therefore you have a fullness and a freedom that is true Self esteem. But it starts by fundamentally throwing out this pitiful small slice of reality you call your ego."

**AC:** *And as one goes deeper and deeper into the process of transformation, it gradually becomes clear what a daunting foe the ego really is, and what a poison narcissism is. We become aware of the long shadow that ego casts over our own consciousness and over the consciousness of others. But this is something that we're not going to be able to appreciate until we actually begin to awaken.*

## A BACKLASH OF CYNICISM

**AC:** *Another dimension to all this is that in the spiritual marketplace, the strong current of antihierarchical sentiment is, in part, fueled by the deep cynicism out there about the actual possibility of radical transformation. And as you know, this is largely a result of what's occurred here in the West over the last thirty years or so. In the seventies, a lot of people got very excited about transformation. Many began to say, "Wow, it's really possible," and they started going to gurus and doing intensive spiritual practice. But then in the eighties and nineties, most of the great masters, individuals who at the time were considered to be fully enlightened, one after the other betrayed their students through blatant abuses of power. So there has been an enormous backlash of cynicism.*

*Few people are even aspiring to reach that high anymore, and one of the reasons for this is that a lot of teachers these days*

*are kind of overcompensating, bending over backward to make everybody feel comfortable by leaving no doubt that in the end they're really not claiming to be much more evolved than the rest of us.*

**KW:** That's true, and very unfortunate, I think. As we've been saying, now we are all supposed to simply come to some sort of sensitive, communal, shared self-acceptance of the self-contraction. And if we can really come to peace with that neurotic coil, and embrace it and hug it, then somehow that's the same as the enlightened state. Obviously that's a bit of a caricature, but that's what a lot of these teachers actually start to sound like.

**AC:** *And of course, the great tragedy in all this is that the higher dimensions of human potential are often being left out of the picture.*

**KW:** I've watched this up close. I've watched the human potential movement for about thirty years. The great promise of the human potential movement was very straightforward—*there are higher human potentials*. Now the problem is that the green meme, the mean green meme, the boomeritis version, got hold of that and said, "Wait a minute. You're saying there are higher potentials, so does that mean I'm *lower*? Because that can't be right." All of a sudden it implied a judgment, and nobody's allowed to be higher because that means somebody else is going to be lower. And you're not allowed to call anybody lower; therefore nobody's allowed to be higher.

So the whole human potential movement got derailed and, as we're saying, was replaced by this therapeutic self-expression, self-acceptance movement, which is fine as far as it goes, but which absolutely catastrophically prevents higher transformation. That's exactly what happened. And what I hear you calling for is the reawakening of this capacity and this desire to have a really radical transformation. The reawakening of the notion that *there are higher potentials*. And that means we have to awaken discriminating awareness, start making judgments about our own contracted state, and enter a relationship with a teacher who has some awareness of these higher possibilities.

## THE AUTHENTIC SELF

**AC:** *In light of everything we've been discussing, I'd like to speak a little bit about what real maturity is in relationship to spiritual transformation. Even though it doesn't sound very romantic, the truth is, I think, that in the end, sustained character development carries more spiritual weight, for most of us, than the peak experience, the ecstatic episode, the transitory event of samadhi or satori. The whole point is, how much real maturity, in human terms, is the seeker able to express in their relationship to life as a result of the spiritual experiences they've had? As you've clearly explained, ultimately it has to do with the degree of mature development. And the specific aspect of this that I'm very interested in has to do with narcissism, and how its presence, to varying degrees, makes it so difficult for the seeker—and also some teachers—to let go for real during the spiritual experience and as a result embrace a relationship to life that expresses real strength, dignity, and maturity.*

*In regard to this question, I wanted to bring up what I call the "authentic self." Sri Aurobindo referred to this as the "psychic being," and in Integral Psychology you call it the "deeper psychic."*

**KW:** Yes, which is the opening to authentic being beyond conventional and egoic modes.

**AC:** *Sri Aurobindo writes:*

It is this secret psychic entity which is the true original Conscience in us deeper than the constructive and conventional conscience of the moralist, for it is this which points always towards Truth, and Right, and Beauty, towards Love, and Harmony and all that is a divine possibility in us, and persists till these things become the major need of our nature. It is the psychic personality in us that flowers as the saint, the sage, the seer; when it reaches its full strength, it turns the being towards the Knowledge of Self and the Divine, towards the supreme Truth, the supreme Good, the supreme Beauty, Love and Bliss, the divine heights and largenesses, and opens us to the touch of spiritual sympathy, universality, oneness. . . . If the secret psychic Person can come forward into the front and, replacing the desire-soul, govern overtly and entirely and not only partially and from behind the veil this outer nature of mind, life and body, then these can be cast into soul images of what is

true, right and beautiful, and in the end the whole nature can be turned towards the real aim of life, the supreme victory, the ascent into spiritual existence.

*What's become apparent in my work with students is that unless the seeker becomes grounded in this authentic self, or psychic being—which is the true self, beyond ego, or the awakened spiritual conscience—then higher nondual enlightenment experiences are never going to stick. There's not going to be a firm ground for those potentially liberating and transformative experiences to take root. This kind of development—the awakening of the authentic self—is missing from the picture in many enlightenment teachings these days. And I think that's why these genuine higher experiences rarely result in real maturity—a human being whose awareness is resting in an awakened higher conscience.*

**KW:** Yes. I think that's really true. And I would say that boomeritis is kind of a scab over that authentic self. I think it's actually the last major roadblock to an awakening of this deeper psychic disposition. That's one of the reasons that it really concerns me. Boomeritis ensconces the ego and the self-contraction as an unassailable entity that cannot be judged because "You are not allowed to judge me. How dare you?" And under those circumstances you're never going to find your own authentic self because the authentic self *itself* passes that same judgment on your self-contraction. So as long as you won't accept that judgment from your teacher, you won't accept it from your own higher self either.

**AC:** *That's right. And unless one is emotionally grounded in the authentic self or soul, under pressure one will waver, one will betray that authentic self to the ego.*

**KW:** Yes. What really tends to hold sway in people is indeed their emotional disposition. I call it the "center of gravity"—it's actually where you "live" so to speak. Under pressure is really when you find out where the person's "soul" is, where their center of gravity is, and unless it reaches into the deepest emotional disposition of a person, it is a superficial realization at best.

## TOP-DOWN VS. BOTTOM-UP

**AC:** *In relationship to this question of transformation, I thought it would be good to speak a little bit about a very important distinction*

# Breaking the Rules

between what we might call a bottom-up and a top-down model of how we relate to the human experience. In other words, the distinction between ego psychology and a psychology of liberation. Ego psychology gives us a bottom-up model: a relationship to the human experience that's based on the presumption that there's something wrong, that there's a fundamental problem. A psychology of liberation, however, gives us a top-down model, one that is based on the opposite presumption, that there's absolutely nothing wrong and that one is inherently free right now and in every moment.

If one is lucky, a certain moment will come where one GETS IT. One gets the whole picture. In that moment, one directly experiences one's own inherently liberated self, beyond mind and beyond time, and in that, knows for the first time one's very real potential for liberation in this life, because one sees the ego, and the conditioned mind, for what it truly is—relative, impermanent, and ultimately unreal.

Now, if one has had a very deep experience of the inherently liberated self, if one has directly seen that one has never actually been unfree, then one would be in a very unusual position. One would potentially be able to embrace a completely different relationship to one's own conditioned mind and emotions—a relationship that would be the expression of liberation itself. And for this to become the case, one would have to surrender wholeheartedly to what one has seen. One would have to consciously—

**KW:** —align oneself with it.

**AC:** Yes. And if through intense aspiration and profound surrender one is able to align oneself with the liberating truth of what one has seen, then we can say that such a person has awakened. To what degree is another issue, but we can say that a transformation has indeed occurred. And it would be obvious. For this kind of top-down transformation to be sustained, what's demanded is literally a different psychology—a psychology of liberation.

Just to illustrate this, I can tell you a story about one of my students. She has a Ph.D. in psychology, and she is very smart, an unusually bright human being. She really got my teaching, had a deep experience of it, and as a result became a passionate supporter of my work. And then, as usually happens around someone like me, after a few years she came bang up against her own narcissism, her own raging ego.

**KW:** What fun for you!

**AC:** What fun indeed! Well, that's the downside of being a guru. Anyway, as soon as her ego was challenged, she abandoned the top-down model, which she had had a very deep grasp of, and which would have demanded that she change there and then in accordance with what she knew to be true, and she suddenly declared, "I think I need to see a therapist in order to find out why I don't want to let go of my ego."

**KW:** (Laughs)

**AC:** I said, "What do you mean? You don't want to let go of your ego for the same reason everybody doesn't want to let go of it. There's only one reason. There's nothing unique about your reason." You see, from the top down, in the psychology of liberation, everything in the human experience becomes radically impersonal. And in that light, of course, it takes great maturity to truly embrace a liberated relationship to our own experience.

**KW:** What's so interesting to me is that both top-down and bottom-up have a role to play. That awakening event—when a person acknowledges that the already liberated self is something that is in the fabric of their awareness that they had simply not noticed—is profound transformation. But then the person comes out of that state. And, as you say, there's the whole process of how much does it stick, can they align themselves with it?

**AC:** Can they live it?

**KW:** Right. Because the alternative to living the already realized state is that they become a seeker. And a seeker, of course, is somebody who relates to the world in terms of a fundamental lack, who presupposes a lack of Spirit, a lack of already enlightened self. All of that is in the contracted realm. But to the extent that they can stay aligned with that already liberated self—that's the top-down model—it starts reconfiguring their entire psychology.

**AC:** Exactly!

**KW:** So the top-down approach is important because a person has to really get a fundamental reorientation to the already

**"Boomeritis ensconces the ego and the self-contraction as an unassailable entity that cannot be judged because 'You are not allowed to judge me. How dare you?'"**

Ken Wilber

liberated nature of their present condition. And that true awakening becomes the foundation of true spiritual practice and replaces the disposition of egoic seeking.

So when that top-down transformative enlightening experience occurs, then the question becomes, what level of development is the person at? If they are at a traditional, or a modern, or a postmodern, or an integral wave—are they going to interpret it differently and perhaps be able to handle it differently? Are they going to carry it differently? Will one wave be able to carry it better than others? Will it stick? Are they going to be able to stand in the fire long enough for it to really reconfigure their entire being? Or are they going to contract and start picking fights with the teacher?

**AC:** *(Laughs)*

**KW:** So what needs to happen from the bottom up, so to speak? How much development and maturity do we need to inculcate in students in order for them to be able to *hold* the top-down disposition long enough for it to reconfigure their entire being? A traditionalist can have a strong *satori*, but it will quickly get turned into fundamentalist dogma. A postmodernist can have a strong *satori*, but it will often degenerate into boomeritis. In other words, development beyond green seems very important to being able to carry this realization effectively. So this is where we need to marry top-down realization with bottom-up development.

**AC:** *Yes, I agree. And you know, in the end, I have found, it always simply boils down to this: How much do we care? How interested are we really, and how much do we care? Because you see, when we're under pressure, when our back is against the wall, the only thing that really counts is how much we care. And that's when this whole question of the authentic self, or soul, comes in, because when this is cultivated, then a deeper capacity to care—to care more about truth, about what is higher—begins to emerge. And our capacity to not be swayed from that position is strengthened, which then makes it possible to actually carry the already liberated state through the trials, tests, and challenges of life.*

**KW:** And also, once there's that acknowledgment and recognition of the already free and liberated condition, then that becomes the basis of a motivation of, in a sense, *duty*.

**AC:** *Yes, an obligation.*

**KW:** You're not motivated out of lack. You're not motivated out of "I'm seeking or grasping something." I mean, a lot of people say, "If you had the experience of being one with everything, how can you be motivated at all?"

**AC:** *Actually, you'd be more motivated.*

**KW:** You're more motivated—of course. You're motivated now to express that, to make *that* happen, *as a duty*, to be true to that nature that's been awakened.

**AC:** *That's what we're here for.*

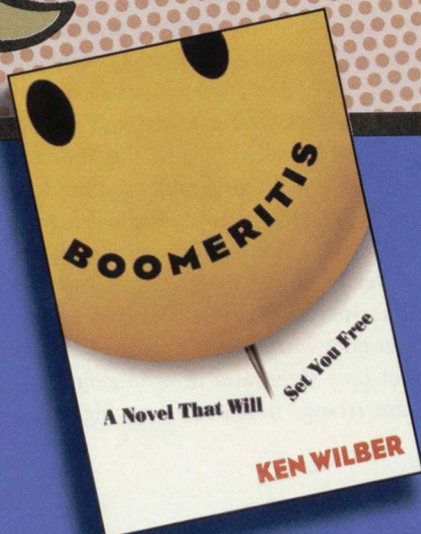
**KW:** At that point your center of gravity shifts to the authentic self, the deeper psychic, because you can never go back now.

**AC:** *Yes.*

**KW:** And frankly that's what boomeritis prevents. If you want to get to the deeper psychic and never go back, *you've really got to get over yourself*. And that means let go of boomeritis and stop being so self-satisfied, forget therapy, and get back to hating yourself!

**AC:** *Yes, because at that point the way we relate to our self and also to other people has to change. There is no going back, no matter how we may happen to feel on any given day, even if we're having a hard time, even if things are not going our way. Because of what we have seen, and because of what we've said yes to, we just can't go back anymore. And that's the ultimate challenge of transformation on a deeply human level: Are we willing to be a different person, no matter what? ■*

# Boomeritis



## &Me:

**Not Just a Book Review**

by Elizabeth Debold

# I AM A BOOMER.

**BLOOMING RIGHT** in the middle of the boomer era—  
born in 1955—and still booming strong.

I have been part of one paradigm-busting, revolutionary movement after another since I came of age in the early seventies. (I even coauthored a book called *Mother Daughter Revolution*, about how mothers can change the future by changing the way they raise girls.) I know that whatever I'm involved in has the potential to entirely transform the world as we know it, to free us from the untold horrors of, well, you name it—patriarchy, racism, class oppression. Why? Because I'm a boomer, and boomers are going to change the world. And isn't it just perfect boomer style that I've also found a spiritual path that is evolutionary, revolutionary, and designed to change the world? Of course, I never really thought of myself as a boomer until I read Ken Wilber's *Boomeritis* (Shambhala Publications, 2002), his scathing and often hilarious indictment of boomer hubris. (That's probably another sign of being a boomer—being too unique to be part of something as mundane as a generation.) Reading *Boomeritis* brought me face-to-face with the inheritance of my generation, with my own boomeritis. Boomeritis is not only, as Wilber makes clear, a barrier to our collective cultural evolution but, like an ebola virus of consciousness, it kills the possibility of any real individual spiritual transformation

from the inside out. And I know something up close and personal about boomeritis: I have quite a case.

So, what is boomeritis? First of all, it isn't just something for those of us born during the boomer years, 1946–1964. According to Wilber, “Boomeritis is simply pluralism infected with narcissism.” Sounds relatively harmless. Pluralism, simply defined, is our current social reality, where diverse racial, ethnic, and religious groups mix within one culture. However, Wilber is referring to something more specific—the intellectual capacity that emerges from that social reality: the ability to appreciate differences, to understand the ways that diverse cultures construct reality, and to fashion an identity, or self, that goes beyond one's family and culture of origin. Boomers do happen to have a particular and, of course, unique historical role in this development. As he writes, “The Boomers, to their great credit, *were the first major generation in history to develop [this capacity]*. That's a very important point. . . . The Boomers moved beyond the [previous cultural stages of] *traditionalism* and . . . scientific *modernism* . . . and pioneered a *postmodern*, pluralistic, multicultural understanding. . . . And that is exactly why the Boomers spearheaded civil rights, ecological concerns, feminism, and multicultural diversity. That is the ‘high’ part of the mixture, the truly impressive part of the Boomer generation and the explosive revolutions of the sixties. . . .” These revolutions, as partial as they have been, changed forever our sense of human possibility and refashioned the contours of human identity.

And the low part? The narcissism, naturally. Wilber is certainly not the only one who has noticed—how could one not?!—that the boomer generation, which unself-consciously and even proudly wears the appellation “the Me generation,” is more than a bit stuck on itself—and has left something sticky on the generations that have followed. Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* and Robert Bellah and colleagues' *Habits of the Heart* have beautifully and poignantly documented how self-involved and isolated we are. Concerned critics have despaired at how this inflated self-involvement has ripped the social fabric and, grasping to bring order to the chaos created by this unparalleled selfishness, they have often, futilely, called for a return to traditional values. Yet these problems can never be solved by looking backward. The world is changing at warp speed. There is no way back nor is there a “back” to go to. Wilber does what no other critic of the cultural scene has done: he not only elaborates in agonizing detail the corrosive effects of “that strange mixture of very high cognitive

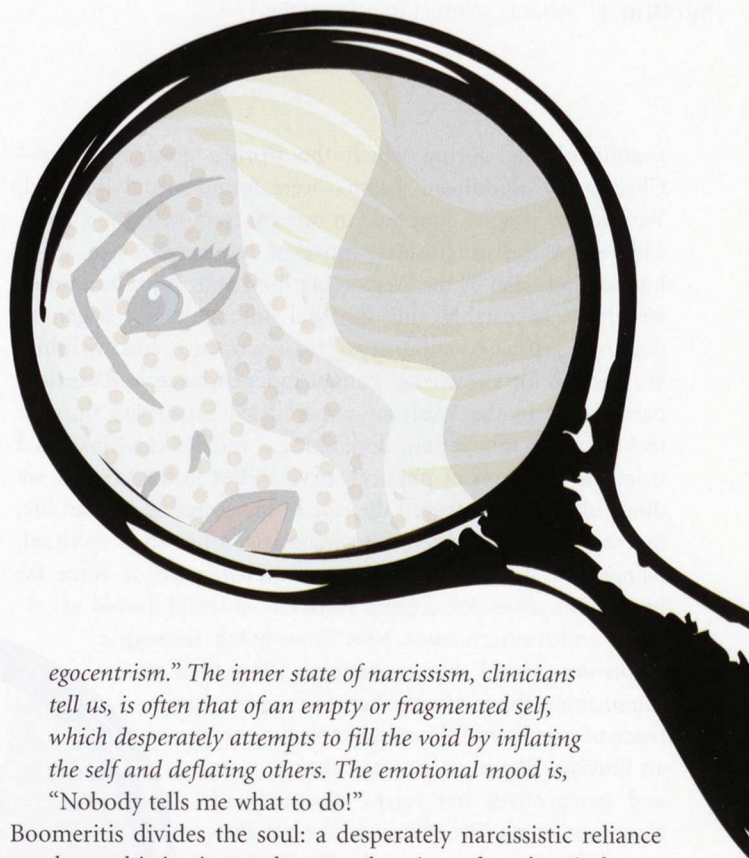


capacity . . . infected with rather low emotional narcissism,” but he places it within an *evolutionary* context and, in so doing, points to a possibility for humanity beyond boomeritis. The solution to boomer narcissism cannot come from looking to the past but only in realizing the demand of the future. Wilber confronts us with how critical the present moment actually is—because beyond the social fragmentation aggravated by boomer self-absorption is the potential for a more holistic, integral future.

Beyond boomeritis, Wilber shows us, is a quantum leap in consciousness that the boomer generation and its irony-clad children, Gen X and Y, are preventing. Using Don Beck and Christopher Cowan’s spiral of development [see page 108] as an evolutionary blueprint, Wilber shows us what this leap is all about and why it is so critical that boomers get over themselves. All of cultural development up to this point has been fundamentally concerned with survival, starting hundreds of thousands of years ago with our most meager physical survival. Through the course of human history, human consciousness has developed more sophisticated strategies for survival—both internally (psychologically) and externally (technologically). Up until now, Beck and Cowan explain, human consciousness development has been about the elaboration of different, and increasingly complex, strategies for protecting an increasingly complex self within an increasingly complex world. In other words, human development has been about one form of narcissism after another, one way to keep the self intact after another. The utter perniciousness of *boomer* narcissism lies in its insidious sophistication—and the fact that right beyond it lies the possibility of a radically different relationship to life that is not driven by physical or psychological survival fears. Taking this leap will give us a new way to respond to the persistent problems that have plagued humanity and have brought us to the edge of destruction—the degradation of the biosphere, incessant warring between different human tribes, overpopulation, and starvation, to name a few. In the brilliant light of what is possible, boomeritis is aggressively anti-evolutionary.

This leap beyond boomeritis is clearly no mean feat. The context, consequences, and cost are enormous—which is what is inspiring about this unique moment in the human drama. We actually have the choice to participate in evolution: which do we trust more, our survival-conditioned minds or the evolutionary flow of life itself? This choice is essential, spiritual, because it concerns our deepest understanding of who we are and what life is about. Wilber documents all of the devious ways that boomers have placed our own narcissism-driven minds at the center of the universe—choosing self-preservation through an unrelenting hubris rather than taking the risk to align ourselves with evolution. Narcissism, as Wilber explains, is a multifaceted survival strategy designed to preserve the psychological self in its separation from the rest of life:

*The dictionary definition of narcissism is “excessive interest in one’s own self, importance, grandeur, abilities;*



*egocentrism.” The inner state of narcissism, clinicians tell us, is often that of an empty or fragmented self, which desperately attempts to fill the void by inflating the self and deflating others. The emotional mood is, “Nobody tells me what to do!”*

Boomeritis divides the soul: a desperately narcissistic reliance on the sophistication and comprehension of one’s mind over the force of life that animates our hearts. And this division destroys the possibility of the spiritual transformation that our collective evolution demands.

“Very interesting, so true of many others, but not me—why, I’m a very spiritual person!” would be a classic “I’m-a-special-case” boomer response to all of this. (Well, at the risk of being boomeritisly self-referential, look at me: I am even an editor of this well-known spiritual magazine, but, boy, do I have boomeritis.) Boomeritis is bigger and runs deeper than one can imagine. In fact, separating out the spiritual from “other” aspects of life and fashioning an identity as a “spiritual” person are both classic forms of boomeritis. You see, while boomers have actually sought for something beyond the materialist gains of the Second World War generation, and have done much to revitalize spirituality in the West, the stain of materialism—of wanting to have, to hold on to something for ourselves—has sullied much of boomer spirituality, draining the sacred from the realm of the spirit. Boomeritis is the materialist takeover of the spiritual for the sake of narcissistic gratification. In the following pages, I want to share with you what I’ve learned about just how deeply boomeritis works as a force against the evolutionary call from the future and how it has infected so much of the contemporary spiritual world.

## BOOMERITIS BASICS

The roots of boomeritis go back several hundred years in cultural history. About four hundred years ago, human beings at the forefront of consciousness development looked away from God and began to look in the mirror. This marked the end of the

traditional era, during which the world's great religions—Christianity, Buddhism, Islam—were founded and flowered. We tried to create a loophole in our contract with the Divine. This was the distinguishing move of the *modern* age, when humankind—led by the West—tore itself away from traditional structures of earthly and spiritual authority and began to develop a self-based authority of reason, science, and the mind. We quested for knowledge, sought independence, and created, particularly in the West, an unparalleled prosperity through technological innovation, developing a middle class insulated from the pressures of physical survival. But in the process, we diminished and destroyed the role of the sacred in human life, thereby reducing ourselves to material, rather than spiritual, beings. We denied our debt to an intelligence or force far beyond ourselves. We created *Flatland*—a world devoid of depth and transcendence. Now as we hurtle through a *postmodern* world that is changing faster than we can imagine, the modernist belief in the omnipotence of reason and the mind is proving to be an illusion. The pluralism of cultures, races, and perspectives has raised questions of rights and truth. We advocated for equality and, in the process, made Truth into truths—our different experiences of life became the ground for equal and, therefore, relative truths. Reducing Truth to our own personal, subjective experience made pluralism, as Wilber says, “a supermagnet for narcissism.” This is the spiritual dilemma of boomeritis: we’ve allowed our creative minds to rob the Divine of Truth and put our subjective experience in its place. The loophole has turned out to be a noose.

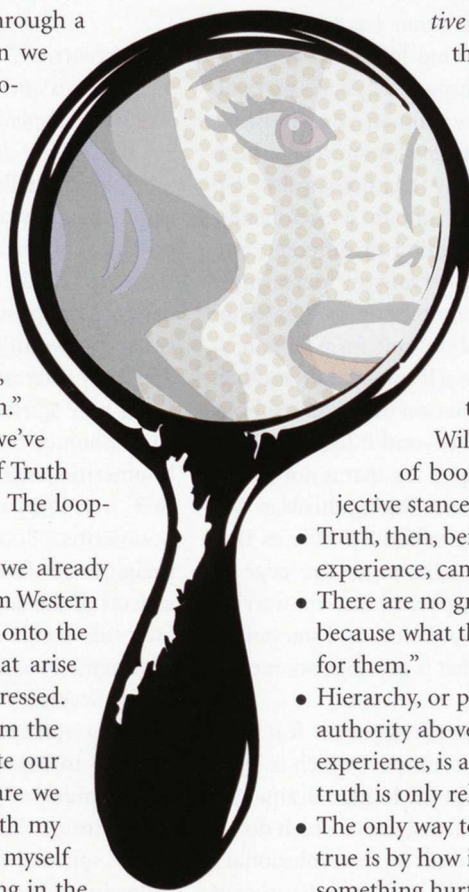
Of course, being smart postmodern types, we already know that the spiritual dimension is missing from Western culture. That’s *why* so many of us have stepped onto the spiritual path or cultivated forms of living that arise from care or concern for the welfare of the oppressed. We’ve collected the great wisdom teachings from the entire world and turned inward to contemplate our deeper nature. Okay, great. But where deeper are we looking? I vividly remember a conversation with my own spiritual teacher when I was clearly holding myself back from a new momentum that was occurring in the larger body of students. In our life together here, in this laboratory of evolution, the demand is to individually and collectively surrender to the evolutionary impulse. Leaning toward a perfect union between the one and the many, both in our work and in direct collective investigation, a dynamic positivity and unlimited possibility open up when each participant brings him- or herself fully to this exploration beyond the known. I was refusing to participate in an authentic way. “You have no idea what it is that I am teaching,” my teacher told me. “You have no idea what is going on here, what it is that I am trying to do.

Everything that you know is conceptual—it’s all concepts and it isn’t real.” He was right. I had grabbed with my mind and conceptualized the very real experience of something thrillingly and terrifyingly new that was emerging among us. I thought *I knew*, and that placed me in a conceptual universe that is a false and sterile parallel to the reality that was being created and shared. I was stopping transformation by creating my own truth, something personal, out of the experience. This is the boomeritis gap, the division between a highly developed intellect and the fear-based self-protection where we often actually reside. Too often, when we *think* we’re going deeper, we end up in a subjective mind-maze of concepts and personal experience. In other words, we’re looking at what we know—which means that we are only looking at ourselves in a narcissistic mirror.

The postmodern self is a deeply *subjective* self. And Wilber makes very clear what the implications are of this subjective, or personal, turn on boomers’ approach to the world. Rejecting both the traditionalists’ God and the absolutist principles of scientific reasoning, the pluralistic mind leaves us only with our own inner, subjective experience as authority, as the ground for truth and action. Pretty frightening when you think of all of the mental and emotional debris that passes through us constantly! As Wilber explains, a number of “principles” of boomeritis pluralism flow from this subjective stance:

- Truth, then, being grounded in subjective experience, can only be relative.
- There are no grounds for judging another—because what they are doing might be “right for them.”
- Hierarchy, or placing anyone’s experience or authority above another’s (especially one’s own) experience, is a violation of what is true (that truth is only relative).
- The only way to determine what is good and true is by how it makes one feel; therefore, if something hurts one’s feelings, then one has been wronged.

Ironically, the result has been a creepy cultural etiquette of niceness. When the only truth is what we feel, then hurting someone’s feelings becomes a violation of truth, an affront to what is held holy—ourselves. The ground between us, the space for coming together, becomes a minefield. Locked in the righteous truth of our own personal, subjective world, we step lightly, cautiously, and pretend with each other. This emphasis on subjective experience doesn’t lead to a culture of strong individuals who express the authority of their own experience—instead, the



connection to one's true subjective experience erodes under the pretense of perfectly-kind-people personas.

Pluralists' fight for the rights of those excluded from modernism's promise has led, yes, to an empowerment and an opening of opportunity for so many. But at the same time, it has unwittingly created a climate where any aggrieved sensitive self can call his or her hurt feelings a personal foul, claim victim status, and seek redress in court (or at least demand health insurance coverage). A hallmark of narcissism is the inability to take responsibility, the intense need to find someone else to blame for one's problems. "The real tragedy" in all this, as Wilber notes, is that actual victims' "genuine grievances are trivialized by victim chic." While Wilber lays out how far we have gone to avoid responsibility—a man with a 60-inch waist suing the airlines for discrimination because he can't get his butt in the seats, the lawsuit against McDonald's because the take-out coffee was too hot, the endless support groups for every real and imagined trauma—his emphasis is on how deeply boomeritis has reached into Western culture. But my question is: what does this mean for the life of the spirit?

## BOOMERITIS OF THE SPIRIT

Let's start with the culture of victimization. Truly, anyone who has been victimized (which does, in some ways, include all of us) knows that the effect is to humiliate one's spirit, to violate one's dignity as a human being. Imagine, then, the cost to the soul of clutching onto victimization—of *choosing* this stance for oneself. What does this say about our relationship to the sacred gift of life? And yet, I know all too well how strong is the desire to be a victim and not take responsibility for the life I have been given. When I was confronted with the demand to come to a deeper reckoning, to drop my own narcissism and



participate fully in the creative force of life in communion with my spiritual sisters and brothers, I would not let go into this forward-rushing current that was carrying everyone beyond the edge of the known. A sense of a *whole* was emerging in the group, allowing for a fearless collective exploration of the entire gamut of the human condition as ourselves. In true boomeritis fashion, I could *see* the processes of my mind and the myriad ways that I was holding on. In fact, I was narcissistically fascinated by it all. Then an insidious little thought crept into consciousness: "*Maybe there is something wrong with me—I am just*

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Jae Jah Noh

*Teacher & Mystic*

*20th & 21st Century USA*

**I DEFEATED MY ILLUSIONS.** I defeated myself. I pushed into the Void, which is my true nature, and I saw the unbelievable. I saw the first and final choices of all creation: tears or laughter, suffering or joy, death or life. And now I am faced with the most terrifying reality of all. I have ended the games, the limits, the enforced and stilted drama. I have destroyed my desires and found peace, destroyed my illusions and found reality, destroyed my fear and found freedom. . . .

This soldier has at last died the good death, and in his very likeness has been resurrected again as love and freedom and joy. Now there is the constant thread of grace, of God, throughout infinity. I have

surrendered everything and gained it all back. What shall I do with it all? I will enjoy it. Calmly, without rushing, effortlessly and without fear, I shall embrace all that is. My God, my God. In the midst of death have I found life and happiness.

I shall live in the heart of the Infinite. I shall live the life of truth. I shall live in God's grace. For all these things I am, effortlessly, naturally, without thought. I shall live in trust. My infinite understanding finds its ultimate dissolution and fulfillment in faith, in effortless being, in immediate and direct relationship. I am all that is and thus my relationship to all things transcends all knowing. It is love, faith, joy.

In the death of this soldier is born the divine.

Jae Jah Noh, *Do You See What I See?* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1977), pp. 20, 22.



*too damaged by my past, maybe therapy could help me to find out what is holding me back.*" Hooking into the soft underbelly of the narcissistic ego that refuses to take responsibility for life, I gave this thought more and more weight. Pushed to choose—where did I stand?—I was willing to trade six years with my teacher and the possibility of leaping into a wholly new dimension of life for the safety of the therapist's couch and the endless exploration of everything that I already knew. It became very clear: *I wanted to be a victim.* Yes, there was something "wrong" with me: I wasn't willing to change. I didn't want to take responsibility for what my heart knew and recognized to be a good greater than myself. I set myself above the call to evolve that is humanity's potential salvation by collapsing into the undignified slouch of the victim.

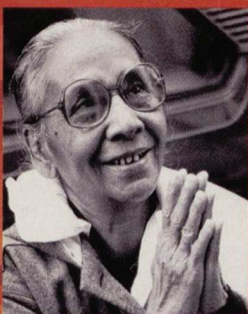
Seeking salvation in the mirror of our minds is a boomeritis trick that allows us to not change while being endlessly involved in *thinking* about change as if it were the real thing. The intensely subjective self, which gives ultimate priority and authority to our thoughts and feeling states, leads to a corruption of the entire aim of spiritual life. The purpose of spiritual life, the reason to seek, is reduced to *wanting to feel better*. In a word: bliss. In two words: no stress. Now, while the recognition that *life is suffering* is what led the Buddha to his realization, Buddha's concern was humanity. The boomeritis concern is also humanity—meaning *myself*. Boomeritis spirituality is almost entirely concerned with the feeling states, and even the omnipotence, of the separate sense of self. The truth is subjective, remember? That means that *I* am the ultimate authority. *I* am the guide to *my* own awakening and to how far I have come on the spiritual path—because my progress on the path is related to the nifty spiritual experiences that *I* have and to how *I* feel. Who can tell, other than *me*? So, I don't need a teacher or any outside authority. And, in fact, don't all of the wisdom teachings say that my fundamental nature is Divine? Hey, I mean, we're all already enlightened, right? Well, maybe . . . but certainly not in the way that boomeritis spirituality uses such hard-won spiritual truths. The result is total self-acceptance—of the good, the bad, and the ugly in human nature—not out of some higher realization of equanimity but out of a lack of discrimination or care for anything other than one's own feelings. (You see, having to confront oneself and really *change* doesn't feel good and it's not easy.)

This distortion of spiritual truth by narcissism leads to a flatland spirituality, devoid of real transcendence, that is barely different from someone's life who is not on the path or doing spiritual practice. But there is one critical difference. The seeker infected with boomeritis feels good about him- or herself, and superior to others, because of having a spiritual identity and

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Dipa Ma

Buddhist Teacher  
20th Century Burma



AT THIS LOWEST POINT IN her life, the Buddha appeared to her in a dream. A luminous presence, he softly chanted a verse from the Dhammapada, originally offered as consolation to a father grieving the death of his son:

*Clinging to what is dear brings sorrow,  
Clinging to what is dear brings fear.  
To one who is entirely free from  
endearment,  
There is no sorrow or fear.*

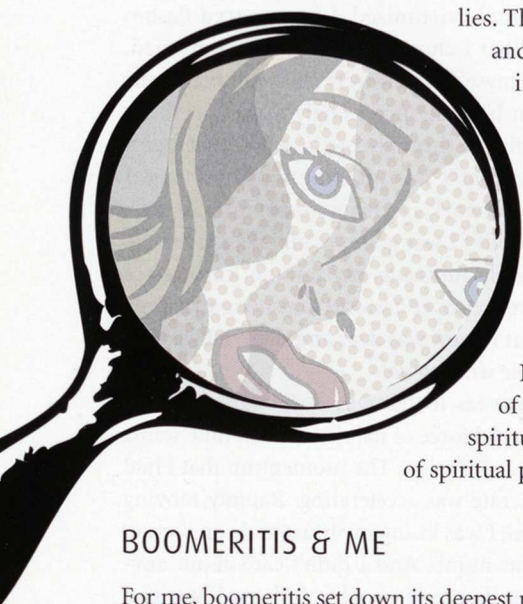
When Dipa Ma awoke, she felt clear and calm. She knew she must learn to meditate no matter what the state of her

health. She understood the Buddha's advice: if she wanted true peace, she must practice until she was free from all attachment and sorrow. . . .

On the way to the talk, Dipa Ma began to experience heart palpitations. Feeling very weak, she ended up on her hands and knees, crawling up the stairs to the hall. She didn't understand the talk but continued her meditation practice. After the talk Dipa Ma found that she couldn't stand up. She felt stuck in her seated posture, her body stiff, immobilized by the depth of her concentration.

being *such a spiritual person*. As Wilber writes, “The essential feature . . . is the process of *relabeling*. That is, you take your present egoic state and learn to constantly relabel it as spiritual, divine, and sacred—relabel your ego as the Goddess, relabel it as the sacred Self, relabel it as the divine Web of Life. . . . One ends up relabeling the subtlest reaches of the ego as Divine, and that is the new spiritual paradigm.” In other words, the Web of Life becomes a web of

lies. This process of relabeling, and the emphasis on feeling, within boomeritis spirituality tries to turn the sacred into something that we can have and claim for our own narcissistic desires. And Wilber’s point holds for far more than what we call the New Age. This relabeling of the ego and its motives as spiritual can corrupt all forms of spiritual pursuit.



## BOOMERITIS & ME

For me, boomeritis set down its deepest roots in my identification with having been part of the movement for women’s liberation for twenty-some years. I marched for women’s rights, explored feminist consciousness-raising, researched girls’ and women’s development, wrote with great passion about women’s predicament and the possibilities of radical transformation in women’s lives. Part of what pluralism allows, for each of us, is the creation of our own personal ideology. But, in a spiritual context calling for real

change, the entire realm of personal identification has to be transcended. When the current of evolutionary intimacy began to pull us toward deeper and higher levels of spiritual communion, I was faced with the very real possibility to live what I have always said I wanted most in my life—to meet other women, heart-to-heart, in liberation beyond gender. But that identity that I clung to, my narcissistic desire to see myself as “the person who cares for women,” became a barbed-wire fence between me and other women. “What is working against you now, what is your enemy,” a friend told me in the middle of this crisis, “is your attachment to your intelligence, your mind, and your passion, your history of believing in women’s liberation. You have to let all of it go.” The surface integrity that I had presented to the world as my identity cracked and blistered up like cheap linoleum. And the floor revealed beneath it was rotten. Underneath the good intentions of the caring feminist was an intense desire to avoid being like other women. Ironically, the desire to not be like other women, the desire to be the special and only one, is one of the key building blocks of woman’s ego. Holding myself as superior to women, and censoring my own experience because it would have only revealed what I did not want to see about myself, not only meant that the freedom of true communion was impossible, but also kept me prisoner in the fortress of self-image, fearful of my own thoughts and impulses. I didn’t want to be left simply with my experience stripped of the ideas and conclusions about myself that I had used to keep the world, and now the hearts of women, at bay. And in that, I stood against the revolutionary possibility that was the light I had followed throughout my entire life.

Now, if you tune your ear and listen carefully, beneath the desperate concern for self-image, the cry of the false victim, the relabeling of all experience as divine, the antipathy toward hierarchy and authority, beneath all the basics of boomeritis spirituality, the true boomeritis mantra sounds loud and clear: *Nobody tells me what to do!* We have become so well-versed in the wisdom

In the following days, Dipa Ma’s practice deepened dramatically as she moved rapidly through the classical stages of the progress of insight that are said to precede enlightenment, according to the teaching of the *Theravada* (South Asian) Buddhist tradition. She experienced a brilliant light, followed by the feeling that everything around her was dissolving. Her body, the floor, everything, she said, was in pieces, broken and empty. That gave way to intense mental and physical pain, with an excruciating burning and constricting in her body. She felt that

she would burst with pressure.

Then something extraordinary happened. A simple moment—it was daytime, she was sitting on the floor, practicing among a group of meditators—an instantaneous transition so quiet and delicate, that it seemed as if nothing at all had happened. Of this luminous instant Dipa Ma was later to say simply, “I did not know,” and yet in it her life had been profoundly and irrevocably transformed.

After three decades of searching for freedom, at the age of fifty-three, after six days of practice, Dipa Ma reached

the first stage of enlightenment.

Almost immediately her blood pressure returned to normal and her heart palpitations diminished. Previously unable to climb the meditation center stairs, this ascent was now effortless, and she could walk at any pace. As the Buddha had predicted in her dream, the grief she had borne day and night vanished. Her constant fearfulness was gone, leaving her with an unprecedented equanimity and a clear understanding that she could handle anything.

Amy Schmidt, *Knee Deep in Grace* (Lake Junaluska, NC: Present Perfect Books, In Press), p. 30.

traditions, have read so much, and have conveniently translated our egoic mind's experience into the appropriate spiritual categories—it is readily apparent how and why these powerful ideas (about me!) are such a magnet for narcissism. In fact, when laid out this way, this can be easy to see and to find even rather amusing—yes, *such narcissism, what folly, ha ha*. But in the context of a world careening out of control precisely because we are so out of control, this is actually no joke. Narcissism is a force in us, built up over hundreds of thousands of years of human history, which must be renounced in order to make the evolutionary leap to a new way of being. It is a willful, and aggressive, denial of the creative force of the universe, whether we call it the Divine or God or what you will. This core motivation—*Nobody tells me what to do!*—sounds like the peevish rant of a two-year-old, which it is, but it is not harmless when it provides us with an excuse not to care beyond ourselves, destroys the true nobility of the spiritual quest and the imperative to reach for the highest in human potential, or justifies the rage of the innumerable sensitive selves who feel victimized in contemporary culture.

For myself, the longer I refused to see the truth of what I was actually doing—and resided in that boomeritis state where only my feelings matter—the more apparent it became that the force in us that says *Nobody tells me what to do!* is actually frighteningly dangerous. The narcissistic ego is primitive—and decidedly destructive. But its pure destructiveness only became clear over the course of this crisis. At first, in meetings with my spiritual sisters where we explored the potential of evolution for women, my voice was hollow and insincere as I pretended to be on top of things, desperately trying to remain in control in a situation where we were all stepping into the unknown. Afterward, they asked me to recognize the choices I was making and urged me to experience the liberation of the truth. “It’s true,” they said, “the truth will set you free.” From behind the hard wall of narcissistic self-protection, I paid lip service to what they said—with my strong mind I could see that it was true—but I avoided

any real reckoning with what I was doing and the implications of it all. “You sound really angry,” my sisters told me. “You just hate seeing that you are not perfect and that you care more right now about your self-image than you do about women’s liberation.” No, *I’m not angry*, I kept insisting with a smile that betrayed a hideous delight in my own defiance, *why should I be angry when I already know that this is what I am doing, I already know what you are pointing to, I know it all*. Insisting on my own sincerity and feeling intensely victimized, I experienced flashes of rage and even hatred that I chose to ignore. As I continued, refusing simply to see in myself the entirety of the human condition, my inner division became increasingly stark—at times I could feel something flying through me, a wind that bears darkness. In this division that I was insisting on preserving, I found myself sabotaging my work, ignoring simple instructions, to the point that I wondered if I was going mad. Like the female demons in the movie *Devil’s Advocate*, my smiling, caring face began to feel like a thin veneer over a monstrous force that only wanted to rip apart all that I knew was dear and sacred. I was out of control: *Nobody tells me what to do!*

But it didn’t stop there (as if that wasn’t enough) because, when unleashed, the powerful force of narcissistic lust only wants to continue its course of annihilation. The momentum that I had allowed this force to generate was accelerating. Rapidly moving beyond the capacity to feel, I was losing my heart and connection with all that I loved. I was numb. And I didn’t care about anything; I couldn’t even care about my own life. “It’s ego!” a friend nearly shouted at me. “It’s ego, and all it wants is to numb you out, to cut you off from everything you care about, from your own heart. It wants to kill the you that cares.” I knew this was true. Deep within this force is a violence against love that is completely blind in its destructive rage. It scared me. I knew I had to stop. Boomeritis was killing me. Something had to change in me—fast.

The deepest dangers of boomeritis are only revealed when we actually begin to take seriously the evolutionary demand of

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### St. Augustine

Church Father & Philosopher  
4th Century North Africa



AND I ENTERED AND BEHELD with the eye of my soul (such as it was), above the same eye of my soul, above my mind, the Light Unchangeable. Not this ordinary light, which all flesh may look upon, nor, as it were, greater of the same kind, as though the brightness of this should be manifold brighter, and with its greatness take up all space. Not such was this light, but other, yea, far from all these. Nor was it above my soul, as oil is above water, nor yet as heaven above earth; but above my soul, because It made me; and I below It, because I was made by It. He that knows the Truth, knows what that Light is; and he that knows It, knows eternity.

Edward B. Pusey (tr.), *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*  
(New York: Random House, Inc., 1949).

real transformation. Only then does the contrast between the call of the spirit to evolve and the force of narcissism become starkly clear. Only then is it possible to see that the narcissistic ego-mind's use of the sacred to create a safe, known world and positive identity is an act of deep corruption in our motivation for seeking. My crisis came from *having to know*—to know who I am, to know where I am, and, finally, to know that I am a good person and therefore I am better and smarter than everyone—and taking all that I experienced for my own self-reflection. This is the double whammy of boomeritis: the highly developed mind covering the low narcissism. The end result is nihilism. Emptying the sacred of its depth, life becomes flat, meaningless, and devoid of the possibility for real transformation. Turning the untouchable and ineffable mystery of life itself into material for our own gratification, we gut the sacred, and our lives, of meaning, in order to create something to hang on to in the face of how vast and truly unknown it all is. "We know by the year about 2020, the greatest disabling phenomenon for the health of the human race will be depression," says Dr. Max Bennett, world-renowned neurologist from the University of Sydney. "Not cancer, not heart disease, but depression." We have not become the Prozac nation for nothing; we've become the Prozac nation for nihilism. Boomeritis leaves us in a world of spiritual pretense that robs the sacred of its power and goodness by trying to make it serve us and our personal need for control.

The truth is actually the complete opposite: *we* exist to serve the sacred, and deeper meaning and purpose can only come from this recognition. My spiritual teacher has written, "What would you do if you realized it was all up to you? What would you do if suddenly you realized that the entire evolution of the whole human race rested on *your shoulders alone*? What would you do?" My heart has always been pulled by these questions—perhaps because mine is the heart of a paradigm-busting boomer—and they have also left me reeling: *it's just too big!* But, actually, life itself is that big. Yours and mine.

The narcissistic rage that I gave myself to when I refused to surrender is enormous. While its violent intensity is hidden from view until we find ourselves up against the wall, the mess that the world is in—even the everyday mess of relationship and disorder and wastefulness—comes from one choice after another made from that same narcissism that wants only for itself and doesn't care about the consequences. But the force of evolution, of life, is even more enormous. For fifteen billion years this force has been moving toward this moment of consciousness where we are now able to choose our fate and that of this world. In contemplating these questions, the very real immensity of life and of the fact that I am here, living in a twenty-first century laboratory of the spirit, exploring the teaching of Evolutionary Enlightenment, opens up a different perspective, another consciousness somehow above or beyond the ego-mind with its ceaseless need to know. Like exercising an unused muscle, I cannot hold this perspective for very long—but I understand deeply that it is always there. And in the clarity of this perspective, I can see that I have taken the call of the spirit, the universal pull of evolution, entirely personally, when it simply is as it is—an obligation that comes with the extraordinary virtue of our human birth. Stepping out of the confines of my particular life to see it in the light of our collective evolution, the movement of the stream of life creates a radically different context for making choices. To act from this, from the biggest possible truth of what it means to be human and alive now, holds a revolutionary possibility that takes us beyond boomeritis into what may, in fact, end up being a truly paradigm-busting transformation for all of humanity. And that would make any boomer's heart truly sing. ■

Quotations from: Ken Wilber, *Boomeritis*, Shambhala Publications, Boston, 2002, pp. 35, 36, 44, 178, 338; "What Buddhists Know about Science," by Daithí Ó hAnluain, [www.wired.com/news](http://www.wired.com/news); Andrew Cohen, *Freedom Has No History*, Moksha Press, Lenox, MA, 1997, p. 101.

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Mr. K. Y.

*Business Executive & Zen Practitioner  
20th Century Japan*

AT MIDNIGHT I ABRUPTLY awakened. At first my mind was foggy, then suddenly that quotation flashed into my consciousness: "I came to realize clearly that Mind is no other than mountains, rivers, and the great wide earth, the sun and the moon and the stars." And I repeated it. Then all at once I was struck as though by lightning, and the next instant heaven and earth crumbled and disappeared. Instantaneously, like

surging waves, a tremendous delight welled up in me, a veritable hurricane of delight, as I laughed loudly and wildly: "Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! There's no reasoning here, no reasoning at all! Ha, ha, ha!" The empty sky split in two, then opened its enormous mouth and began to laugh uproariously: "Ha, ha, ha, ha!" Later one of the members of my family told me that my laughter had sounded inhuman.

I was now lying on my back. Suddenly I sat up and struck the bed with all my might and beat the floor with my feet, as if trying to smash it,

all the while laughing riotously. . . . Covering my mouth with her hand, my wife exclaimed: "What's the matter with you? What's the matter with you?" But I wasn't aware of this until told about it afterwards. . . .

"I've come to enlightenment! Shakyamuni [the Buddha] and the patriarchs haven't deceived me! They haven't deceived me!" I remember crying out.

Roshi Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 216.



# section 2 Miracles and Transformation

*What do miracles and extraordinary human capacities have to do with spiritual transformation?*

*What makes the miraculous possible?*



**"I am not the body; I am the soul"**

*Breaking Limits with Sri Chinmoy  
and Ashrita Furman*



**Where Two or Three  
Are Gathered in My Name**

*An Excerpt from Father Arseny*



**The Fantastic Buddhaverse  
of Robert Thurman**

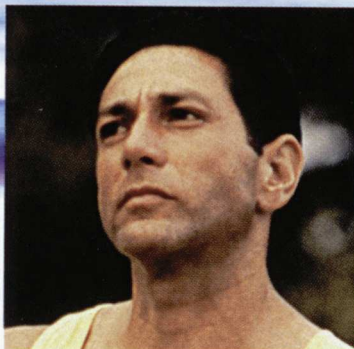
# “I am not the body I am the soul”

## Breaking Limits with Sri Chinmoy and Ashrita Furman

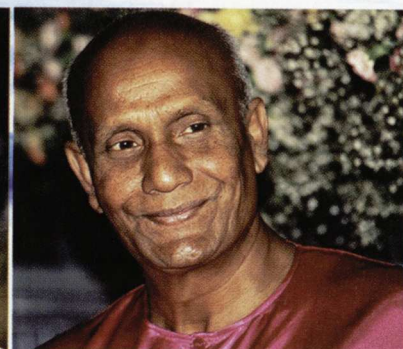
an interview by Elizabeth Debold

**WHEN IT COMES TO MIRACLES**, it often seems like the past has an almost complete monopoly. Look at just about any religion and you'll see that its spiritual canon is filled with endless stories of extraordinary events, miraculous transformations, and divine interventions. They are inspiring, intriguing, unexpected, and sometimes too much to believe. They mystify, fascinate, and tantalize, and they seem so, well . . . so much a part of the past, usually the ancient past. Does that mean that the rise of the scientific age has sounded the death knell of the miraculous? Are the miracles of spiritual transformation that have so long stoked the devotional fires of the faithful merely anachronistic relics in the more rational climate of our contemporary society? For all of the skeptics in the land of the spirit who might be tempted to answer that question with a “yes,” let me introduce Exhibit A for the defense: Sri Chinmoy and Ashrita Furman.

Sri Chinmoy, a world-famous spiritual teacher, musician, artist, and prolific poet, is perhaps best known for his near-Herculean efforts to promote the ideals of peace and spiritual freedom on the world stage and for the impressive list of spiritual and political friends he has enlisted in these efforts, including Nelson Mandela, Mikhail Gorbachev, the last two popes, and a former Secretary General of the U.N. But his accomplishments hardly stop there. A former decathlete and world-class long-distance runner, Sri Chinmoy has made the transcendence of human limitations his own personal *sadhana* [spiritual practice]. And to hear his list of achievements and records—from creating more than sixteen thousand paintings in one twenty-four-hour period to writing over thirteen hundred books to lifting over seven thousand pounds—is to journey into a world in which normal ideas of what's possible seem to crumble away in the face of



Ashrita Furman



Sri Chinmoy

the love, devotion, and surrender that Sri Chinmoy cites as the source of his extraordinary talents. But despite his impressive résumé of personal achievements, Sri Chinmoy's most extraordinary feat of all may be his near-miraculous ability to inspire in many of his students the same kind of limitation-shattering abilities that have marked his own spiritual odyssey, and his own accomplishments are perhaps only surpassed by the many accomplishments of those who have been inspired by his example.

Enter Ashrita Furman. A close student of Sri Chinmoy since the early seventies, Furman actually holds the Guinness record for holding the most records in the *Guinness Book of Records*. Long intrigued by Sri Chinmoy's ability to inspire in his students an almost superhuman capacity to transcend human limitations, *WIE* caught up with Furman last fall. Speaking from his home in New York City, this mild-mannered spiritual devotee shared with us the secrets of his success and the breathtaking stories of his unique achievements. And while his feats might not come close in spectacle to parting the Red Sea or turning water into wine, Furman's deep surrender and unwavering devotion made it very clear that modernity's long shadow of skepticism has not yet eclipsed the miraculous nature of one individual's faith in a sacred power that works its will far beyond the limitations of the physical form.



## “I am not the body; I am the soul”

**WIE:** *Your teacher, Sri Chinmoy, is well known for accomplishing extraordinary feats of creativity, physical strength, and endurance. Could you speak about some of what he has accomplished?*

**ASHRITA FURMAN:** Well, the list is pretty amazing. I couldn't possibly tell you all of it. I'll just go through a few of the things. With art, for example, he's painted these amazing acrylic abstract pieces, over 135,000, and they're just astounding. They're so beautiful. He doesn't use his mind at all. He says he follows a streak of light when he paints. And the colors! He doesn't choose them by any kind of mental choice, it's like an intuition—he dips his brush or his sponge or his fingers or however he's painting. He's very creative. The artwork is a perfect example of his creativity, because there's no end to what he has done. It's very exciting when he gets involved in a project, to see how far he'll go and to see his creativity in finding new ways to express his vision. It's really a *vision* that he's expressing on paper. I've had some incredible meditations looking at his artwork in a gallery or even looking at a print. And the artwork is just one very small aspect of what he's doing. He's always pushing the envelope, you might say. He says that he's not worried about the quality, because he surrenders that to the Supreme. He's an instrument. So he's doing all of this not for his own glory or name and fame. He's doing it to inspire other people. He says that the Supreme has to take care of the quality, and he'll just produce.

One time he wanted to see how many paintings he could do in twenty-four hours. It was so exciting—I did the counting. He was painting so *fast* that there was no place to put all these thousands of paintings. We had to build a machine that would dry off the paper, so we could stack them.

**WIE:** *How many did he do in the end?*

**AF:** He did over sixteen thousand in those twenty-four hours. And that is just *art*. He's also written more than thirteen hundred books—poetry, aphorisms, plays, short stories. It's all coming from his inner realization and it's just endless. He doesn't stop. And he feels a tremendous inner push to keep writing and creating.

Once something really nice happened. He wrote a series of short poems. He said that some people were criticizing him because his poetry wasn't rhyming, so he decided to write a book of rhyming poems. He'd just written it and was very excited about

**Guinness Book of Records**  
Most 20-ounce glasses  
balanced on the chin: 75

*This is one thing I love about the records: there's always this moment of truth, somewhere, where I really have to transcend my body and my mind, go deep within and really connect with my soul and with my teacher's grace, leave my own human capacity and jump into something beyond me. It is something that I can't even take credit for.*

it. He told each person who was there at his house to pick a number from one to one hundred—because he'd written about a hundred poems. Someone would pick a number, and then he'd turn to that page and read the poem. He got to me and I picked number twenty-three. The page was blank! So he wrote a poem right on the spur of the moment. I remember, because the poem had to do with being sheltered by the Supreme, which is what my name, *Ashrita*, means. That's what I mean, he's so creative that on the spur of the moment, he'll just get the inspiration and create. Again, he doesn't think—he just goes deep within and it flows out.

It's the same thing with his music. I'm not a singer so I'm not really qualified to even talk about his music, but he's written thousands, literally, thousands of songs—beautiful, incredibly uplifting songs in his mother tongue, Bengali, and in English. And I've been to a concert where he's played more than a hundred musical instruments.

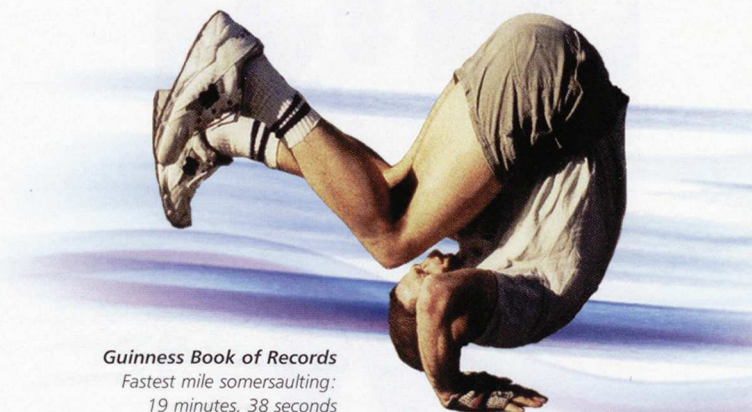
**WIE:** *A hundred different musical instruments?*

**AF:** Yes, and it's all self-taught. He's really the foremost expert on the *esraj* in the world. It's an Indian string instrument, like an Indian cello, you might say. It has all these sympathetic strings, so when he plays these notes, the other strings reverberate. It's very moving. He's played more than five hundred concerts around the world. They're free—they're always for free—to inspire people to go deep within and feel that peace within themselves.

It's really almost unfair to try to talk about everything in one conversation. You can't possibly cover everything that he's done. But it's always something new. Even his weight lifting is creative. He doesn't do things in the standard way. He wouldn't just sit down and see how much he could do on a bench press. He'd see what the heaviest elephant is that he could lift on the calf-raise machine. He has a whole program that he calls "Lifting Up the World," which is a beautiful concept. People stand up on a platform and he gets underneath, pushes up on a handle, and it lifts up the platform. He's literally lifting them up. It's a way of appreciating people. He's lifted more than four thousand people around the world doing this—people like Nelson Mandela—prime ministers, presidents, but also just people who are doing good things.

**WIE:** *How did he start doing the weight lifting? Did he train?*

**AF:** You know, he never used to like weight lifting. He was a decathlete in India, and he was really a champion. He was a



**Guinness Book of Records**  
Fastest mile somersaulting:  
19 minutes, 38 seconds

champion sprinter in his ashram, and he never liked weights at all. Coming here to the West, he actually was into long-distance running for a while, but then his knee was bothering him. So he wanted to find some other form of exercise. But because of that knee injury, he started lifting weights, and, well, his nature is self-transcendence. That's one of the major pillars of his philosophy. It's self-transcendence, that there's no end to our progress. As far or as high as you go, you can always go higher. And that's on the spiritual realm, because the Supreme is infinite, there's no end. You just keep going. It's the same thing with *everything* that he does. So, on a physical plane as well, he inspires us to push ourselves in whatever we do. If we're doing some service, we try to do more service. If we're running a certain number of miles, we can run more miles or we can run faster. Or if we have certain qualities or capacities, we try to transcend them in every way.

**WIE:** *Did he build up doing the weights? I've heard that he can lift up thousands of pounds.*

**AF:** Well, yes. He built up. He started with very light weights, but in a short period of time, within a year I think, he was lifting thousands of pounds. I was actually there when he lifted seven thousand pounds. It was in his house at 1:30 in the morning. There were seventy hundred-pound plates that were on either side of a bar, which was resting in these metal loops attached to the ceiling of his house. That's like having a truck in your living room. They had to bolster the floor of his house so the whole thing wouldn't cave in. It was very scary just being near it. He went to a very high consciousness. And for us it was all a very deep meditation.



Sri Chinmoy has run 22 marathons and has lifted over 7,000 pounds to inspire others to break limits.

**WIE:** *So you were all meditating together?*

**AF:** Yes, we were all meditating, and then he got under it and lifted it. He pushed it a couple of inches off the loop so that he was actually holding it. And you know, we were not surprised because we've had such incredible spiritual experiences with him. When we see him do something like this, we're not surprised. We almost expect that he can do anything that he wants to do. And he's doing it to inspire us, to inspire people to transcend themselves. People are so limited by their minds. And he's just trying to say, "Okay, you've got to break out of that mental limitation." People can't believe it, but we were there. There were about twenty-five people who were eyewitnesses; we have pictures. But you know, he's not claiming records or trying to get into the Guinness book. It's just one of the many ways that he has to inspire people.

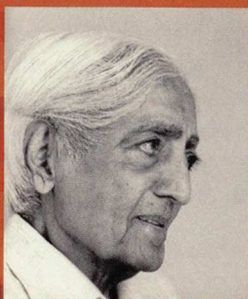
**WIE:** *That's really extraordinary. You mentioned surrender—could you say more about what makes these feats possible?*

**AF:** Well, yes; it's surrender to the will of the Supreme. In his case, he really has very close communication with the Supreme, and he is a surrendered instrument. He sometimes calls himself a football—the Supreme can just kick him in any direction that It wants to, and he's completely surrendered. Really, that's the only way he does any of this. It's not based on technique. Everything he does—his painting, playing musical instruments, everything—it's not any kind of fancy technique. It's all coming from his heart and from his soul. He's really an instrument, letting the divinity flow through him and create. He's trying to tell us that we can *all* do this if we can surrender, if we can get into that consciousness where we can overcome our own mind and

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### J. Krishnamurti

*Spiritual Teacher  
20th Century*



ON THE FIRST DAY while I was in that state and more conscious of the things around me, I had the first most extraordinary experience. There was a man mending the road; that man was myself; the pickaxe he held was myself; the very stone which he was breaking up was a part of me; the tender blade of grass was my very being, and the tree beside the man was myself. I almost could feel and think like the road-mender, and I could feel the wind passing through the tree and the little ant on the blade of grass I could feel. The birds, the dust, and the very noise were a part of me. Just then there was a car passing by at some distance; I was the driver, the engine,

and the tires; as the car went further away from me, I was going away from myself. I was in everything, or rather everything was in me, inanimate and animate, the mountain, the worm, and all breathing things. All day long I remained in this happy condition. I could not eat anything, and again at about six I began to lose my physical body, and naturally the physical elemental did what it liked; I was semi-conscious.

Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening* (New York: Avon Books, 1975), p. 170.

other limitations, impurities, and be a pure instrument so the grace can flow through us.

**WIE:** *His example has certainly inspired you to take on breaking limits—you've attempted, and broken, many Guinness world records in an astonishing number of categories.*

**AF:** Right. In fact, the first Guinness record that I attempted was soon after Sri Chinmoy painted all of those paintings in twenty-four hours. I wanted to see if I could do something in twenty-four hours, and I wanted to dedicate it to him. So, my first attempt was to break the record for the most jumps on a pogo stick in twenty-four hours. The existing record was 100,000 jumps. And, well, I didn't train at all. I just decided, "I'm going to do this." I went into Central Park in front of the Park Commissioner's Office, near the zoo that they have there. I had done this totally spontaneously. I hadn't gotten a permit. But the commissioner was extremely nice. He said, "Look, if he's crazy enough to do it, then I'm crazy enough to let him do it." The media was there—we called them because that's a requirement of Guinness. And I got these official witnesses, and two kind of homemade pogo sticks. And I started jumping. It was exciting and fun for the first three hours. But after that it was very painful. Since I hadn't practiced at all, I had no idea what was involved. I started getting blisters on my knees, because your knees are holding on to the pogo stick. And I started getting blisters on my hands. The arches of my feet started hurting. And, of course, I started getting very tired muscular-wise. It was a *real* battle. It was a *real* challenge.

I had learned these different techniques of really trying to stay within and invoking God's grace and invoking my teacher. So I was doing all that. I was getting closer and closer to the record;

and it was getting more and more painful. Anyway, actually at one point I had a vision, a spiritual vision, on the pogo stick. This is one of my great claims to fame—I'm probably the only person in history who has had a vision on a pogo stick!

It was very thrilling. It was the second time that I had had to really push way, way, way beyond my physical capacity. I knew that it wasn't my body that was doing it, that it was really my soul. The record, as I told you, was 100,000 jumps, and I broke the record. And then something happened that was *really* cosmic. Literally one or two seconds after I broke the record, it was in the middle of the night, the peacocks in the zoo started screaming. Now we hadn't heard them at all up until then. But just at the moment that I broke the record and did 100,000 jumps, these peacocks started screaming. You know, in Indian mythology, peacocks represent victory. It sent chills throughout my whole body. It was just amazing—I felt there was some kind of significance to that.

I ended up doing 131,000 jumps altogether, which broke the record. But the record was not accepted.

**WIE:** *Why not?*

**AF:** Because they have rules. In any kind of marathon event, over an extended period of hours, you're only allowed five minutes after each hour to rest. Not having really looked into it, I didn't know. So even though I was jumping much faster—I broke the record with an hour and a half to spare—I rested too much per hour. So they didn't take it, and that was it. But then I tried again. The next one I did was the jumping jack record, and that one was accepted.

**WIE:** *Is it true that since then you've earned the most world records of anyone in the Guinness Book of Records?*

I WAS SO HAPPY, CALM and at peace. I could still see my body and I was hovering near it. There was such a profound calmness both in the air and within myself, the calmness of the bottom of a deep unfathomable lake. Like the lake, I felt my physical body, with its mind and emotions, could be ruffled on the surface but nothing, nay nothing, could disturb the calmness of my soul. The Presence of the mighty Beings was with me for some time and then They were gone. I was supremely happy, for I had seen. Nothing could ever be the same. I have drunk at the clear and pure waters at the source of the fountain of life and my thirst was appeased. Never more could I be

thirsty, never more could I be in utter darkness; I have seen the Light. I have touched compassion which heals all sorrow and suffering; it is not for myself, but for the world. I have stood on the mountain top and gazed at the mighty Beings. Never can I be in utter darkness; I have seen the glorious and healing Light. The fountain of Truth has been revealed to me and the darkness has been dispersed.

Love in all its glory has intoxicated my heart; my heart can never be closed. I have drunk at the fountain of Joy and eternal Beauty. I am God-intoxicated.

Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening* (New York: Avon Books, 1975), p. 171.

**AF:** Right. I have more than seventy. Since 1979 I've broken seventy-one Guinness records. But I currently have, I think, fourteen in the book. That's because many times a record will get broken and then I break it back, or sometimes they retire different categories. They actually gave me the record for having the most records, which is also a Guinness record category.

**WIE:** *And were you a naturally athletic person?*

**AF:** No, not at all. That's why this thing is so exciting for me. I had always been interested in the *Guinness Book of Records* as a kid. I was *fascinated* by it for some reason. I found out, just a couple of years ago, that I was born four days after the Guinness book was conceived. I think there was some connection because in that year—I was born in 1954—Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile. And there were other things like that happening. So I had always been interested in it as a kid, but I was *very* unathletic. My father was an attorney and really stressed education. I was into that; I was very, very mental. I felt that sports were a waste of time. I could be reading or studying—why waste my time doing sports! My whole life revolved around the mind. I didn't see any purpose in developing the body.

I became dissatisfied with life as a teenager. When I was fifteen, I read *Siddhartha*. I started really becoming disillusioned with the world as I saw it, and with my life, as I saw how it was going to become like my father's or like others' around me. I didn't want to lead a life like that; I didn't see any meaning in it. So I started searching, doing yoga, and reading books on Eastern spirituality. Sri Chinmoy actually lived in my neighborhood. I

saw a poster and I went to a meditation—they were held in his house in those days.

**WIE:** *How old were you?*

**AF:** I had just turned sixteen. I knew the second that I saw him that he was my teacher. I had *no* idea what his philosophy was. In fact, my concept was that I was going to go into a cave and try to realize God. That was my idea. I was a little disappointed to find out that that wasn't his philosophy. But I knew he was my teacher. As soon as I saw him, I saw that he was a divine being, and I knew that I was meant to follow him. So I had to conform to his philosophy of staying *in* the world, not going into a cave, living in the world and manifesting for other people whatever spirituality that you get through your own spiritual practice.

His idea is that we have to live in the world and be examples, to try to inspire other people. And also, to develop every part of ourselves; not only our spiritual part but our mind and our heart and also our body. So he would encourage people to participate in sports. But because I was *so* unathletic, I just figured, "Oh, that doesn't apply to me." Because I was like the biggest nerd. I just really didn't believe in it and I didn't feel it applied to me. But after a number of years, there was this big race in Central Park, a twenty-four-hour bicycle race.

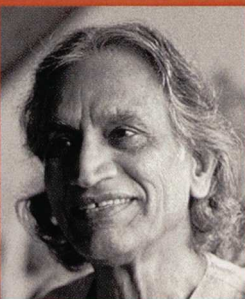
**WIE:** *Was it put on by Sri Chinmoy?*

**AF:** No. I don't know who it was; it was sponsored by Pepsi. It was in 1978. They had a five-mile loop in Central Park, and the idea

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Yogi Amrit Desai

*Spiritual Teacher  
20th & 21st Century USA*



ONE MORNING, I WAS performing my normal routine of yoga postures in the meditation room of my home in Philadelphia. With me were my wife, Urmila, and two of my students, John and his wife, Barbara. As was our custom, we were all greeting the dawn with stretching postures and breathing exercises.

I performed my daily routine with special concentration that morning. A tape-recording of yogic chants by Bapuji [my guru] played in the background. The intonations of his voice and the gentle accompaniment of the drum stirred feelings of nostalgia and deep reverence within me. As I continued to move, I became absorbed in the rhythm of the chants. Gradually, I became more and more absorbed until I had entered a deep medita-

tive state, even while my body continued to move. My movements had become one with the chanting.

Suddenly, as if bursting upon me like an unexpected spring downpour, I was flooded with bliss throughout my entire being, and I felt myself being irresistibly drawn into another level of consciousness. As the music dissolved far into the background, I began feeling that I was no longer the performer of the exercises: they were being performed through me. A new and never-before-experienced flow of energy coursed throughout my system, and with no conscious effort on my part, my body spontaneously began to twist and turn on its own, flowing smoothly from one posture to the next. The movements were effortless and free, a

was to ride the most times around this five-mile loop. You wore kind of a bib, and they would stamp you every time you went around. Sri Chinmoy encouraged all of his students to join. He himself went out and practiced. He would go out at five in the morning and ride his bike around in the park. And I figured, "Okay, well, I think maybe I should join this." I had no idea. Not having ever done sports, I really had no idea.

So I bought a bike and trained—I rode around for ten days or something before the race. And then the night before the event, we had a meditation. Just for fun, Sri Chinmoy asked each person—we had about two hundred people who were entered in the race—how many miles they thought they were going to do. Usually people would ride and then sleep for a few hours, and then ride, and then rest—like that. The really good athletes in our group were thinking like 300, 325 miles, because it's a hilly course, and it was hot. I figured, "Okay, I'll say 200 or maybe I'll say 250—I mean, that would be incredible for me."

**WIE:** *This was your first physical effort?*

**AF:** Yes, exactly. It came to my turn and instead of letting me say anything, Sri Chinmoy said, "Oh, Ashrita, how many miles are you going to do? 400." And I almost fell over. I was really in shock. Because 400—I think the guy who won the race did just a little more than 400 the year before. I was numb. I just kind of nodded.

I went home, and I knew that Sri Chinmoy could see something within me that I wasn't seeing. So I was determined to try to do that 400, or else I was going to die trying. I literally wrote

command and gift from a newly opened, higher dimension of my inner being. My body became extraordinarily elastic and stretched smoothly and easily beyond its previous limits. I was not aware of giving any direction to the movements. Thoughts continued to come, but now they passed through my mind in slow motion, seemingly disconnected from my body's activity.

Although my eyes were closed, I became distinctly aware that the others in the room had silently stopped their own exercises to watch me. One after another, the postures flowed. Some of them were traditional yoga exercises; others were movements which I had never felt before. At the end of this flow of postures, my body naturally

entered the lotus position, and an intense stillness, so deep that it penetrated every level of my being, emanated from within me. Suddenly, an explosion of ecstasy spread through me, and I became engulfed, overwhelmed, by a state of complete inner bliss.

About thirty minutes later, my consciousness slowly began to return to normal. With considerable effort, I was able to open my eyes, discovering to my amazement that I was still in my own home surrounded by Urmila, Barbara, and John. It was difficult to move, and my breath was almost imperceptible. My face was completely devoid of expression, frozen, and immobile. My mouth was dry, and I realized



**Guinness Book of Records**  
Most continuous miles on a  
pogo stick: 23 miles

that I had not swallowed for a long time. I tried to speak, but words would not form.

My friends mirrored my trance-like state. As I looked at their unmoving, expressionless eyes, I realized that they, too, had entered a deep state of meditation without closing their eyes. Obviously my experience had communicated itself to them without my saying a word. Gradually and with great difficulty, they began to describe what they had observed while watching me. As they slowly and quietly expressed their experience, I was amazed to hear each of them report a profound, compelling meditative experience.

Sukanya Warren, *Gurudev: The Life of Yogi Amrit Desai* (Lenox, MA: Kripalu Publications, 1982), pp. 35-36.

out my will. Not that I had much—I had a rabbit and a bird because I used to do magic shows for kids. I really had no idea what would happen, but I was ready to go out into the battlefield.

So I took a little picture of Sri Chinmoy and taped it to my bicycle. I had a very good meditation right before the race—and then I went out there. And it was one of the greatest experiences of my life. (I've had so many since this started!) For one, two, three hours, everything was going well, I was keeping the pace. And then, of course, my legs started hurting, and I would use different things that Sri Chinmoy taught me.

**WIE:** *Like what?*

**AF:** For instance, I remember vividly that my quadriceps really started to ache, and I said to myself that the Supreme was massaging my legs. In other words, instead of feeling that sensation as pain, I felt it as something good. When I started getting tired, I would start chanting and using all the techniques I had learned. I would start saying a mantra, or I would try to do some *pranayama* [breathing exercises]. All this was happening on the bike!

It was amazing. I remember that at one point the course was almost completely empty. This was in the middle of the night. It was very, very dark, except for a few lights in Central Park. I was riding around the course with the wind blowing through my hair, and I was up there with the leaders! Riding around the course! By the morning, people were in shock.

Because I think I got off the bike once for a bathroom break for five minutes. But people, everybody, could not believe it, because they knew I wasn't an athlete. And even Sri Chinmoy seemed surprised, I think. I ended up tying for third place overall—I did 405 miles.

**WIE:** *That's fantastic.*

**AF:** It was an epiphany for me. It was *obvious* that it had *nothing* to do with me—with my body. It was completely the grace of my teacher and the Supreme.

From that moment, when I got off the bike—well, I fell off the bike—I knew that I was going to try to break a Guinness record. That was such an incredible experience for me. That was the basis of everything else. I knew then that I would be able to get into the Guinness book. And I wanted to do it, really, to honor my teacher, because all of this was coming from him. I dedicate every one of these Guinness records to Sri Chinmoy because I feel that he's inspired me. And not only inspired me—he *gives me* the capacity because I invoke him throughout when I'm trying to break a record. I consider them as spiritual experiences. Besides that one vision on the pogo stick, I've had many, many deep spiritual experiences doing the records.

**WIE:** *Is there any particular record that stands out for you as even more challenging than the rest?*

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### St. Catherine of Genoa

*Christian Mystic  
15th Century Italy*

**IN THE YEAR 1474 . . .** "the day after the feast of St. Benedict (at the insistence of her sister that was a nun), Catherine went to make her confession to the confessor of that nunnery; but she was not disposed to do it. Then said her sister, 'At least go and recommend yourself to him, because he is a most worthy religious'; and in fact he was a very holy man. And suddenly, as she knelt before him, she received in her heart the wound of the unmeasured Love of God, with so clear a vision of her own misery and her faults, and of the goodness of God, that she almost fell

upon the ground. And by these sensations of infinite love, and of the offenses that had been done against this most sweet God, she was so greatly drawn by purifying affection away from the poor things of this world that she was almost beside herself, and for this she cried inwardly with ardent love, 'No more world! No more sin!' And at this point, if she had possessed a thousand worlds, she would have thrown all of them away. . . . And she returned home, kindled and deeply wounded with so great a love of God, which had been shown her inwardly, with the sight of her own wretchedness, that she seemed beside herself. And she shut herself in a chamber, the most secluded she could find,

with burning sighs. And in this moment she was inwardly taught the whole practice of orison [prayer]: but her tongue could say naught but this—'O Love, can it be that thou has called me with so great a love, and made me to know in one instant that which words cannot express?' This intuition of the Absolute was followed by an interior vision of Christ bearing the Cross, which further increased her love and self-abasement. "And she cried again, 'O Love, no more sins! No more sins!' And her hatred of herself was more than she could endure."

Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), pp. 181-182.

**AF:** I'm going to tell you about the somersaults because that was very inspiring, the somersault record. But first let me tell you how I came to try for that one. You see, the first record I did was jumping jacks. The record was 20,000; I did 27,000. As I told you, I was in such terrible shape—I could only do 50 when I first started. I would do jumping jacks as a meditation. I would meditate and then do the jumping jacks almost as an extension of my meditation. I finally got up to the point where I could do 10,000 and then I went for the record.

It was one of my favorite records to do because I had a picture of Sri Chinmoy right on the wall at the gym. I would meditate on the picture while I was doing the jumping jacks. So I did 27,000 and broke the record. And then I figured, "Wow, that was my first official record." I looked in the book, and I saw right next to the jumping jack record was the somersault, or technically, forward roll. And I thought it would be kind of neat to have two in a row. I tried it, and I got so dizzy doing even a few rolls that I said, "No, no. Let me try something else." But it bothered me, because I felt that I should be able to transcend that feeling of dizziness and nausea. Someone else did 8.3 miles.

**WIE:** *Someone really did 8.3 miles of somersaults, forward rolls?*

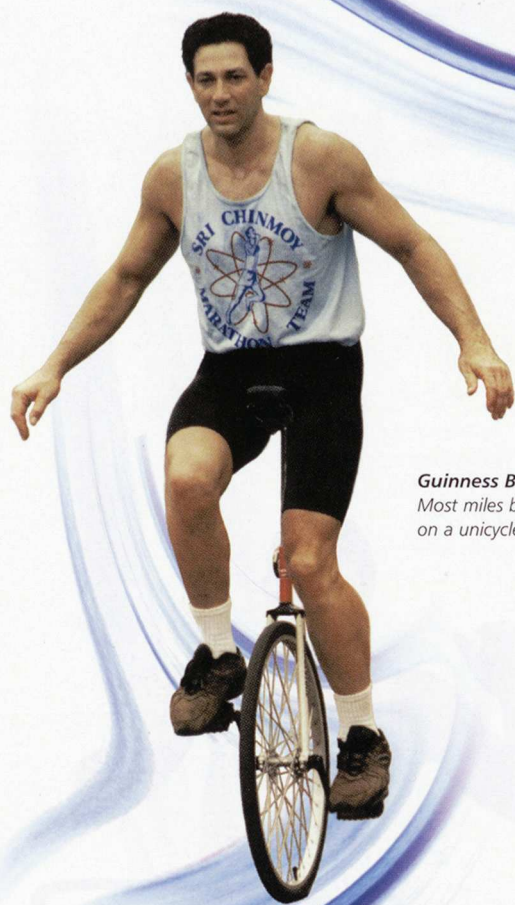
**AF:** Exactly. So I kept thinking about it. And one night I went out at two o'clock in the morning when no one was around, because otherwise people would think I was crazy. And I rolled around the track; I did a quarter of a mile. I was so happy. I was completely nauseous. I didn't use any padding, I was black-and-blue, covered in dirt—there was glass on the track. But I was thrilled that I had been able to push through and do a quarter of a mile. I practiced and got to a point where I felt I was ready to try for the record. I actually broke the record in Central Park: I did ten miles. And nobody broke my record, so then I decided that I was going to break my own record. And I chose to do Paul Revere's Ride in Massachusetts.

**WIE:** *How long is that?*

**AF:** It is twelve and a quarter miles. *People* magazine was there, and there was a lot of media coverage. I was very, very nervous. And, well, I ate four slices of pizza the night before. I was doing this thing called carbo-loading, but I didn't realize that it was not



**Guinness Book of Records**  
Fastest mile hula hoop racing:  
28 minutes, 40 seconds



**Guinness Book of Records**  
Most miles backward  
on a unicycle: 53 miles

going to get digested. So I was completely sick. It's funny, the unofficial rule, Guinness rule, is that you have to do continuous rolls, but they allow you to stop to throw up. Because the thing is, you *do* have to throw up. It was also a hilly course. I had never trained on hills. I had only trained on a flat track. So right away, my whole equilibrium was off. I was struggling from the moment I started. People were screaming, "Ashrita, how are you doing?" My friend was yelling out, "Oh, yes. He's going to Charlestown!" And I'm thinking to myself, "I'm never going to make it. There's no way I'm going to make it." Usually I'm not in that kind of frame of mind, because I usually try to stay in a soulful consciousness while I'm doing this, really stay within my heart and think of my teacher. But I was really thrown off. I felt so nauseous and sick from the very first mile. I figured, "I'm never going to make it."

This is actually one thing I love about the records: there's always this moment of truth, somewhere—usually in almost *every* single attempt—where I really have to transcend my body and my mind, go *deep* within and really connect with my soul and with my teacher's grace. I'm invoking it all the time. There's a moment when I have to truthfully make that jump, leave my own human capacity and jump into something beyond me. It is something that I can't even take credit for. I don't take credit for these things.

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Gopi Krishna

*Mystic & Philosopher*  
20th Century India



IT WAS IN MY THIRTY-FOURTH year, seventeen years after starting the meditation, that I had my first experience of transcendental consciousness. It was in the winter, about the time of Christmas. I was meditating early in the morning when suddenly I found something giving way as if a new aperture had opened, and I felt an energy rising up my spinal cord. At first I was terrified, and my attention went to the sensation caused by the energy. At that moment

the vision ceased. Then I again concentrated, and ultimately I managed to keep my attention focused at the crown of my head, while the energy rose upward and upward, through the spinal cord, to the neck and then into my head. I then suddenly found that a stream of silvery light was pouring into my brain.

There was a sound like thunder or like a waterfall in my ear, and it grew louder and louder. At the same time, I began to

*At one point I had a vision, a spiritual vision, on the pogo stick. This is one of my great claims to fame—I'm probably the only person in history who has had a vision on a pogo stick!*

So around five or six miles, I was finished: "I just can't; I just can't go anymore." I stopped, and I meditated. And I got the inspiration. I had a very deep meditation—it was very quick—but I had a very deep meditation. I really felt this force, this divine force inside me, and I kept going. The record was ten miles, and I decided, "I'm going to go just a little past ten miles and then stop. I'm not going to finish." I had already decided that in my own mind, because it was so painful.

A radio station had been broadcasting my progress, and there was a furniture store a little bit past the ten-mile point. They had put this lounge chair out on the road, on the sidewalk. I saw this chair out in the distance like an oasis. And I said, "Okay, I'm going to hit that chair, and I'm going to stop. That's it. I'll have broken the record, but I'm not going to finish. I'm not going to go to the end." I got to the chair and plopped down. I said, "Okay, that's it." I told my friends who were with me, "That's it. I'm finished." They said, "Ashrita, we actually called Sri Chinmoy." Because one fellow knew me very well, and he had figured out what I was thinking, even though I never expressed it. He said, "I called New York." Now, Sri Chinmoy doesn't usually get involved. I couldn't imagine that they had called and found him. They told him that I was having a lot of trouble and that I was probably going to stop just after ten

miles and not finish the whole course. So Sri Chinmoy said, "Tell Ashrita that he has the capacity to do it." As soon as I heard that, I was overjoyed. My teacher was actually telling me that I could do it! I was in a pretty good consciousness, and I knew that I would find some way.

So I just got out of the chair and I started rolling. With each roll at this point, my whole abdomen would cramp up. It was very painful. But with the first roll I did, these words came out of my mouth, "I am not the body; I am the soul." It was like a mantra, which I had never said before nor had ever heard before. With every roll, I did it, "I am not the body; I am the soul!" And I tell you, it was thrilling! It was exhilarating! I finished with no problem at all. I had no physical injuries after. I had been so uplifted by that message. Again, I attribute everything to my teacher, because he gave me that message that lifted me up out of my physical pain so that I no longer identified with what was happening with my body. That's my goal in all of these things, to try to transcend the physical and go beyond it.

**WIE:** *It's very inspiring just to hear you speak about it.*

**AF:** I feel like we only touched the tip of the iceberg, but the tip hopefully will inspire some people. ■

expand. I cannot describe exactly what I mean by this, but it seemed that my consciousness was now gaining a wider and wider space, and I was leaving my body behind and projecting myself, spreading myself, all around in the universe. My body grew dimmer and dimmer, and I could hardly hear any noises coming from the street. I remained totally engrossed in the vision that was now unfolding before me.

It was the vision of a silvery luster, alive, living, vibrant with life, conscious

and spread all around me. The small self that was "I" seemed to become like a point of awareness, watching this great personality that had now developed and seemed to encompass the whole universe. I was like a small cork floating in an ocean of consciousness, aware of the whole surface at every point of the compass. I felt myself expanding more and more, and this expansion was attended by a happiness that is not possible to describe. . . .

I continued to sit and to contemplate this vision with all the power of my attention. It was not I. The vision drew me to it. I was fascinated, and my whole attention was attracted to it as an iron filing is attracted to a magnet. I could not withdraw out of it and remained contemplating the vision for some time.

Gene Kieffer, ed., *Kundalini* (New York: Paragon House, 1996), pp. 51-52.

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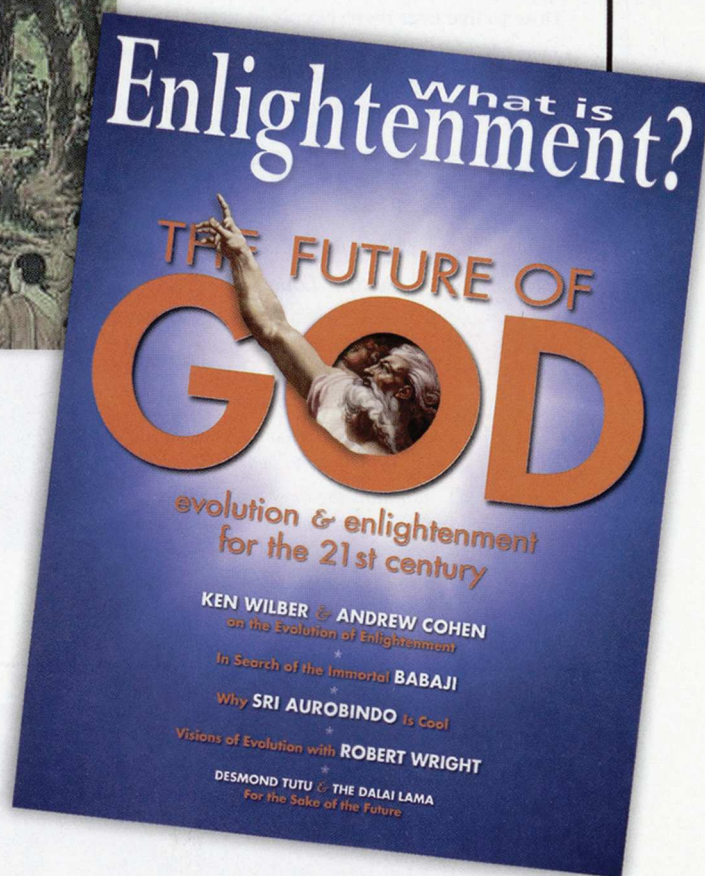
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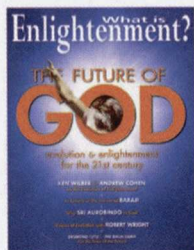
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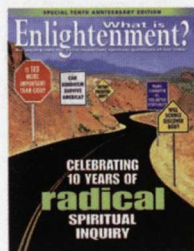
## Issue 21



### Evolution & Enlightenment

- Andrew Cohen & Ken Wilber
- Beatrice Bruteau
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## Issue 20



### Special Tenth Anniversary Anthology

- Thomas Keating
- Vimala Thakar
- Ken Wilber
- Ramesh Balsekar
- Miranda Shaw
- Lee Lozowick

## Issue 19



### Can enlightenment save the world?

- Roshi Bernie Glassman
- Rabbi Michael Lerner
- Duane Elgin
- Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati
- Brian Swimme
- Vimala Thakar

## Issue 18



### What does it mean to be in the world but not of it?

- Eckhart Tolle
- Ken Wilber
- HH Penor Rinpoche
- Joseph Goldstein
- Elizabeth Lesser

## Issue 16



### An inquiry into the relationship between gender identity and enlightenment

- Father Basil Pennington
- Sam Keen
- Jetsunma Ahkön Lhamo
- Marion Woodman

## Issue 15



### What is the relationship between self-mastery and enlightenment?

- Dan Millman
- Michael Murphy
- Jean Houston
- Anthony Robbins
- Susan Powter
- Jack LaLanne

## Issue 14



### An exploration of Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta

- HH the Dalai Lama
- Stephen Batchelor
- Ramesh Balsekar
- Helen Tworikov
- Vijai Shankar

## Issue 12



### An inquiry into the popularization of East-meets-West spirituality

- Ken Wilber
- Georg Feuerstein
- Deepak Chopra
- Andrei Codrescu

## Issue 11



### Can science enlighten us?

- Huston Smith
- Fritjof Capra
- Rupert Sheldrake
- E.F. Schumacher
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## Issue 9



## Issue 10



## Issue 13



## Issue 17




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# where two or three are gathered in my name

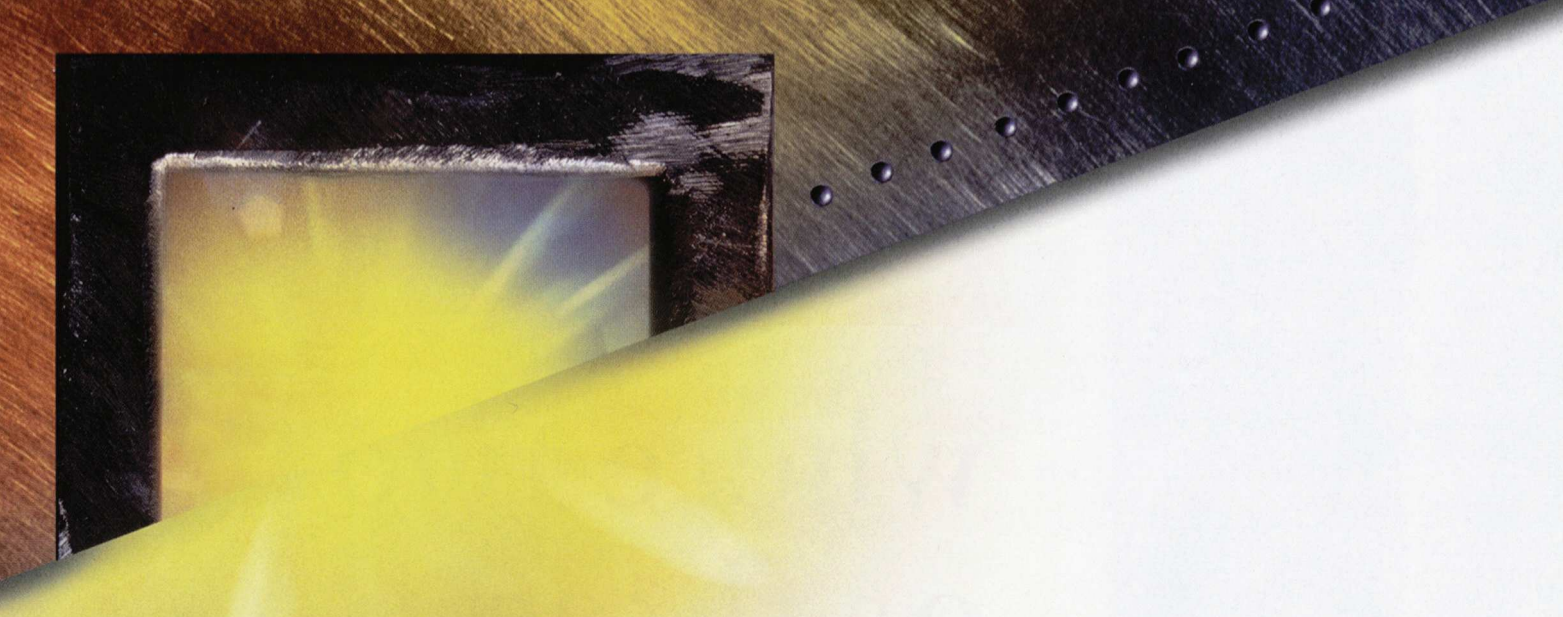
*excerpted from the book:*

**Father Arseny**

Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father

FEW STORIES HAVE CAPTURED OUR HEARTS HERE AT *WIE* like the story of the remarkable, and by now legendary, Father Arseny. Father Arseny was imprisoned in the Soviet labor camps as were many of the 160,000 Russian Orthodox bishops, priests, monks, and nuns killed in the Soviet Union during the Stalin years (1924–1953). This art-scholar-turned-monk was revered for his uncompromising compassion for others under the harshest and most dehumanizing of conditions. A physically frail man, he survived numerous death threats and the abuses of his captors through a series of what could only be called miracles, many of which have been collected and narrated by those who witnessed them firsthand. The following account of one such miracle—a story that must be read to be believed—demonstrates the mysterious and undeniable power of one man’s absolute faith in his Holy Father, as well as his unwavering care for his fellowman. Indeed, Father Arseny’s spiritual strength consistently uplifted those who would otherwise have been consigned to a sure and hopeless death, and it continues to shine through the following pages as a profound testimony to the transformative power of one simple priest’s breathtaking humility before God.

—MH



During one of the winters, a young man was assigned to Father Arseny's barracks. Aged 23, he was a student and had been sentenced to twenty years in the camp. He had no experience of camp life because he had been sent to this special camp directly from the strict Butirki Prison in Moscow. Still young, he did not fully understand what lay ahead of him. As soon as he entered the death camp, he encountered the criminals.

His clothing was still good for he had only been in prison a few months. The criminals, led by Ivan the Brown, decided to get hold of the young man's apparel. They proposed a card game with clothing at stake. Everybody knew that this lad would soon be naked, but no one could do anything about it; even Sazikov dared not intervene. The camp rule was that whoever interfered would be killed. Those who had been in the camp for a while knew only too well that if the criminals decided to play for your rags, to resist would be the end of you.

Ivan the Brown won all the young man's clothes. Ivan approached him and said, "Take everything off, my friend."

At that point things started to go sour. The young man, whose name was Alexei, thought that the game had been for fun and refused to hand over his clothing. Ivan the Brown decided to make an exhibition of it. He began with mocking kindness; then he started beating him. Alexei tried to resist, to fight back, but by now the whole barracks knew that he would be beaten until he could no longer move, or even to death. Everyone sat still and watched as Ivan bashed Alexei. He bled from the mouth and face and was swaying. Some criminals mockingly urged him to fight.

Father Arseny had not seen the beginnings of the fight; he had been piling up logs near a stove at the other end of the barracks. He suddenly saw what was happening. Ivan was going to kill Alexei. By now Alexei could only cover his face with his hands; Ivan was slamming him and smashing him repeatedly. Father Arseny silently put the logs near the stove, calmly walked over to the fight and, before the amazed eyes of the whole barracks, grabbed the arm of Ivan the Brown. Ivan looked surprised, shocked! The priest had interfered in a fight. This meant he must die. Ivan hated Father Arseny. He had never dared touch him for fear of the rest of the barracks, but now he had a true reason to kill him.

Ivan stopped beating Alexei and pronounced, "O.K. Pop, it's the end for both of you. First the student, then you." A knife appeared in his hands and he lunged towards Alexei.

What happened? Nobody could understand, but suddenly the gentle and weak Father Arseny straightened himself up and slammed Ivan on the arm so hard that the knife fell from his hand. Then he pushed Ivan away from Alexei. Ivan stumbled and fell, and hit the corner of a bunk with his face. Father Arseny went to Alexei and said to

him, "Go, Alyosha, wash your face, no one will hit you anymore." Then, as if nothing had happened, he went back to his work.

Everyone was taken aback. Ivan the Brown stood up. The criminals did not say a word. They understood that Ivan had lost face in front of the whole barracks. Somebody discreetly wiped the blood from the floor with his foot. Alyosha's face was completely smashed up, his ear was torn, one eye was closed, and the other one was dark red. Everyone was completely silent. They knew that it was all over now for both Father Arseny and Alexei. The criminals would kill them both.

But in fact things turned out differently; the criminals looked upon Father Arseny's actions as bold and brave. Even though everyone feared Ivan, Father Arseny had not faltered when Ivan the Brown had held a knife, and they respected a man who showed no fear. They already knew Father Arseny for his kindness and his unusual ways; now they respected him for his courage. Ivan retreated to his bunk and whispered with his friends, but he realized that they did not really support him—they had not come immediately to his aid.

The night passed. In the morning everyone went to work; Father Arseny was busy tending the stoves, cleaning up and scraping dirt off the floor. In the evening the prisoners returned from their labor and suddenly, just before the barracks was locked for the night, the supervisor ran in with several guards.

"Attention!" he shouted. All the men jumped down from their bunks. They stood motionless while the supervisor walked along the line of men. When he came to Father Arseny he began to beat him. Meanwhile Alexei was dragged from his place in line by the guards.

"P18376 and P281 to punishment cell No. 1, for 48 hours, without food or water, for breaking camp rules, for fighting," shouted the officer.

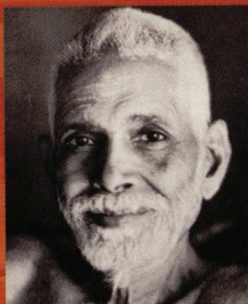
Ivan had reported them to the authorities. To do so was considered by the criminals to be the lowest and most despicable act possible.

Punishment cell No. 1 was a tiny house that stood by the entrance of the camp. In this house were several rooms for solitary confinement; there was also one for two people which held a narrow board instead of a bed. This board was less than 20 inches wide. The floor and walls were covered with sheets of metal. The whole room was not wider than three quarters of a yard and two yards long. Outside it was  $-22^{\circ}\text{F}$  and

## TALES of TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Ramana Maharshi

Hindu Saint  
20th Century India



**YOU CANNOT CONCEIVE OF** the majesty and dignity I felt while begging. The first day, when I begged from Gurukul's wife, I felt bashful about it as a result of the habits of my upbringing, but after that there was absolutely no feeling of abasement. I felt like a king, and more than a king. I have sometimes received gruel at some house and taken it without salt or any other flavoring, in the open street, in front of great pandits and other important men who used to come and prostrate themselves before me at the ashram, and then I wiped my hands on my head and walked on supremely happy and in a state of mind in which even emperors were mere straw in my sight. You can't imagine it. That is why kings have given up their thrones and taken to this path.

windy, so that it was hard to breathe. You had only to step outside to become immediately numb. The occupants of the barracks understood what this meant: certain death. Father Arseny and Alexei would be frozen within two hours. No one had ever been sent to that cell in such cold. Occasionally, someone was sent to it when the temperature reached  $-21^{\circ}$  or  $-22^{\circ}$ , but this only for 24 hours. The only ones who stayed alive were those who could jump up and down the whole 24 hours to keep their blood from freezing. If you stopped jumping, you froze. And here it was  $-22^{\circ}$ , Father Arseny was an old man, Alexei had just been beaten up, and both men were exhausted.

The supervisors seized them both and started dragging them out of the barracks. Avsenkov and Sazikov dared to come out of the line and said to the officer, "Comrade Officer, they will freeze to death in this weather. You can't send them to that cell!" The supervisor slammed them both so hard that they flew dazed against the barracks wall.

Ivan the Brown lowered his head. Fear gripped him as he realized that his own people in the barracks would kill him for this.

Father Arseny and Alexei were dragged to the punishment cell and shoved inside. They both fell, cracking their heads against the wall. It was pitch black inside. Father Arseny stood up and said, "So, here we are. God has brought us together. It is cold, Alyosha, and there is metal all around."

They heard the outer door close, the locks click, the voices and the steps of the guards fade away. The cold seized them and constricted their chests. Through the small window with iron bars the moon shone its milky light into the cell.

"We are going to freeze, Father Arseny," moaned Alexei. "It is because of me that we are going to freeze. We are both going to die. We need to keep moving, to jump up and down, but it is impossible to keep that up for 48 hours. I already feel so weak, so battered. My feet are already frozen. There is no room here, we cannot even move. Father Arseny, we are going to die. They are inhuman, it would be better to be shot!" Father Arseny was silent. Alexei tried to jump, but it did not warm him up. It was hopeless to resist such cold.

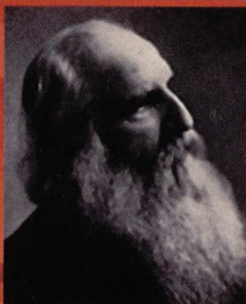
"Why don't you say anything, Father Arseny?" Alexei shouted.

As if from somewhere very far away Father Arseny's voice answered, "I am praying to God, Alexei!"

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Richard Bucke

Physician & Author  
20th Century Canada



"I HAD SPENT THE EVENING in a great city, with two friends, reading and discussing poetry and philosophy. We parted at midnight. I had a long drive in a hansom to my lodging. My mind, deeply under the influence of the ideas, images, and emotions called up by the reading and talk, was calm and peaceful. I was in a state of quiet, almost passive enjoyment, not actually thinking, but letting ideas, images, and emotions flow of themselves, as it

were, through my mind. All at once, without warning of any kind, I found myself wrapped in a flame-colored cloud. For an instant I thought of fire, an immense conflagration somewhere close by in that great city; the next, I knew that the fire was within myself. Directly afterward there came upon me a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination impossible to describe. Among other

"What's there to pray about when we are going to freeze?" Alexei muttered.

"We are here all alone, Alexei; for two days no one will come. We will pray. For the first time God has allowed us to pray aloud in this camp, with our full voice. We will pray and the rest is God's will!" The cold was gradually conquering Alexei and he was sure that Father Arseny was losing his mind. Making the sign of the cross and quietly pronouncing some words, Father Arseny stood in the ray of moonlight. Alexei's hands and feet were numbed by the cold; he had no strength in his limbs. He was freezing and no longer cared.

Father Arseny was silent now, and suddenly Alexei heard Father Arseny's words clearly, and understood that this was a prayer. Alexei had been in church only once, out of curiosity. Although his grandmother had baptized him when he was a child, his family did not believe in God. They simply had no interest in religious matters. They did not know what faith really was. Alexei himself was a student, a member of the Komsomol. How could he believe?

Through the numbness and the pain from the blows he had received, Alexei could clearly hear the words that Father Arseny was saying: "O Lord God, have mercy on us sinners! Ever-merciful God! Lord Jesus Christ who because of Thy love became man to save us all. Through Thine unspeakable mercy save us, have mercy on us and lead us away from this cruel death, because we do believe in Thee, Thou our God and our Creator." And so the words of prayer poured forth, and in each of these words lay the deepest love and trust in God's mercy, and unconditional faith in Him.

Alexei started listening to the words of the prayer. At first he was perplexed, but gradually he began to comprehend. The prayer calmed his soul, took away the fear of death, and united him with the old man standing beside him.

"O, Lord our God, Jesus Christ! Thou didst say with Thy purest lips that if two or three agree to ask for the same thing, then Thy Heavenly Father will grant their prayer because, as Thou didst say, 'When two or three are gathered in my name, I am among them.'" Alexei was repeating these words after Father Arseny.

The cold had taken over Alexei completely; his entire body was numb. He no longer knew whether he was standing, sitting, or lying down. But suddenly the cell,

things, I did not merely come to believe, but I saw that the universe is not composed of dead matter, but is, on the contrary, a living Presence; I became conscious in myself of eternal life. It was not a conviction that I would have eternal life, but a consciousness that I possessed eternal life then; I saw that all men are immortal; that the cosmic order is such that without any peradventure all things work together for the good of each and all;

that the foundation principle of the world, of all the worlds, is what we call love, and that the happiness of each and all is in the long run absolutely certain. The vision lasted a few seconds and was gone; but the memory of it and the sense of the reality of what it taught me remained during the quarter of a century which has since elapsed. I knew that what the vision showed was true. I had attained to a point of view from which I saw that it must be true.

That view, that conviction, I may say that consciousness, has never, even during periods of the deepest depression, been lost."

William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 316-317.

the cold, the numbness of his whole body, his pain from the blows he had received and his fear all disappeared. Father Arseny's voice filled the cell, but was it a cell? Alexei turned to Father Arseny and was stunned. Everything around had been transformed. An awful thought came: "I am losing my mind, this is the end, I am dying."

The cell had grown wider, the ray of moonlight had disappeared. There was a bright light and Father Arseny, dressed in brilliant white vestments, his hands lifted up, was praying aloud. The clothing on Father Arseny was the same as the priest Alexei had once seen in church.

The words Father Arseny spoke were now easy to understand, they had become familiar—they entered directly into Alexei's soul. He felt no more anxiety, no more suffering, no more fear, only the desire to become one with these words, to understand them, to remember them for the rest of his life. There was no more cell: now they were in a church. How had they gotten here? And why was there someone else here with them? Alexei saw with surprise that there were two men assisting Father Arseny. Both were dressed in the same bright vestments and both shone with an undefinable white light. Alexei did not see their faces, but sensed that they were beautiful.

Prayer filled Alexei's being. He stood up and started praying together with Father Arseny. It was warm and easy to breathe, and happiness filled his soul. Alexei repeated everything Father Arseny was saying, yet he was not simply repeating, but praying together with him. It seemed like Father Arseny had become one with the words of his prayer, but Alexei understood that Father Arseny had not forgotten him and was helping him all the while, helping him to pray. The certainty that God existed, that He was with them, came to Alexei. He saw God with his soul. At times Alexei thought that perhaps they were both already dead, but the firm voice of Father Arseny and his presence kept bringing him back to reality.

How much time had passed he did not know, but Father Arseny turned to him and said, "Go, Alyosha! Lie down, you are tired. I will keep praying, you will hear me." Alexei lay down on the metal-covered floor, closed his eyes, and kept on praying. The words of prayer filled his whole being: "... will agree to ask anything, it will be given to them by my Heavenly Father ..." In thousands of ways his heart responded to these words: "gathered in my name ..." "Yes, yes! We are not alone," thought Alexei from time to time as he continued to pray.

## TALES of TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

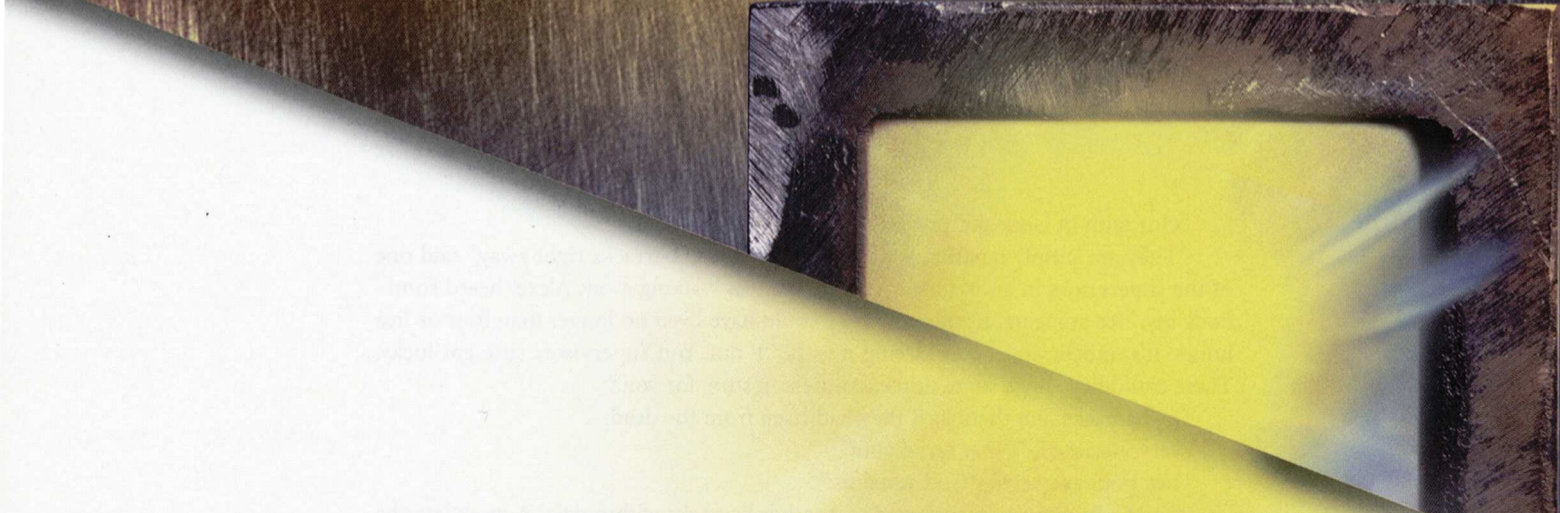
**Karma Trinley**  
Buddhist Abbot  
16th Century Tibet



This is the profound innermost secret;  
guru's blessings have entered my heart;  
naked nonduality dawns within;  
the secret of samsara and nirvana is revealed!

I have beheld the face of the ordinary mind;  
I have arrived at the view that is free of extremes;  
even if the Buddha came in person now,  
I have no queries that require his advice!

Thupten Jinpa and Jas Elsner, *Songs of Spiritual Experience*  
(Boston, MA: Shambhala, 2000), p. 147.



All was peaceful and warm. Suddenly out of nowhere his mother appeared. She covered him with something warm. Her hands took his head, and she pressed him to her heart. He wanted to speak to her, "Mama, can you hear, can you hear how Father Arseny is praying? I've learned that God exists, I believe in Him."

As if she had heard him speak, she answered him, "Alyoshenka! When they took you, I also found God. This is what has given me the strength to live."

Everything that was awful had disappeared, his mother and Father Arseny were near him. Words of prayer which had been unknown to him now rekindled and warmed his soul. It was important not to forget these words, to remember them all his life. "I never want to be far from Father Arseny, I want always to be with him," thought Alexei.

Lying on the floor at Father Arseny's feet, Alexei listened, half-asleep, to the beautiful words of the prayer. Father Arseny prayed, and the two others in bright garments prayed with him and served him. They seemed amazed at how Father Arseny could pray. Father Arseny no longer asked for anything, he only glorified God and thanked Him. How long all this lasted no one could say.

The only things that remained in Alexei's memory were the words of the prayer, a warming and joyful light, Father Arseny praying, the two others in clothes of light, and an enormous, incomparable feeling of inner renewing warmth.

Somebody struck the door, the frozen lock squealed, and voices could be heard from the outside of the cell. Alexei opened his eyes. Father Arseny was still praying. The two in garments of light blessed him and Alexei and slowly left. The blinding light was fading and the cell at last became dark and, as before, cold and gloomy.

"Get up, Alexei! They have come for us," said Father Arseny.

Alexei rose. The head of the camp, the doctor, the main head of the special sector, and the Major were coming in. Somebody behind the door was saying, "This is inexcusable—someone could report this to Moscow. Who knows how they will look at this. Frozen cadavers—this is not the modern way."

In the cell stood an old man in a patched up vest and a young one in torn clothes with a bruised face. Their faces were calm and their clothing was covered with a thick layer of frost.

"They're alive?" the Major asked in amazement. "How did they survive here for two days?"

"We are alive, sir," said Father Arseny. All looked at each other in amazement.

"Search them."

"Come out!" shouted one of the supervisors. Father Arseny and Alexei walked out of the cell. The supervisors removed their gloves and started frisking them. The doctor also removed a glove, put it under Father Arseny's and then Alexei's clothing and, to nobody in particular, said, "Amazing! How could they have survived? It's true, though; they're warm." The doctor walked into the cell, looked around it and asked, "What kept you warm?"

"Our faith in God, and prayer," Father Arseny answered.

"They are simply fanatics. Send them back to the barracks right away," said one of the supervisors in an irritated voice. As he was walking away, Alexei heard somebody say, "It's amazing. In this cold they could have lived no longer than four or five hours. It's unbelievable, considering it's  $-22^{\circ}$  F out. You supervisors sure got lucky. There could have been some unpleasantness in store for you."

The barracks met them as if they had risen from the dead.

Everyone asked, "What saved you?"

They both answered, "God saved us."

Ivan the Brown was transferred to another barracks within days. A week later he was killed by a falling rock. He died in terrible pain. It was rumored that his own friends had helped the rock to fall.

Alexei became a new man, as if reborn. He followed Father Arseny whenever he was able to and asked everyone he could about God and about Orthodox services.

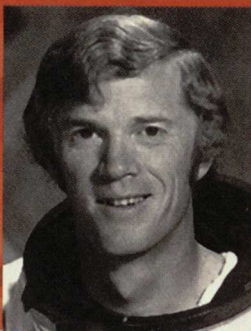
*This story was told by Alexei and confirmed by several witnesses who lived in the barracks at that time. ■*

This chapter was excerpted from Alexander, *Father Arseny 1893-1973 Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father*, trans. by Vera Bouteneff (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999) and appears by permission of the publisher.

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Russell Schweickart

Astronaut  
20th Century USA



YOU LOOK BACK ON THE TIME you were outside on that EVA [extra-vehicular activity] and on those few moments that you could take, because a camera malfunctioned, to think about what was happening. And you recall staring out there at the spectacle that went before your eyes, because now you're no longer inside something with a window looking out at a picture. Now you're out there and there are no frames, there are no limits, there are no boundaries. You're really out there, going 17,000 miles an hour, ripping through space, a vacuum. And there's not a sound. There's a silence the depth of which you've never experienced before, and that silence contrasts so markedly with the scenery you're seeing and with the speed with which you know you're moving.

And you think about what you're experiencing and why. Do you deserve this, this fantastic experience? Have you earned this in some way? Are you separated out to be touched by God, to have some special experience that others cannot have? And you know the answer to that is no. There's nothing you've done to deserve this, to earn this; it's not a special thing for you. You know very well at that moment, and it comes

through to you so powerfully, that you're the sensing element for man. You look down and see the surface of that globe that you've lived on all this time, and you know all those people down there, and they are like you, they are you, and somehow you represent them. You are up here as the sensing element, that points out on the end, and that's a humbling feeling. It's a feeling that says you have a responsibility. It's not for yourself. The eye that doesn't see doesn't do justice to the body. That's why it's there; that's why you are out there. And somehow you recognize that you're a piece of this total life. And you're out there on that forefront and you have to bring it back somehow. And that becomes a rather special responsibility, and it tells you something about your relationship with this thing we call life. So that's a change. That's something new. And when you come back there's a difference in that world now. There's a difference in that relationship between you and that planet and you and all those other forms of life on that planet, because you've had that kind of experience. It's a difference and it's so precious.

Kevin W. Kelly, Ed., *The Home Planet* (New York: Addison-Wesley and Moscow: Mir Publishers, 1988).



Illustrated by  
Nadir Balan

# the FANTASTIC BUDDHaverse


of Robert Thurman

THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A FINE LINE between myth and reality, between biography and hagiography, between ancient story and historical truth. It is a line that many a good scholar has found hard to locate, difficult to draw, and almost impossible to be sure of. And truth be told, more than a few have tripped headlong over it. The epic *Iliad* was completely fictional, right? A myth of Homer. Oops... archaeologists found the city of Troy, suggesting otherwise. Was there a biblical flood? Does Babaji exist? Atlantis? King Arthur? The debates go on and on. But perhaps nowhere does the world of the mythical seep more into the world of the real than when it comes to the subject of spiritual transformation. And if you have any doubt about that, just ask Robert Thurman. As a Tibetan Buddhist scholar of the highest repute, Dr. Thurman has been delving deep into the labyrinthine mythological and historical world of Tibetan Buddhism for several decades. In fact, Thurman holds the unique distinction of being the first Westerner to be ordained as a monk by the Dalai Lama. But today the ochre robes of the ascetic have long given way to the less austere robes of the academy, and Thurman has spent the better part of his life championing the philosophy and culture of the storybook Himalayan kingdom from his chair at Columbia University.

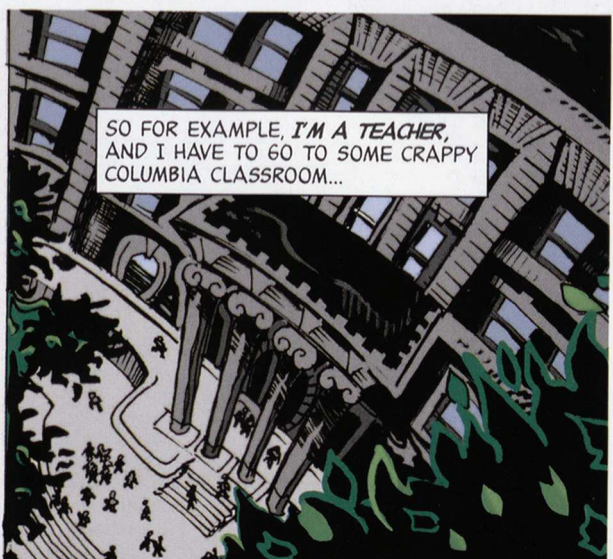
So when I and a fellow editor accompanied the founder of *WIE*, Andrew Cohen, on the three-hour journey from our offices to

Dr. Thurman's home in Woodstock, New York, one beautiful Sunday afternoon last autumn, our intention was to speak to the esteemed professor about evolution and transformation in the Buddhist teachings. And so we did. But you see, evolution is a broad term and conversations with Dr. Thurman have a way of getting away from him. Indeed, somewhere between the all-powerful Buddhas, the mythic bodhisattvas, and the fast-firing synapses of Thurman's passionate and prodigious mind, the interview seemed to slip a little off its planned course. And before we knew it, we had left the quiet countryside of rural New York behind and soared far beyond the Tibetan prayer flags flapping in the breeze outside Thurman's rustic home. Our surroundings looked the same, the Tibetan artwork still adorned the walls, the afternoon sun still shone through the windows, and the tape recorder still whirled away capturing the words of the moment. But Dr. Thurman was slowly drawing us, in his charming and meandering style, into another dimension, an alternate reality in which contemporary notions of spiritual transformation began to mix and mingle with the mythic, the miraculous, and the otherworldly. Looking back, we can only say that what began as an interview ended up as a journey, an unexpected journey into another universe altogether—the fantastic Buddhaverse of Robert Thurman.

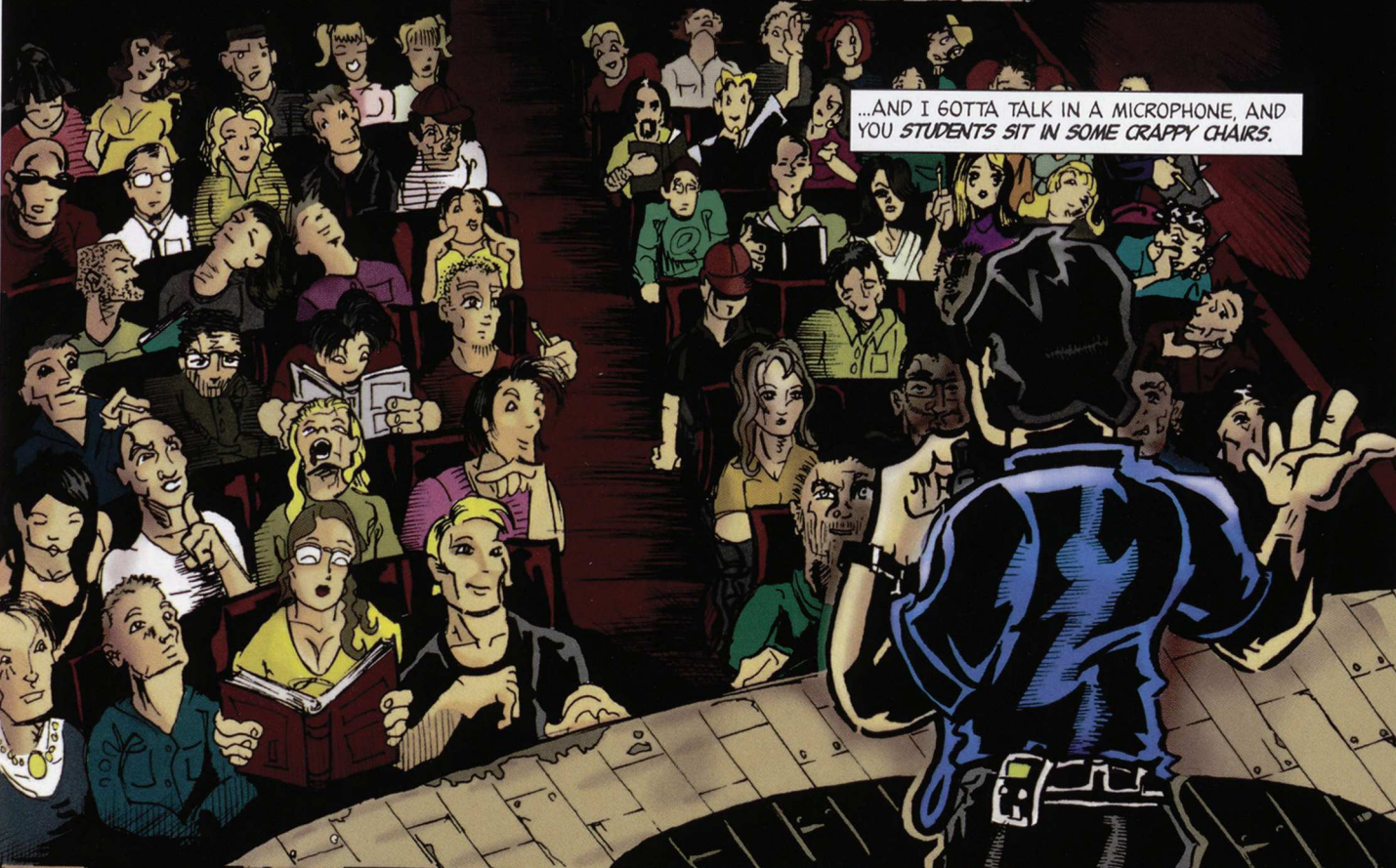
—CP




WHEN YOU BECOME A BUDDHA,  
YOU'RE NO LONGER JUST A  
BEING INSIDE THIS SKIN...




SO FOR EXAMPLE, I'M A TEACHER,  
AND I HAVE TO GO TO SOME CRAPPY  
COLUMBIA CLASSROOM...



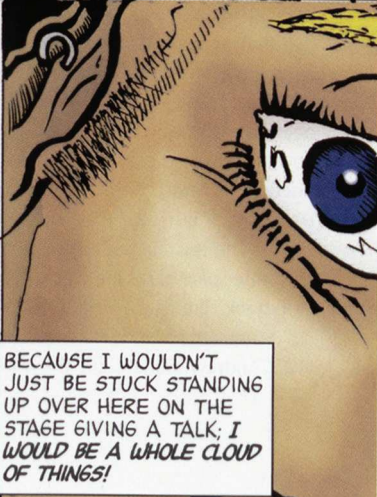
...AND I GOTTA TALK IN A MICROPHONE, AND  
YOU STUDENTS SIT IN SOME CRAPPY CHAIRS.



BUT IF I WAS A BUDDHA, THE CHAIRS  
WOULD TEACH YOU. THE ROOM. THE  
SHOES, THE CLOTHES, EVERYTHING!



I WOULD SURROUND YOU  
WITH PEDAGOGICAL  
DEVICES. DO YOU KNOW  
WHAT I'M SAYING?!



BECAUSE I WOULDN'T  
JUST BE STUCK STANDING  
UP OVER HERE ON THE  
STAGE GIVING A TALK; I  
WOULD BE A WHOLE CLOUD  
OF THINGS!

THE *MOMENT* IN A BEING'S EVOLUTIONARY CONTINUUM WHEN THEY DECIDE THAT THE UNIVERSE HAD *BETTER* HAVE A HAPPY ENDING, AND *THEY'RE GOING TO SEE TO IT...*

...AND THAT HAPPY ENDING IS FOR THEM AND EVERYONE ELSE TO *BECOME A COMPLETE BUDDHA*, THEN THEY TAKE THE BODHISATTVA VOW. "I'M GOING TO BECOME A BUDDHA AND I'M GOING TO SAVE BEINGS." "I'M GOING TO DO IT!" IT'S NOT JUST A LITTLE SELFLESS THING. "I'M GOING TO DO IT!"

AND IT'S KIND OF AN *EGOTISTICAL*, ALMOST *MEGALOMANIAC* THING THAT A BODHISATTVA DOES. THEY GET *SO PASSIONATE*, THEY CAN'T STAND TO WAIT FOR A LONG PERIOD OF EVOLUTION TO SAVE OTHER BEINGS...

...SO TO SPEED UP THE PROCESS, THEY SHIFT INTO THIS *VERY DANGEROUS*, SWIRLING *VIRTUAL REALITY*, IN ORDER TO CHANGE *FAST*.

THIS IS TANTRIC HIGH-TECH METHODOLOGY!!

IN THAT REALM, YOU HAVE TO *ACTUALLY GO THROUGH THE SELF-TRANSFORMATION* OF GIVING YOUR LIFE TO OTHER BEINGS,

LIKE A THOUSAND TIMES IN A NIGHT.

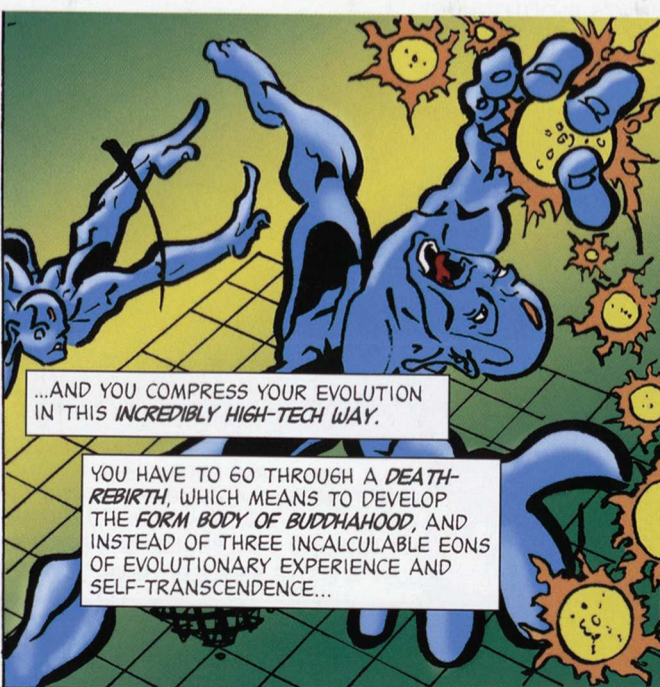
A GUY LIKE THE TIBETAN YOGI, MILAREPA, HE'S IN A CAVE THERE, BUT ACTUALLY HE'S IN A *VIRTUAL PLANE* AND IT'S LIKE HE'S DOING ONE OF THOSE *TRAINING PROGRAMS FROM THE MATRIX*.

AND IT'S *INCREDIBLY DANGEROUS*. YOU'RE DOWN THERE SWIMMING IN YOUR UNCONSCIOUS, AND YOU'RE BRINGING UP THESE *DEEP ENERGIES* AND YOU'RE SORT OF *REDESIGNING YOUR GENES*...



...AND YOU COMPRESS YOUR EVOLUTION IN THIS *INCREDIBLY HIGH-TECH WAY*.

YOU HAVE TO GO THROUGH A *DEATH-REBIRTH*, WHICH MEANS TO DEVELOP THE *FORM BODY OF BUDDHAHOOD*, AND INSTEAD OF THREE INCALCULABLE EONS OF EVOLUTIONARY EXPERIENCE AND SELF-TRANSCENDENCE...



YOU CAN DO IT IN ONE LIFETIME—IF YOU'RE A *SUPER-DUPER PERSON!*



BUT IF YOU DON'T HAVE THE FOUNDATION FOR *TANTRA*, WHICH IS *KNOWLEDGE OF SELFLESSNESS*, THE ABILITY TO LET ANY STRUCTURE OF SELF DISSOLVE—EVEN THE MOST POWERFUL, *THE MOST MAGNIFICENT, THE MOST BEAUTIFUL STRUCTURE OF SELF*—



—YOU'LL BE REBORN AS A *TITAN* OR A *DEVIL*, OR SOMETHING.



THE *BODHISATTVA* COMPLETELY MASTERS THE *WHOLE ART OF MANIFESTATION* THROUGH THE *MAGIC BODY*...

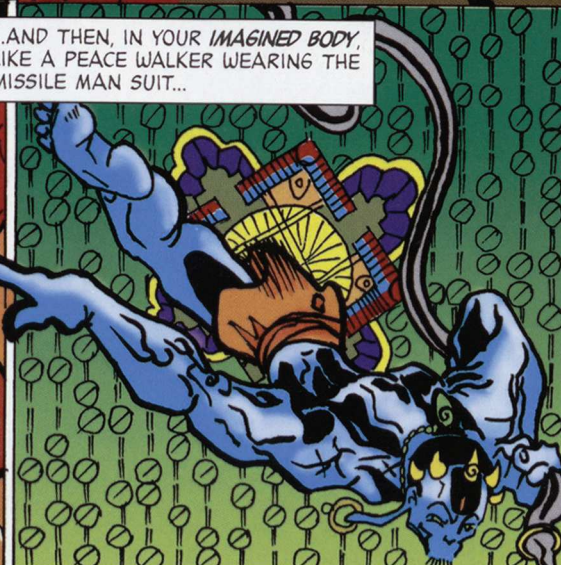


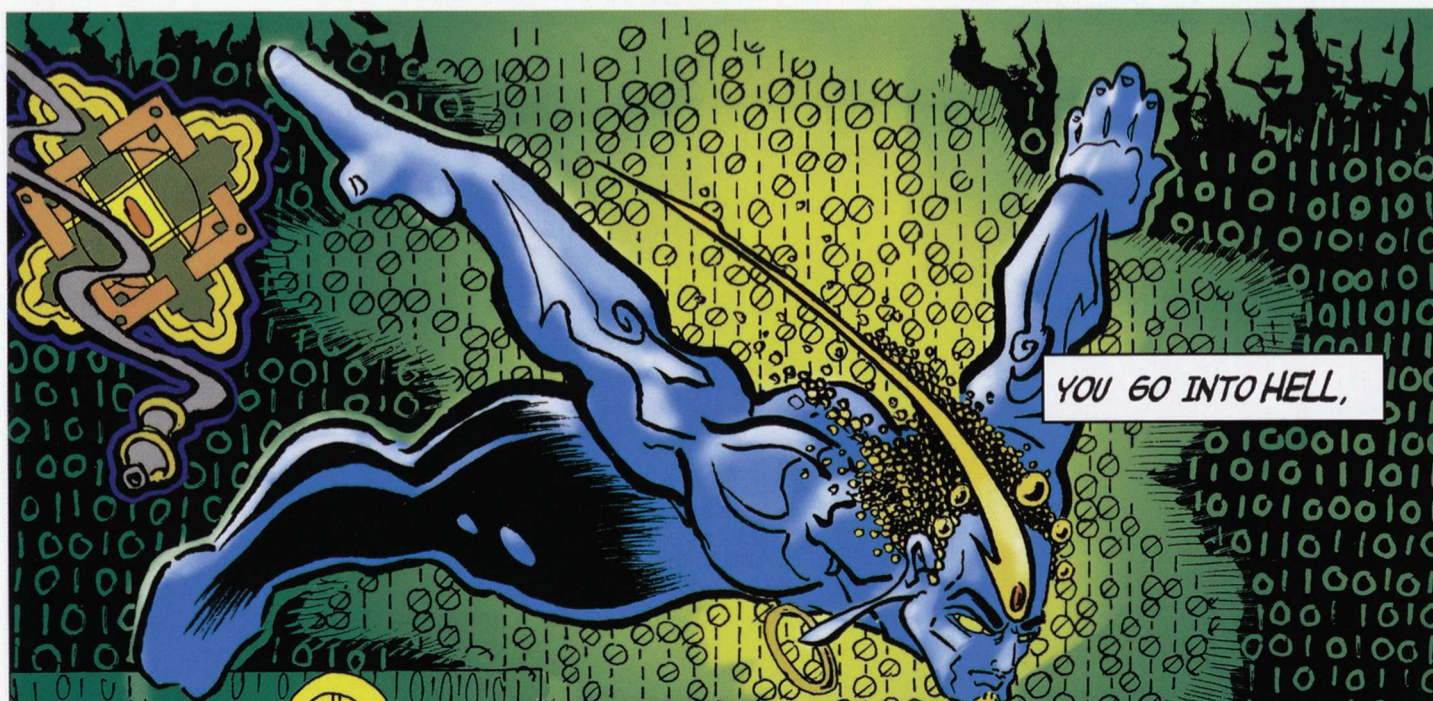
...WHICH IS LIKE A *DIGITAL RESIDUAL SELF-IMAGE* IN A VIRTUAL, SAMADHIC REALM WITHIN A *MANDALA*, WHICH IS A *PROTECTIVE FORCE FIELD* IN WHICH TO VOYAGE TO INNER UNIVERSES. AND THIS IS ALL A REHEARSAL FOR DEALING WITH THE OUTER UNIVERSE.

...AND THEN, IN YOUR *IMAGINED BODY*, LIKE A PEACE WALKER WEARING THE *MISSILE MAN SUIT*...



SO, SAY YOU WANT TO GO AND REHEARSE SAVING SOME BEINGS FROM *HELL*, THEN YOU MIGHT WANT TO MEDITATE ON SOME *FIERCE DEITY* WITH MANY ARMS AND WEAPONS AND *DIFFERENT HEADS* LOOKING IN ALL DIRECTIONS...





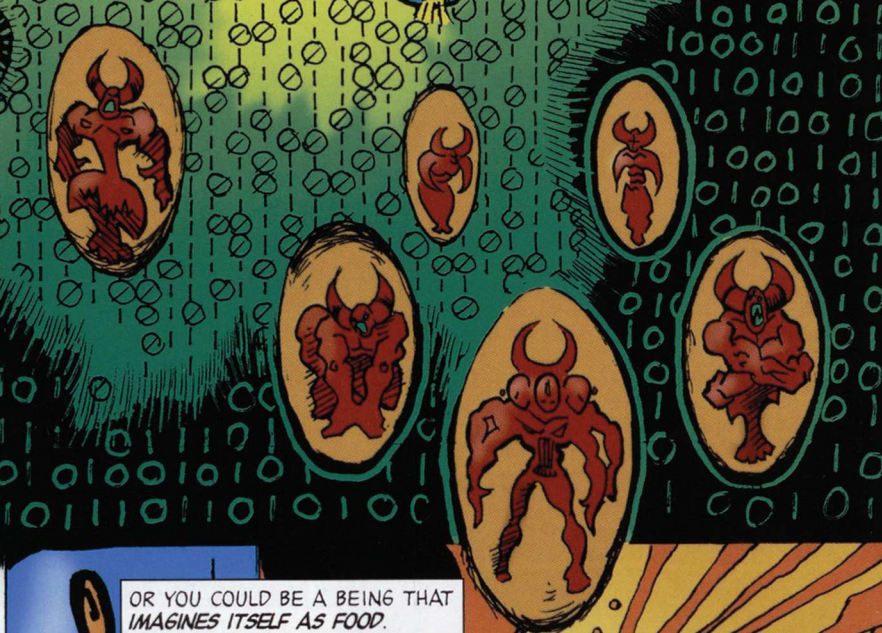
YOU GO INTO HELL,



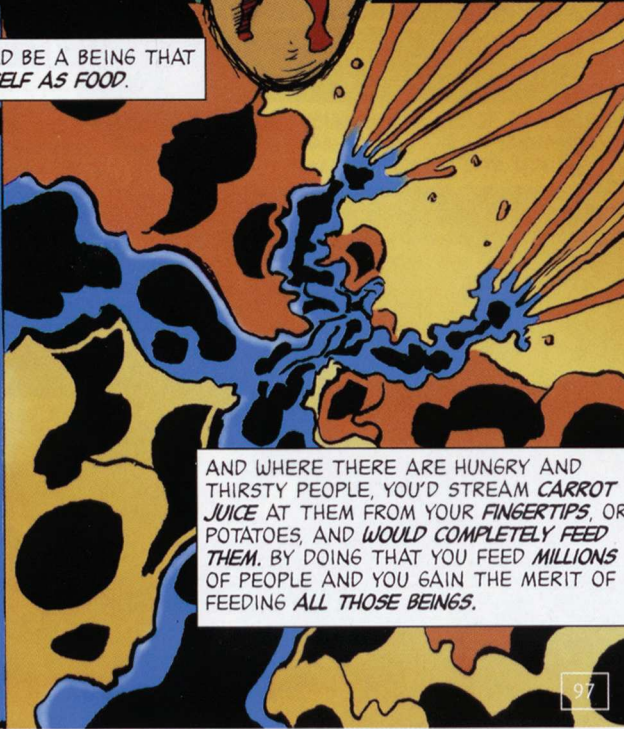
AND GET THOSE DEMONS  
OFF THE BACKS OF PEOPLE...



...AND COOL THINGS DOWN—BRING A  
FIRE HOSE, *WHATEVER IT TAKES!*



OR YOU COULD BE A BEING THAT  
IMAGINES ITSELF AS FOOD.



AND WHERE THERE ARE HUNGRY AND  
THIRSTY PEOPLE, YOU'D STREAM *CARROT  
JUICE* AT THEM FROM YOUR *FINGERTIPS*, OR  
POTATOES, AND *WOULD COMPLETELY FEED  
THEM*. BY DOING THAT YOU FEED *MILLIONS*  
OF PEOPLE AND YOU GAIN THE MERIT OF  
FEEDING *ALL THOSE BEINGS*.

SO YOU'RE ACCELERATING THE ACCUMULATION OF MERIT THAT WOULD OTHERWISE TAKE *LIFETIMES TO ACCUMULATE*. AND YOU'RE DOING THIS IN THE NIGHT IN YOUR *DIGITAL MAGIC BODY*.

WHEN YOU GET THAT KIND OF MERIT...

...YOU DEVELOP THE STABILITY OF MIND AND HAVE THAT LEVEL OF ART AND CREATIVITY TO BE *ENGAGED WITH THE WHOLE WORLD SYSTEM*.

THEN YOU BECOME A BUDDHA!!

A BUDDHA CAN MANIFEST ALL KINDS OF INCARNATE FORMS AND SEEMINGLY INDIVIDUATED FORMS, TO BECOME A *DISCREET MANIFESTATION* THAT OTHER BEINGS CAN PERCEIVE. THEY EMANATE AN INDIVIDUATED FORM THAT ANOTHER PERSON CAN THEN RELATE TO, IN ORDER TO GET THAT PERSON TO *REALIZE THEIR OWN TRUE NATURE*.

BUDDHA WILL BE A PARROT IF THAT'S WHAT IS NEEDED.

IF SOMEONE IS SO FRIGHTENED OF THE WORLD THAT ALL THEY CAN DO IS PET A DOG, THEN THE BUDDHA WILL BE A DOG, AND JUST GO AND GET PETTED THEY WON'T EVEN SAY THE DHARMA OR ANYTHING.

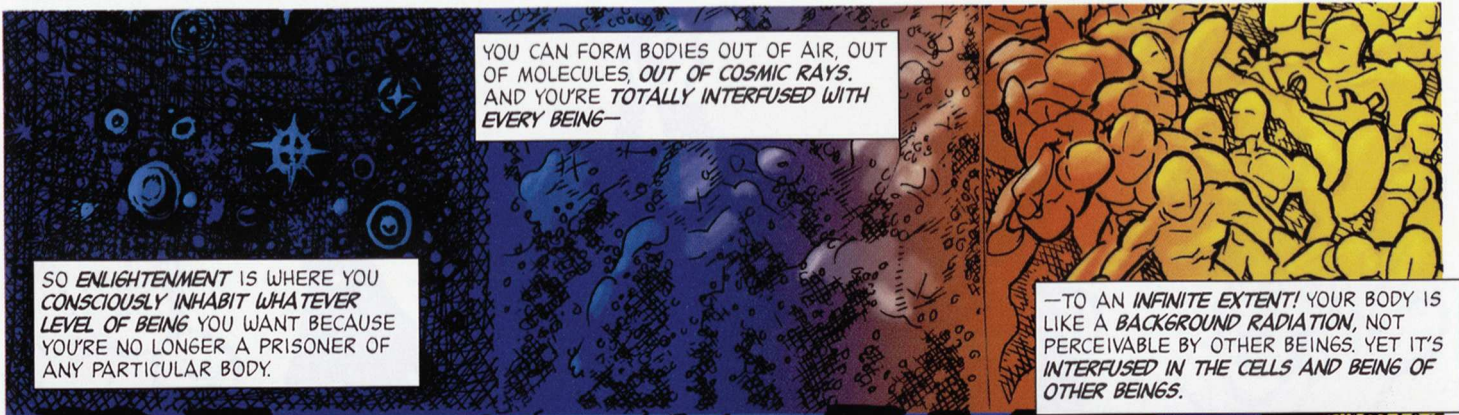
AND TO BE A REAL GURU YOU HAVE TO BE *CLAIRVOYANT*, BUT NOT FOR YOUR OWN SAKE.

LET'S SAY THE GURU WAS TEACHING SOMEONE AND AT THE SAME TIME THEY WERE AWARE OF EVERY WAY THAT PERSON WAS PERCEIVING THEM...

...A REAL GURU WOULD BE AWARE OF EVERY THOUGHT IN THAT PERSON'S MIND...

IF YOU WANT TO BE A *TRUE TEACHER* YOU HAVE TO DEVELOP THOSE ABILITIES.

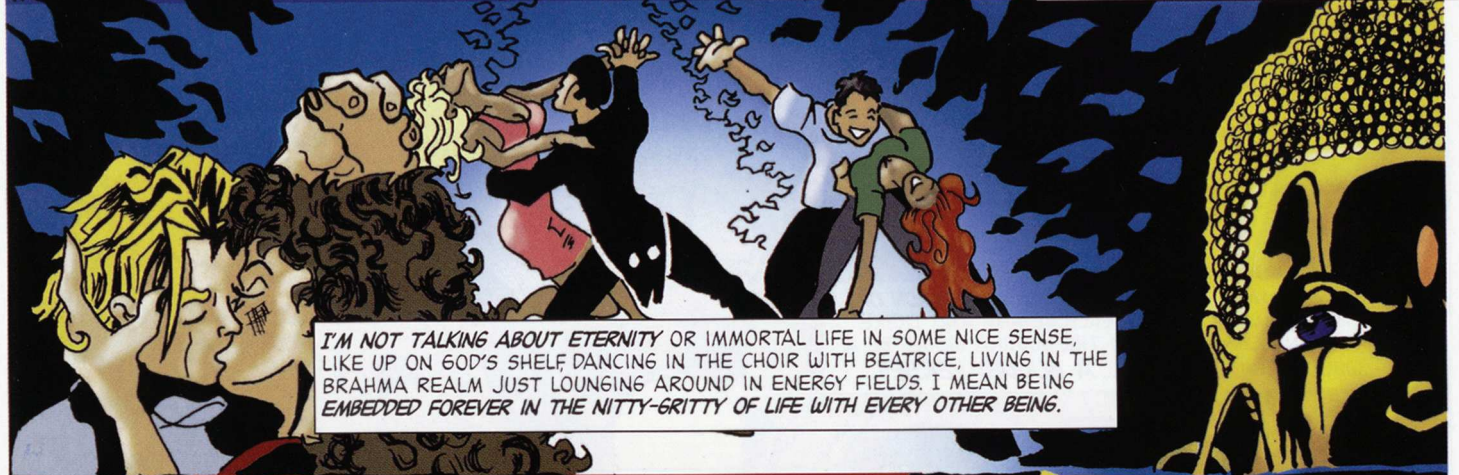
...AND OF HOW THAT PERSON WAS INTERPRETING EVERYTHING THEY WERE SAYING...



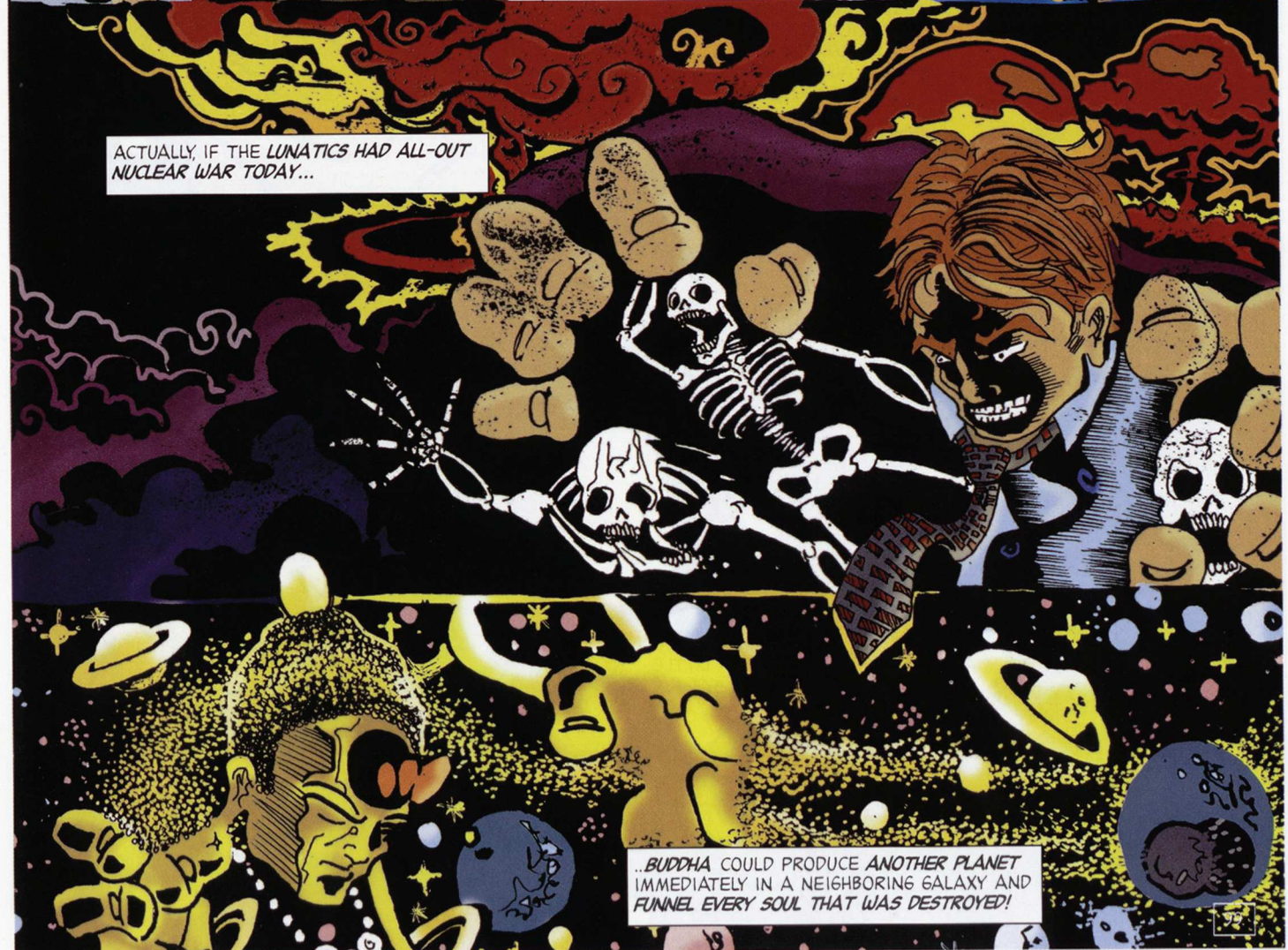
YOU CAN FORM BODIES OUT OF AIR, OUT OF MOLECULES, OUT OF COSMIC RAYS. AND YOU'RE TOTALLY INTERFUSED WITH EVERY BEING—

SO ENLIGHTENMENT IS WHERE YOU CONSCIOUSLY INHABIT WHATEVER LEVEL OF BEING YOU WANT BECAUSE YOU'RE NO LONGER A PRISONER OF ANY PARTICULAR BODY.

—TO AN INFINITE EXTENT! YOUR BODY IS LIKE A BACKGROUND RADIATION, NOT PERCEIVABLE BY OTHER BEINGS. YET IT'S INTERFUSED IN THE CELLS AND BEING OF OTHER BEINGS.




I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT ETERNITY OR IMMORTAL LIFE IN SOME NICE SENSE, LIKE UP ON GOD'S SHELF DANCING IN THE CHOIR WITH BEATRICE, LIVING IN THE BRAHMA REALM JUST LOUNGING AROUND IN ENERGY FIELDS. I MEAN BEING EMBEDDED FOREVER IN THE NITTY-GRITTY OF LIFE WITH EVERY OTHER BEING.



ACTUALLY, IF THE LUNATICS HAD ALL-OUT NUCLEAR WAR TODAY...

...BUDDHA COULD PRODUCE ANOTHER PLANET IMMEDIATELY IN A NEIGHBORING GALAXY AND FUNNEL EVERY SOUL THAT WAS DESTROYED!



SO THE WHOLE WORLD BECOMES AN EXPRESSION OF THE BUDDHA'S WISH TO TEACH BEINGS, AND THERE ARE ENDLESS BEINGS. SO THE BUDDHA WOULD BE A WHOLE CLOUD OF THINGS... **A BUDDHAVERSE!!**

AND THE *BUDDHA* WOULD BE ACTUALLY UN-LOCATABLE, **TOTALLY UN-LOCATABLE**, AND **TOTALLY PRESENT AT ALL TIMES** WITH ALL OF US, COMPLETELY, RIGHT HERE AND NOW, **FOREVER ENGAGED.**

THIS IS WHAT THEY SAY. IT'S A LOT OF FUN TO THINK ABOUT ACTUALLY. BUT I KNOW IT'S A LITTLE INCREDIBLE. **IT'S SUPER SCI-FI!**



# section 3 <sup>the</sup> Dynamics of Transformation

*Do the conditions of the time we're living in demand a collective evolutionary leap that's never happened before?*

*How does transformation actually happen?  
What really changes?*

*What's the relationship between individual and collective transformation?*



## **The Never-Ending Upward Quest**

*A WIE Editor Encounters the Practical  
and Spiritual Wisdom of Spiral Dynamics  
An Interview with Dr. Don Beck*



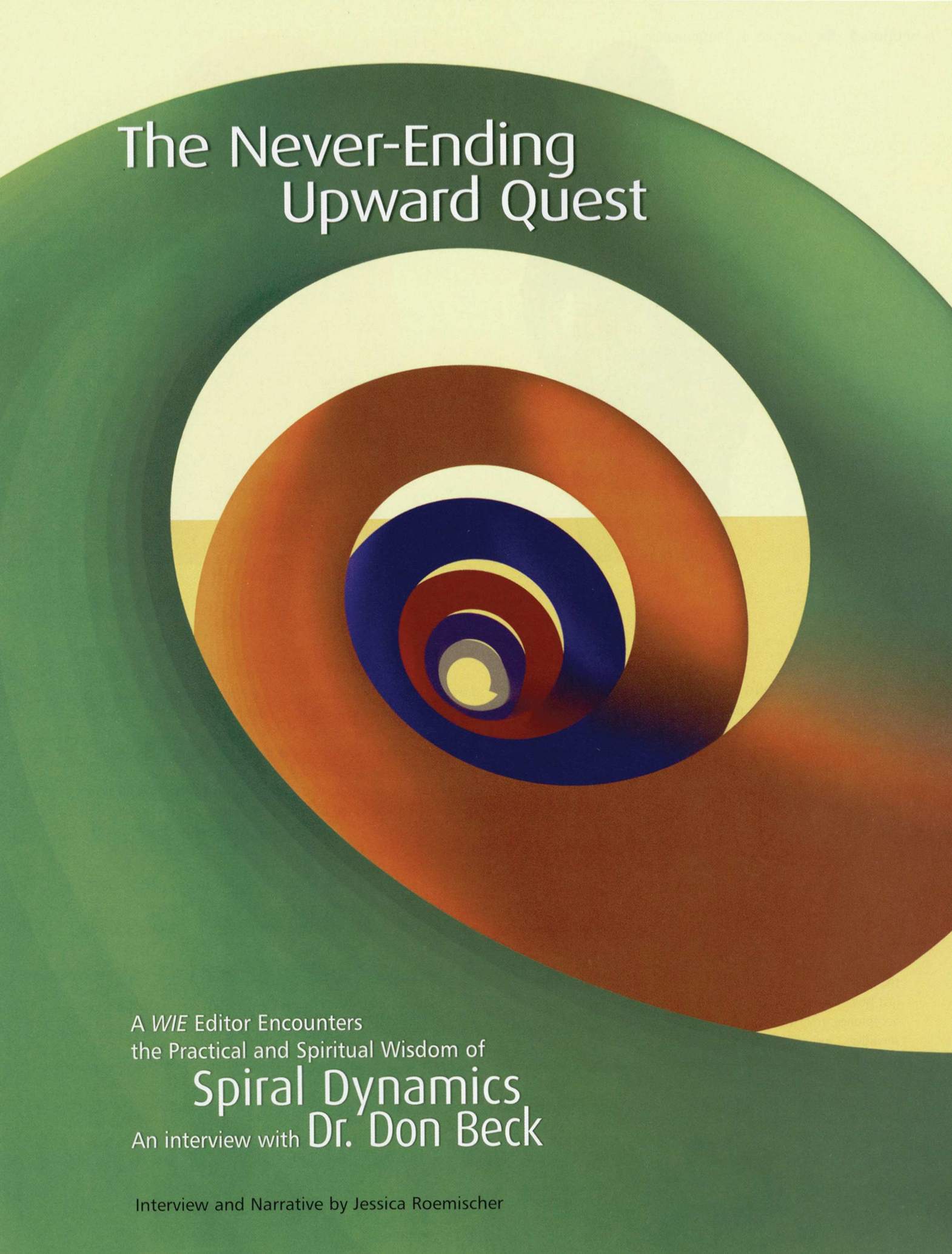
## **Transformation by Design**

*An Interview with Dee Hock*



## **Epistemology, Fourth Order Consciousness, & the Subject-Object Relationship**

*or . . . How the Self Evolves  
with Robert Kegan*



# The Never-Ending Upward Quest

A *WIE* Editor Encounters  
the Practical and Spiritual Wisdom of

**Spiral Dynamics**  
An interview with **Dr. Don Beck**

Interview and Narrative by Jessica Roemischer



**I THINK I'M BEGINNING TO SEE PEOPLE** as colors! Having just immersed myself for the past three months in Spiral Dynamics—an incisive and far-reaching theory of human development—I can say without exaggeration that Spiral Dynamics is, indeed, one of the major breakthroughs in mapping and managing complexity—that complexity being us. Our diverse worldviews, our beliefs, our very identities, represented by eight “memes,” or value systems, which apply as much to individuals as to entire cultures. And, as I am discovering, this dynamic spiral-shaped model of human consciousness, with its hierarchy of color-coded memes, is literally coloring my perception.

I was at a friend's wedding and suddenly realized that I was seeing the BLUE (absolutist) meme in the conservatively-dressed woman wearing a crucifix, the ORANGE (achieivist) meme in the young go-getter with the Rolex, the GREEN (egalitarian) meme in the aging bearded hippie. And not only that—I'm beginning to see just how “GREEN” I am, with my longing for communal living and acceptance, my strong bias against corporations and political conservatives, and my passion for environmental causes, even though I am, admittedly, attached to driving my Audi (ORANGE), fast (RED—impulsive)!

Should I be worried? Am I typecasting other people, and myself, with these apparently broad-brushed, color-coded characterizations called “memes”? Is the Spiral Dynamics model, comprised of these

memes, simply a convenient way to avoid having to grapple with the complexity and diversity of human beings and the challenge to discern who we really are? On the contrary, I have been finding that, rather than a cold analytical detachment or one-dimensional perspective, Spiral Dynamics is giving rise to a profound clarity of insight into the sweeping patterns of human psychologies, beliefs, and values (including my own) that are, often unconsciously, guiding our choices and shaping our very identities. Spiral Dynamics is also resulting in an unexpected and liberating objectivity because it places my own experience in the context of the entire history of human psychological development, the totality of which is present in each of us—from the most primitive survivalist instincts (BEIGE) to evolved spiritual aspirations (TURQUOISE), with, in my case, a good dose of righteous eco-egalitarianism (GREEN) thrown in!

But why a spiral, you might ask? Spirals are a dynamic expression of natural and cosmic forces, a “dominant universal fractal” evident in everything from our DNA code to the spiraling galaxies that inhabit the universe. Spiral Dynamics posits that the evolution of human consciousness can best be represented in this way: by a dynamic, upward spiraling structure that charts our evolving thinking systems as they arc higher and higher through levels of increasing complexity. Certainly, human consciousness has dramatically increased in complexity over the span of millennia, as evidenced by our fast-paced highly interactive world. But, despite any illusions I may have about



how far up the spiral I am in my technology-rich postmodern life, according to Spiral Dynamics, we human beings are only just emerging from the first great episode of human history—a 100,000-year epoch defined fundamentally by survivalism: the Spiral's "First Tier."

Dr. Don E. Beck has been developing, teaching, and implementing Spiral Dynamics for nearly three decades. Transmitting the genuinely inclusive or "integral" perspective that is the essence of the Spiral Dynamics model, Beck portrays the vast tapestry of global cultures with the care, insight, and easy familiarity with which one might speak about the members of one's extended family, each with their unique capacities and challenges. And this evolved humanitarianism conveys Beck's passionate and sincere conviction that Spiral Dynamics can resolve the immense challenges and responsibilities we face at this juncture in history.

Indeed, one could call Don Beck a philosopher-activist for the new millennium. As cofounder of the National Values Center in Denton, Texas, and President and CEO of the Spiral Dynamics Group, Inc., a global enterprise, he is, by his own definition, a "Spiral Wizard," employing the Spiral Dynamics model to effect large-scale systems change in and among various sectors and societies of the world. Together with Christopher Cowan, he wrote *Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership, and Change* in 1996, which is based on and enhances the groundbreaking "Value Systems" theory of human development proposed by the late Professor Clare Graves. Beck's long

consulting career has taken him to such diverse settings as 10 Downing Street, to meet with members of Tony Blair's Policy Unit; inner-city Chicago, to address the difficulties faced by educational institutions there; the World Bank, to address the future of Afghanistan; and the boardrooms of major banks, energy companies, airlines, and government agencies.

Don Beck has discussed racial issues with President Bill Clinton and deep reconciliation strategies with President Nelson Mandela, playing a central role in the peaceful creation of a democratic South Africa, for which he received a legislative honor in 1996 in his home state of Texas. More recently, he has joined forces with integral philosopher Ken Wilber and President of the Arlington Institute John Petersen, among others, to make Spiral Dynamics an even more powerful tool "for managing large-scale interventions, change, and transformation"—a new initiative called "Spiral Dynamics integral" (SDi).

Drawing from his vast experience, Dr. Beck illustrates why Spiral Dynamics is invaluable for anyone who sincerely recognizes the necessity for human transformation and global reconciliation at this critical and all-demanding period in history. And indeed, as one becomes familiar with Spiral Dynamics, it easily becomes apparent why this compelling theory is called nothing less than "a new definition of human nature [and of the] evolutionary significance of human intelligence."

# Spiral Dynamics

the eight-stage spiral of development

## Second Tier "Being" valueMEMES

### **TURQUOISE Holistic MEME – starting 30 years ago**

**Basic theme:** *Experience the wholeness of existence through mind and spirit*

- The world is a single, dynamic organism with its own collective mind
- Self is both distinct and a blended part of a larger, compassionate whole
- Everything connects to everything else in ecological alignments
- Energy and information permeate the Earth's total environment
- Holistic, intuitive thinking and cooperative actions are to be expected

### **YELLOW Integrative MEME – starting 50 years ago**

**Basic theme:** *Live fully and responsibly as what you are and learn to become*

- Life is a kaleidoscope of natural hierarchies, systems, and forms
- The magnificence of existence is valued over material possessions
- Flexibility, spontaneity, and functionality have the highest priority
- Differences can be integrated into interdependent, natural flows
- Understands that chaos and change are natural

"What I am proposing is that the psychology of the mature human being is an unfolding, emergent, oscillating, spiraling process, marked by progressive subordination of older, lower-order behavior systems to newer, higher-order systems as man's existential problems change."

Dr. Clare Graves

## First Tier "Subsistence" valueMEMES

### GREEN Communitarian/Egalitarian MEME – starting 150 years ago

**Basic theme:** *Seek peace within the inner self and explore, with others, the caring dimensions of community*

- The human spirit must be freed from greed, dogma, and divisiveness
- Feelings, sensitivity, and caring supersede cold rationality
- Spreads the Earth's resources and opportunities equally among all
- Reaches decisions through reconciliation and consensus processes
- Refreshes spirituality, brings harmony, and enriches human development

### ORANGE Achievist/Strategic MEME – starting 300 years ago

**Basic theme:** *Act in your own self-interest by playing the game to win*

- Change and advancement are inherent within the scheme of things
- Progresses by learning nature's secrets and seeking out best solutions
- Manipulates Earth's resources to create and spread the abundant good life
- Optimistic, risk-taking, and self-reliant people deserve success
- Societies prosper through strategy, technology, and competitiveness

### BLUE Purposeful/Authoritarian MEME – starting 5,000 years ago

**Basic theme:** *Life has meaning, direction, and purpose with predetermined outcomes*

- One sacrifices self to the transcendent Cause, Truth, or righteous Pathway
- The Order enforces a code of conduct based on eternal, absolute principles
- Righteous living produces stability now and guarantees future reward
- Impulsivity is controlled through guilt; everybody has their proper place
- Laws, regulations, and discipline build character and moral fiber

### RED Impulsive/Egocentric MEME – starting 10,000 years ago

**Basic theme:** *Be what you are and do what you want, regardless*

- The world is a jungle full of threats and predators
- Breaks free from any domination or constraint to please self as self desires
- Stands tall, expects attention, demands respect, and calls the shots
- Enjoys self to the fullest right now without guilt or remorse
- Conquers, out-foxes, and dominates other aggressive characters

### PURPLE Magical/Animistic MEME – starting 50,000 years ago

**Basic theme:** *Keep the spirits happy and the tribe's nest warm and safe*

- Obeys the desires of the spirit being and mystical signs
- Shows allegiance to chief, elders, ancestors, and the clan
- Individual subsumed in group
- Preserves sacred objects, places, events, and memories
- Observes rites of passage, seasonal cycles, and tribal customs

### BEIGE Instinctive/Survivalistic MEME – starting 100,000 years ago

**Basic theme:** *Do what you must just to stay alive*

- Uses instincts and habits just to survive
- Distinct self is barely awakened or sustained
- Food, water, warmth, sex, and safety have priority
- Forms into survival bands to perpetuate life
- Lives "off the land" much as other animals



## Spiral Dynamics

**WIE:** *Dr. Beck, can you begin by explaining the basic concept of Spiral Dynamics?*

**DON BECK:** The concept of Spiral Dynamics is that human nature is not fixed; we're not set at birth. Rather, we have the capacities, in the nature of the mind/brain itself, to construct new conceptual worlds. So what we're trying to describe is simply how humans are able, when things get bad enough, to adapt to their situation by creating greater complexities of thinking to handle new problems.

**WIE:** *Can you elaborate on what seems to be our unique capacity to develop higher levels of thinking and cognition?*

**DB:** Spiral Dynamics is based on the assumption that we have *adaptive* intelligences, "complex, adaptive, contextual intelligences," which develop in response to our life circumstances and challenges—what Spiral Dynamics calls *Life Conditions*. What we're always focusing on are the causative dynamics created by the Life Conditions and then the kinds of coping mechanisms and collective intelligences that are forged in response to those conditions. These collective intelligences are what we call *memes*.\*

**WIE:** *You seem to be pointing to the evolutionary nature of human intelligence, which makes it possible for us to adapt to and survive our existential challenges, or "Life Conditions." Can you speak further about the evolutionary significance of "memes"?*

**DB:** Like genes, viruses, and bacteria, memes respond to the same basic principle in the universe, which is this concept of renewal, this regenerating capacity. Each successive meme contains a more expansive horizon, a more complex organizing principle, with newly calibrated priorities, mindsets, and specific bottom lines. It's a way of solving problems. It's a way of assigning priorities to what's most important and why, formed in response to the Life Conditions. And just like a biological DNA code, which is a code that replicates itself throughout the body, a meme code is a bio-psycho-social-spiritual DNA-type script, a blueprint that spreads throughout a culture, and plays out in all areas of cultural expression, forming survival codes, myths of origin, artistic forms, lifestyles, and senses of community.

**WIE:** *So, you are saying that as humans adapt to their Life Conditions, this awakens new intelligences, or meme codes, which in turn shape the evolution of culture.*

**DB:** Yes. And cultures, as well as countries, are formed by the emergence of these memes, or value systems, which are the glue that bonds a group together, defining who they are as a people and reflecting the place they inhabit on the planet.

My longtime friend and colleague, the late Professor Clare Graves, sensed that there were deeper patterns in the evolution of human consciousness and identified eight levels of psychological and cultural existence, or value systems, which became the basis for the spiral model. The same principles or levels of existence apply as much to a single person as to an entire society. Graves involved thousands of people in his research and was constantly on the lookout for these deeper patterns, which, he argued, reflect different activation levels of our dynamic neurological equipment.

**WIE:** *Could you outline the spiral model with its hierarchy of eight memes, or levels of existence?*

**DB:** In the language of Graves, the spiral's "First Tier" is a set of six memes characterized by *existence* or *subsistence*. What that means is that we're more like animals than like gods and we have to deal with what are essentially earthbound existence problems. So the First Tier (BEIGE, PURPLE, RED, BLUE, ORANGE, GREEN) clusters together our "subsistence" or survival-level concerns, while the Second Tier (YELLOW, TURQUOISE) works to create healthy forms of all the First Tier systems in the context of an information-rich, highly mobile global community. While Graves identified eight levels of existence, with a ninth on the horizon, the Spiral is expansive, open-ended, continuous, and dynamic. There is no final state, no ultimate destination, no utopian paradise. It's a never-ending upward quest, with each stage but a prelude to the next, and the next, and the next.

**WIE:** *And what drives the evolutionary emergence of these stages, or memes, up the spiral?*

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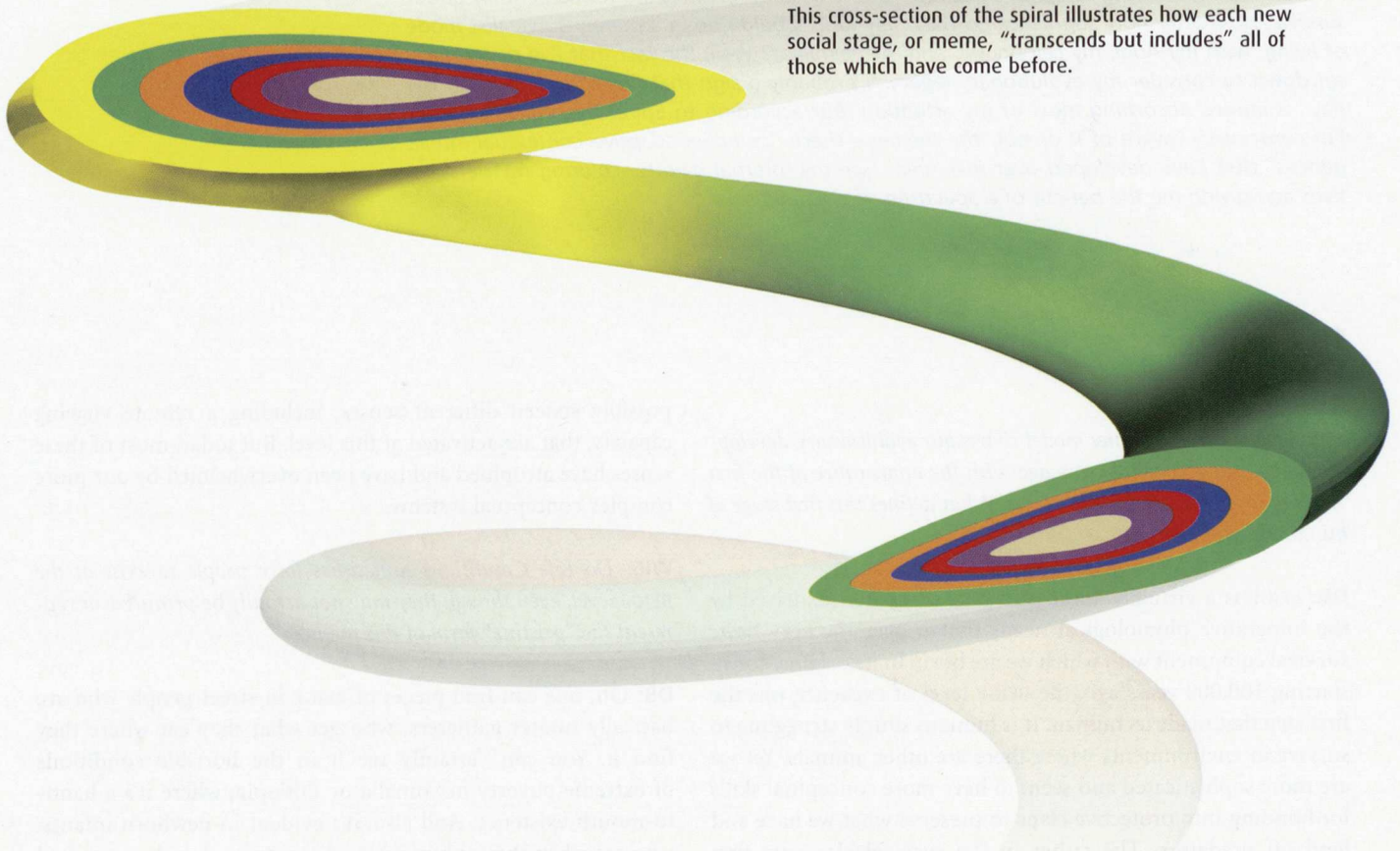
\*The concept of "meme" was first proposed in the mid-1970s by the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, who believed that the evolution of culture should be considered as independent from genetic or biological evolution. Dawkins' "memes" refer to specific "units of cultural transmission," examples of which could be songs, ideas, clothes fashions, to name just a few. However, in Spiral Dynamics, these are called "little memes." When Beck uses the word "meme," he is speaking about a "core value system," or "value meme." These act as "organizing principles" that express themselves through little memes and that are so central to the way we think that they can "reach across whole groups of people and entire cultures, and begin to structure mindsets on their own."

# transcend & include

*"When a new worldview emerges, the [previously awakened memes] do not disappear. Rather, they remain subsumed in the total flow and not only add texture to the more complex ways of living, but remain 'on call' in case the problems that [first] awakened them to service reappear. So, there are systems within us, miniature worldviews, each of which is calibrated for different problems of existence. Like the Russian dolls, there are systems within systems within systems within systems."*

Don Beck

This cross-section of the spiral illustrates how each new social stage, or meme, "transcends but includes" all of those which have come before.



**DB:** Our crises, because they provide the inflection points and the benchmarks that trigger the shift up to the next level of human development. And each level of existence, or meme, is more like an emerging wave, a fluid living system, than a rigid hierarchical step. Once a new level appears in a culture, all of the previously acquired developmental stages remain in the composite value system. In Ken Wilber's language, each new social stage "transcends but includes" all of those that have come before. For this reason, the more complex thinking systems have greater degrees of freedom.

**WIE:** *Why do you use a spiral model to chart the emergence of these evolutionary stages of psychological and cultural development?*

**DB:** A spiral vortex best depicts the emergence of human systems, or memes, as they evolve through levels of increasing complexity. Each upward turn of the spiral marks the awakening of a more elaborate version on top of what already exists, with each meme a product of its times and conditions. And these memes form spirals of increasing complexity that exist within a person, a family, an organization, a culture, or a society. We all live in flow states; there is always new wine, always old wineskins. And you can see that this whole evolutionary process is working because we're still here, because we've been able to survive thousands and thousands of years of coping with what has been quite a hostile environment. So we have a wonderful species that has an innate capacity to renew itself. *That's what makes us human.*

UNTIL RECENTLY, I'VE BEEN TOO CAUGHT UP with the technological satisfactions and day-to-day demands of my fast-paced life to even consider what it's taken for evolution to produce, well, me! But thanks to the Spiral Dynamics model, with its evolutionary stages of development, the memes, it's starting to sink in: BEIGE instincts, PURPLE mysticism, RED self-assertion, BLUE conformity, ORANGE materialism, GREEN egalitarianism. . . . You see, the thing is, I can personally relate to all the memes. And that's how Spiral Dynamics makes human evolution real and makes it make sense. Because the stages of our entire evolutionary history are entirely present in me—a human being living at the threshold of the new millennium, and coincidentally, as I've discovered, at the threshold of the spiral's "Second Tier."

But wait—according to Spiral Dynamics, all the First Tier memes are fundamentally about survival, no matter how sophisticated they may look. Could I be in a merely survivalist mode of living, with my Audi, my cell phone, and my PalmPilot? Well, the fact that I've never really sat down to consider my evolutionary legacy is probably a sign that "making it through the day" is indeed absorbing most of my attention. But according to Spiral Dynamics, whether I'm consciously aware of it or not, the memes—these "complex adaptive contextual intelligences" that have developed over millennia—are my internal palette, coloring my perspectives and giving me the benefit of a spectrum of possibilities.

## The "Memes"

### BEIGE

**WIE:** *The Spiral Dynamics model charts our evolutionary development beginning 100,000 years ago with the appearance of the first "level of existence," the BEIGE meme. What defines this first stage of human development?*

**DB:** BEIGE is a virtually automatic state of existence, driven by the imperative physiological needs that trigger the very basic survival equipment with which we are born. In its original form, starting 100,000 years ago, the BEIGE level of existence was the first step that made us human. It is humans simply struggling to survive in environments where there are other animals. Yet we are more sophisticated and seem to have more conceptual skills for bonding into protective clans to preserve what we have and fend off predators. The father in the survival clan eats first because if the strongest dies, the family has no hope. So, the key to BEIGE is survival using instinctive intelligences, with a more heightened sensory system with which we can see better, hear better—we can sense things with the hair standing on the back of our neck. Simply staying alive is more highly valued than anything else.

**WIE:** *Are there any remaining examples of BEIGE in the world today?*

**DB:** The only real BEIGE that exists today in its pristine condition is hidden away in Indonesia and parts of Africa. We've studied bushmen for some time, and it's quite clear that they have an uncanny ability to recall where the water is buried, and the ostrich eggs, and can sense weather changes. So we don't equate primitive with being primitive and "dumb" because there are

possibly sixteen different senses, including a remote viewing capacity, that are activated at this level. But today, most of these senses have atrophied and have been overwhelmed by our more complex conceptual systems.

**WIE:** *Do Life Conditions sometimes force people to exist at the BEIGE level, even though they may not actually be primitive or represent the "pristine" form of this meme?*

**DB:** Oh, one can find pieces of BEIGE in street people who are basically hunter-gatherers, who get what they eat where they find it. You can certainly see it in the horrible conditions of extreme poverty in Somalia or Ethiopia, where it's a hand-to-mouth existence. And also, it's evident in newborn infants, who eat when they're hungry. And some people, when exposed to a catastrophe, may regress to BEIGE. Higher-order priorities suddenly vanish in the midst of personal tragedy, extreme suffering, or deprivation. There's a kind of emptiness, which is certainly fear-driven, because boundaries and expectations have suddenly dissolved and one is on one's own footing, living by one's own wiles. It's that feeling that we have when we have to do something entirely different, something that we've never done before and are not sure that we even can do. I think that after September 11, we saw some people temporarily go into BEIGE because the crisis put them in a very different psychological condition.

### PURPLE

**WIE:** *The second level up the spiral is PURPLE. What evolutionary developments characterize the shift from the primitive existence of BEIGE to this next level of existence, the PURPLE meme?*



**DB:** PURPLE is animistic, tribalistic, and mystical. In this world of PURPLE, we tend to have the first evidence of human bonding—the sense of a kindred spirit, that “I’m someone because I belong to a certain clan or certain tribe.” During the Ice Age, the world became overpopulated. There were more humans per acre than there had ever been before. We had clans in the BEIGE system beginning to bump into other clans, with a sense of competition for niches starting to appear. Suddenly a clan, which is loosely structured, solidifies into a tribe of, say, four to five hundred people, so that the previous clan can now survive in the midst of competition with other clans. So one of the Life Conditions changes that led to the shift from BEIGE to PURPLE had to do with territoriality and access to resources.

Now, at the same time, a mutation occurred to awaken in the brain the first real ability to assign cause and effect. This was the first sense of the metaphysical. In the BEIGE mind, events seem to be scattered, each one unto itself, without much predictability. But, for example, in Africa, if the moon is full and the cow dies, the PURPLE mind connects the two events, one causing the other. So the awakening of the metaphysical system, together with the capacity to work more firmly in a team arrangement, occurred in the transition from the Dawn People (BEIGE) to the Mystical People (PURPLE), precipitated by the changing Life Conditions that occurred during the Ice Age, about fifty thousand years ago.

**WIE:** *It seems that the emergence of the capacity for bonding and working together, would literally improve one’s chances for survival.*

**DB:** You’re absolutely right. Literally. And because these stages of existence, or meme levels, represent bio-psycho-social systems, they indicate the evolutionary emergence of biological and physical capacities and abilities. For example, we know that the level of the brain chemical oxytocin, which has various health-giving benefits, is higher when humans eat in a group. And so eating together, breaking bread together, feasts of various kinds, all raise the oxytocin level in the brain and improve survival. Another thing that developed at this time was whatever it is in the brain that chemically enables the person to hear inner voices, the voices of spirits. The PURPLE meme is heavily laden with such so-called right brain tendencies as heightened intuition, emotional attachments to places and things, and a mystical sense of cause and effect. I have a well-developed PURPLE sense myself, having spent so much time with the Zulus in sacred places.

## RED

**WIE:** *With its tribes and rituals, PURPLE seems to have been quite a leap from the primitive existence of BEIGE. How did the next meme level of the spiral—RED—arise out of PURPLE, and what are its defining characteristics?*

**DB:** In the RED zone, we have the first raw, egocentric self. *I am somebody.* Beginning approximately ten thousand years ago, what began to cause the change in Life Conditions that led to RED were not failures, but rather successes. In PURPLE we had become very successful. We had found food, we had stabilized our lifestyle, we had conquered what we thought were the



dragons in our life. Everything was smooth, boring. So many of the youth became discontented. They saw that there was something about their essence that, rather than being protected, was being contained, limited. Then RED strides forth. Now we have an elite individual beginning to move away from the bonding element in PURPLE, which had become overplayed. So what PURPLE produced, through its success, was the need for strong individuals who ascend to power, who dominate, for example, in a military environment where we don't have the time to vote whether or not to "take yon hill." What begins to spring free is the assertion of raw self—the renegade, the heretic, the barbarian, the go-it-alone, the power-self, the hedonist.

**WIE:** *It's more difficult to see the positive attributes of the RED meme. PURPLE definitely seems more appealing to me, with its emphasis on human bonding and the sense of the metaphysical.*

**DB:** There are both positive and negative expressions to all the memes, including RED. In RED, we see high crime rates, we see all kinds of rage and rebellion, but we may also see wonderful spurts of creativity, heroic acts, and the ability to break from tradition and chart a whole new pathway. And RED rebellion and impulsiveness could only happen because PURPLE, through

bonding, stabilized things. And also, RED was a rebellion against the rituals and sacrifices forced on the youth by the PURPLE system, in painful rites of passage, for example. So that's why RED follows PURPLE, and why PURPLE set the stage for RED.

This is very important—I want you to see the interconnection. Memes are not free-floating entities. RED is not better than PURPLE. It's different. So you have to ask, first and foremost, what are the Life Conditions? If the Life Conditions require you to be strong and self-assertive, or to fight your way out of a horrible situation, then the RED meme is the way to be. RED is not an aberration, but a normal part of the human meme repertoire. This perspective is fundamental to Spiral Dynamics: you accept that the memes do not represent a hierarchy of "better," but rather that each can be expressed in a positive and negative way, and that the whole spiral with its assortment of meme codes is inside the person and may be called upon in response to the demands of their changing Life Conditions.

#### BLUE

**WIE:** *And now to the fourth meme level of the spiral. Could you begin by speaking about the Life Conditions problems produced by RED individualism and egocentrism, which ultimately required a shift up to the next level, BLUE?*



**DB:** In BLUE there is a search for a transcendent purpose, a recognition of the importance of order and meaning, a universe controlled by a single higher power. Society could no longer function with the constant presence of RED, with its war-like, gang-like, warlord-like entities, so we have to grow up, to solve the problems created by RED success. Here for the first time is the capacity to feel guilt (RED feels shame, but not guilt). In the BLUE system, people gladly accept authoritarianism and self-sacrifice for the common good.

When BLUE first develops, it has to handle RED. And that's why in the Old Testament you have such punitive measures as "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." If there is a heavy RED component, then you have, in religious systems and legal systems, the very heavy punitive form of BLUE. It's designed to address the threat of RED, so as long as the RED threat is there, the punitive expression of BLUE will continue to exist. But as BLUE moves away from having to contain the violence in RED, it goes on its life cycle toward its own healthier version, taking the form of more institutionalized systems, in which righteousness, discipline, accountability, stability, perseverance, and order prevail.

What also seems to occur in the brain is a heightened capacity for abstraction, and that abstraction ability attaches

itself to a cause, a *cause célèbre*, an "ism"—for example, the Buddhist's Eightfold Path, or the idea of Islam, which are both abstractions. So once again, we're into a metaphysical zone, but this time the PURPLE spirits are organized into "a mighty fortress is our God . . ." And thus we have the birth of monotheism and Zoroastrianism and all the "isms" that suddenly started emerging about five thousand years ago. And while they had different content, the mode of thinking for all of them was identical.

**WIE:** *I had never considered the world's religions from that point of view, that despite differences in "content," they are expressions of the same evolutionary stage of development.*

**DB:** Yes, because these meme codes are like a blueprint, or like magnets. The meme code we designate "BLUE" finds a transcendent purpose. What is that transcendent purpose? It could be Buddhism, or Judaism, or Islam. These religious expressions are what that meme code has attached to as a way to express itself. Therefore we can have holy wars between "isms," both of which are in the BLUE code. Because there's a difference between the surface-level manifestations of a core value system, or meme, and the core system, or meme code, itself.



## ORANGE

**WIE:** *How does institutional, disciplined, absolutist BLUE give rise to the ORANGE meme, the fifth level of the spiral model?*

**DB:** ORANGE is about advancement, improvement, and progress. Once again, you play out the BLUE theme to its ultimate. You make it very, very successful. And then what happens? The individual gets restless. “But I’m an individual. I want to assert my personal autonomy.” “No,” BLUE says. “You must stay in line and conform to the dictates of the system. Don’t you want to go to heaven? Don’t you want to have a retirement?” And ORANGE says, “Yes, but I think I can produce a heaven on earth. I think I can increase the size of the cake.” Thus we had the great Enlightenment, which is simply the individual spirit breaking free from what had become very restrictive forces.

Now the BLUE system, when it first appeared, was relevant, was necessary. But ORANGE individualization began to appear about three hundred years ago, when the sacred leaders became too punitive and also became discredited because they could not protect people from the plagues. And thus we had the birth, thank goodness, of the scientific method. We also had a growing belief in optimism, in changeability—a belief that we can indeed shape our future, that we are the stewards of the universe and

therefore have dominion over it. We can carve out a good life for ourselves. And again, some fascinating things happened in the European brain that seemed to occur for the first time in the 1700s—the mathematical sense, the sense of cadence, the linear sense that made possible written music, that made possible quantification and measurement. These classical left brain capacities uniquely developed in the Western brain in the ORANGE system. That entire wonderful movement is begrudgingly classified as “Western,” but that’s really what it is.

**WIE:** *It’s refreshing to hear you speak about ORANGE in these terms, because I was reflecting on the many negative effects of this particular meme, for example, the ecological devastation that ORANGE industrialization has given rise to.*

**DB:** That is why we have to look at three things: the Life Conditions, the meme code itself, and the way that meme code is being expressed in a certain context. If we don’t like capitalism or consumerism, which are *expressions* of the ORANGE meme code, it’s not the same thing as the meme code itself, which is the capacity to engineer things, to make things better. The creativity and ability to engineer that are inherent in that same ORANGE meme code can now be used to clean up the environment. That’s



why we can't afford to bash any of these memetic systems. We can challenge a manifestation of it, but without the ORANGE thinking system, we couldn't solve medical problems, we couldn't figure out how to clean up the water or the air, and we would sink back to the myth and mysticism of BLUE. I don't think anybody wants that to happen.

## GREEN

**WIE:** *The GREEN meme is the final level of the spiral's First Tier. Can you speak about the GREEN meme, how it emerged out of ORANGE and the role it plays in human emergence up the spiral?*

**DB:** At its peak, GREEN is communitarian, egalitarian, and consensual. Without ORANGE we wouldn't have GREEN, because in ORANGE the inner being was bypassed and ignored. Our science left us numb, without heart and soul, and with only the outer manifestations of success. The "good life" was measured only in materialistic terms. We discover that we have become alienated from ourselves, as well as from others. So GREEN, this fairly recent memetic code, began emerging about 150 years ago, out of the Ages of Industry, Technology, Affluence, and Enlightenment, to declare that in all of these undertakings, the basic human being has been neglected. The focus shifts from personal achievement

to group- and community-oriented goals and objectives—for GREEN, we are all one human family.

GREEN begins by making peace with ourselves and then expands to looking at the dissonance and conflicts in society and wanting to make peace there, too, addressing the economic gaps and inequities created by ORANGE, and also by BLUE and by RED, to bring peace and brotherhood so we can all share equally. Gender roles are derigidified, glass ceilings opened, affirmative action plans are implemented, and social class distinctions blurred. Spirituality returns as a nondenominational, nonsectarian "unity."

**WIE:** *And since GREEN is the final meme level of First Tier, it must be preparing us to make the transition up to the "Being" levels of the spiral's Second Tier.*

**DB:** Yes, because what GREEN has accomplished, in a very positive sense, is the cleansing of the spiral, declaring an equality of all the different experiences of life. It weakens the control of BLUE and ORANGE, allowing the PURPLE and RED indigenous people to have their place in the sun and their time on CNN. It works, you see, to find equality and sameness and sensitivity. And it is doing so for a very good purpose: because without GREEN, we could not go to YELLOW and Second Tier.

**AM I GREEN? WELL, AM I A GOOD EXAMPLE** of someone who's environmental, egalitarian, sensitive, spiritual, open-minded, and culturally aware? You better believe it! Has being GREEN given rise to a passion for spiritual transformation (YELLOW/TURQUOISE)? Yes. Has my GREENness also seriously impeded spiritual transformation? Absolutely! It all started with my very GREEN parents—cultured, intellectual, left-wing types. Both Ph.Ds. Both teachers. They divorced when I was six. At that time divorce was rare—I came from the only “broken family” on the block. In fact, both sets of grandparents—divorced too—were also well ahead of their time. A photograph of my father in an anti-Vietnam War demonstration appeared on the front page of the New York Times in 1970. My first experience of smoking marijuana was with him—he grew it! My mother always complained bitterly about Republicans (BLUE/ORANGE), as well as about my father. She worked with young children, many of them disadvantaged. She was their tireless advocate and railed against the schools that consigned them to failure.

In my family, there was more than a fair bit of indulgent, narcissistic behavior (RED) and not a whole lot of discipline (BLUE). Sometimes, I wistfully imagined growing up with the neighbors—one particularly close-knit family who were regular church-goers (definitely BLUE). I longed for some structure and role-modeling, but then quickly felt suffocated by the thought of it. My musings concluded with choosing the family I had. In the end, despite the lack of cohesion and, dare I say, character, I somehow sensed that my family set me on a road of more open-ended possibility. And it was true. My spiritual journey started young, fueled by my parents' evolved appreciation of things cultural, humanitarian, and philosophical. I grew up reading the theologian Martin Buber, the existentialists Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, the novels of D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce. And now, in my forties, on the path of transformative spiritual possibility (Second Tier)—thanks in large part to the early inspiration they gave me—I'm also beginning to realize that growing up GREEN can have its downside, and that my spiritual path is strewn with the wreckage of that legacy: narcissism, arrogant individualism, and a resistance to hierarchy and authority.

But getting back to my family, now that I think about it, all this GREENness actually started with my grandmother. On cold rainy days, she would comment: “Jessica, this is Nixon weather—nasty and rotten!”

## The “Mean Green Meme”

**WIE:** Dr. Beck, my memetic “center of gravity” is most certainly in GREEN. And I'm not alone: the GREEN meme is both the leading edge of Western culture at this time and is for many, like myself, the dominant conceptual and psychological paradigm. As I have learned, each meme, including GREEN, has both its positive and negative manifestations. So what I would like to know is how the GREEN meme is currently creating Life Conditions problems that we must respond to in order to evolve up the spiral.

**DB:** As I said, GREEN is an essential step to YELLOW and Second Tier, but it's so expensive—it absorbs rather than contributes.

**WIE:** Why do you say that GREEN is expensive?

**DB:** Because it is expensive to provide for everyone without requiring some kind of contribution other than being present for the handout. Most noble “Great Society” programs have not worked, and those who have tried socialism as their version of GREEN are finding that that is not the answer either.

**WIE:** And what do you mean when you say GREEN “absorbs rather than contributes”?

**DB:** It uses the resources that ORANGE has built, but because it dislikes ORANGE, it backs away from growth. Growth and consumption are bad. It wants to use resources already available and redistribute them so everybody can catch up. GREEN is a wonderful system, but ironically, it assumes that everyone enjoys the same level of affluence that it has.

**WIE:** I certainly recognize that in my own experience: my high standard of living allows me to be very self-satisfied and very egalitarian, all at the same time!

**DB:** Right. Only those people who have been successful in ORANGE—who have good bank accounts, who have some guarantee of survival, who don't have the wolf at the door—will begin to think GREEN. But unfortunately, when GREEN starts launching these attacks on the BLUE and ORANGE meme levels—the nuns with rulers and the fat cats in corporate suites—it's like a person who climbs to the top of a house and then throws down the ladder that got him up there.

**WIE:** What effects are we seeing from the negative expression of the GREEN meme?

**DB:** Unhappily, what this negative version of GREEN does is to destroy the capacity of ORANGE and BLUE social and economic systems to actually address the gaps that GREEN itself has identified. It destroys ORANGE economic structures. And it also destroys BLUE authoritarian systems, which are necessary to control RED, as we can see all too clearly in the example of Zimbabwe today. It therefore becomes counterproductive. It makes things worse. It relieves RED of the responsibility to learn discipline and purpose in BLUE-ORANGE, because it loves the indigenous people but tends to read into them greater complexity, as it sees them as “noble savages.” And in destroying the authoritarian, purifying systems in BLUE and ORANGE, there's the flooding of the RED undisciplined, egocentric, impulsive



behavior into the GREEN zone, both in one's self and in societies. And it is this unhealthy meshing of RED and GREEN, in which strong egocentric narcissism combines with pontifications about humanity and equality, that becomes the breeding ground for what Ken Wilber and I call the "Mean Green Meme," or "boomeritis," so called because the boomer generation was the first to enter the GREEN meme *en masse*.

**WIE:** *Ken Wilber's book, Boomeritis, certainly made me realize that I was, indeed, infected with this postmodern "virus"!*

**DB:** You see, the whole idea of the "Mean Green Meme" is a rhetorical strategy. Ken and I asked: How do we uncap GREEN? How do we keep it moving? Because so much of it has become a stagnant pond, in our view. So we said, let's invent the Mean Green Meme. Let's shame it a bit. Let's hold up a mirror and show it what it's doing, with the hope that it will separate the Mean Green Meme from legitimate healthy GREEN. Let's expose enough people to the duplicity and artificiality and self-serving nature of their own belief systems around political correctness to finally get the word out that there's something beyond that.

It is a drastic measure, a rhetorical strategy to create a symbol that will hopefully give people an understanding that what they are doing is actually destroying the very thing they want to accomplish.

**WIE:** *What are the spiritual and psychological implications of the Mean Green Meme?*

**DB:** GREEN starts with the search for self. "I want to get to know myself. I want to deal with the hidden child in me. I want to make peace, I want to find tranquility." So I go into a sensitivity training session, where I get feedback; I go downward, inward, to look at all my life experiences and try to remove the guilt. GREEN hates guilt. And it wants to deal with the rage, from what happened to it, as a victim. But GREEN is a relativistic system. And much of GREEN is so naïve, thinking, "All people are good people. It's society that makes them bad. There are no bad people! There is no evil. That's all a myth. Everyone is going to love us." Well, September 11 was a wake-up call, and for the first time GREEN began to see the ugly face of RED/BLUE. Ever since that point, a lot more people are becoming interested in the work we are doing.

**MY MOTHER WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR A NOT INSIGNIFICANT NUMBER** of transcendent moments in my life, mostly associated with music and dance. She frequently took me to New York's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, often to see the Russian dancer, Natalia Makarova. Makarova's interpretations of the great balletic works were so sublime, so transcendent, they brought you to tears. In the final moment of a particularly extraordinary performance of Romeo and Juliet, the entire audience—perhaps four thousand people—simultaneously rose in one collective expression of awe. It was nothing less than a spiritual experience. My mother turned to me and said, "Jess, you are witnessing the greatest dancing that ever was, and maybe ever will be."

But the legacy of my unstructured **GREEN** upbringing is one of contradiction: high aesthetic and spiritual sensibilities married to the narcissistic need for security and emotional affirmation. It's the kind of situation that leaves you at odds with yourself, and you don't quite know why. By fourteen or fifteen, the gnawing hunger that had been floating in my experience for quite some time was magnetized to something outside myself: guys. Could relationship bring ultimate fulfillment? I certainly hoped so, and I definitely gave it a good shot—actually, a lot of shots.

Soon after turning thirty, I met my first spiritual teacher, a Korean Buddhist monk. One afternoon he said to me, "Jessica, everything about you is beautiful, except your choice in men." After a long line of relationships, I couldn't help but acknowledge the truth of the second half of that sentence, and the first half really appealed to me. A powerful yogi, he had unusual healing and intuitive abilities (**PURPLE**). "I'm the best health insurance you can have," he reassured me. "I can cure you of anything." Talk about security. I wanted it! Plus, I could learn how to meditate and be spiritual too. The perfect combination. Early one morning, practicing the meditation technique he gave me, high up in the mountains of South Korea, all my thoughts suddenly dropped away, and what was left was the unconditional Oneness of everything. As time went on, he suggested I move to Korea, begin long-term training at his monastery, and become . . . a nun (**BLUE**). A nun? Those experiences of Oneness had revealed the true nature of things. Korea was fascinating and colorful. I was captivated by this teacher's unusual abilities and powers. But becoming a nun was quite a leap. I got cold feet. Was it my unstructured liberal upbringing (**GREEN**) with its narcissistic impulses (**RED**) that made me feel stifled by the prospect of this lifelong commitment (**BLUE**), even if it was spiritual? I couldn't tell, but one fateful day in Seoul, after much soul-searching, I decided to look elsewhere for a path to Second Tier.

## Life Conditions

**WIE:** You said earlier that new intelligences—new meme levels—are formed in response to our Life Conditions. No one can deny that the Life Conditions that now confront us as a global human community are more challenging and dangerous than those of any previous moment in history. Could you speak about these Life Conditions and the role they play in our next evolutionary transition?

**DB:** What seems to have happened in our lifetime, for good or ill, is that we have learned the basic codes and principles of life itself. We are confronted with mind-blowing choices—everything from shaping natural habitats to gene splicing to using science in various ways to alter the human experience. I don't think any of us realize yet what that's going to mean. So we're now in this position: we act like gods. We can change the future, and we have never before had this capacity as a species. So once again, we find that, not through our failure but through our success, we are confronted with extremely dangerous conditions.

And furthermore, power in the form of nuclear weaponry developed in the more complex **ORANGE** meme, which has the stabilizing influence of the previous **BLUE** code in it, is now under the control of a **RED** meme that has no **BLUE** influence, no discipline and accountability, no sense of the potential for mutual destruction that emerged in **ORANGE** along with that particular technological development. **RED** has a short time-frame about power and that's one hell of a problem. That is, is it not, one of the primary risks that we face as a species.

**WIE:** Adding to this pressure is the fact that life is changing at an ever-increasing rate. The quote I'm about to read you, by inventor and futurist Ray Kurzweil, conveys the enormous change that we, as humans, are both precipitating and simultaneously trying to adapt to:

Centuries ago, people didn't think that the world was changing at all. Their grandparents had the same lives that they did, and they expected their grandchildren would do the same, and that expectation was largely

# the MEMES: worldviews and realities



## **TURQUOISE MEME**

An elegantly balanced system of interlocking forces



## **YELLOW MEME**

A chaotic organism forged by differences and change



## **GREEN MEME**

A human habitat in which we share life's experiences



## **ORANGE MEME**

A marketplace full of possibilities and opportunities



## **BLUE MEME**

An ordered existence under the control of the ultimate truth



## **RED MEME**

A jungle where the strongest and most cunning survive



## **PURPLE MEME**

A magical place alive with spirit beings and mystical signs



## **BEIGE MEME**

A natural milieu where humans rely on instincts to stay alive

# a spiral wizard at work

South Africa, 1983: Dr. Don Beck mediating a management/union process to improve the working and life conditions of blacks in a factory close to Johannesburg.



I MADE OVER SIXTY-THREE TRIPS to South Africa between 1981 and 1999, launching the South African initiative first called "Strategic Evolution." During that period, my basic role was to reshape the definitions the various sectors of society were using to stereotype each other, replacing the usual racial/ethnic categories with an understanding of these value system or memetic differences, all of which were alive in that global microcosm. The complexity of the South African situation had been simplified down to what is morally right or wrong along race lines, and that was a grave mistake. Much sympathy was lavished on the black "struggle," and rightfully so. But getting rid of what they didn't want—apartheid—was not the same thing as getting what they did want—a just and prosperous society. In the final analysis, a black, one-party-state doctrinaire nationalism (as in Zimbabwe today) would be no better than an Afrikaner version of the same.

So, rather than attack the Afrikanervolk and their rather rigid, exclusive belief system around race, I simply challenged them to develop technology and agriculture in Africa—as their highest calling. As Franklin Sonn, the South African ambassador to the United States, said, my work "helped educate white people that there was a life, and even a life abundant, beyond apartheid." To get this message out, I appeared on television, on radio, at academic institutions, and in open sessions all over the country. A series of six articles of mine, which appeared in all the South African newspapers in April of 1989, was influential in convincing Afrikaner political

leaders in Pretoria to release Nelson Mandela and start the peace process.

But I paid a heavy price and was severely criticized for my work in South Africa. Clare Graves had warned me to plan for a personal attack from the GREEN egalitarian system for even being in South Africa in the first place, "selling out to the white, racist, apartheid regime." I was advocating a different solution than what GREEN demanded, which was the instant redistribution of power because, according to GREEN, the only reason for the gap in development between European and African was blatant racism. The unhealthy expression of GREEN egalitarianism is to "deconstruct" the BLUE and ORANGE social, economic, and political architecture since that alone is supposedly the cause of human suffering. But those in the "struggle industry" had little idea of the scorched earth they were to inherit if their tactics for disinvestment, sanctions, and Western isolation were to succeed. In fact, sanctions cut both ways. Jobs were lost, never to return. The medical establishment was severely crippled. Much of the essential infrastructure disintegrated. Many good people with high skill levels have left the country and, alas, the AIDS pandemic is sweeping the *veldt*. I think there was a much better way to transform that whole society in a healthy fashion, and many who backed sanctions in South Africa have told me they now realize what deep and permanent damage was done to the country.

I believe that if they started over again, South Africans would do a number of things differently. And yet, the fact that the society emerged without a civil war is simply remarkable. But to me, apartheid was not the problem; it was a symptom of the inability to figure out the meshing of European and African modes of thought, to stitch together a new South African fabric. I went to South Africa because I believed that something entirely different, yet just and democratic, was waiting to be discovered, managed by new, more complex levels of thinking that would appear, driven by the Life Conditions they all faced together. If the social mosaics could successfully work together for the common good, I believed that South Africans could point the way for the true integration of the entire planet. I felt that if I could discover the nature of the deep conflict, perhaps I could work behind the scenes in empowering them to bridge their own great divides. There were many, many South African heroes who were involved; I was simply a pathfinder, a map-maker, and a cheerleader. The Zulus named me "Amizimuthi," which means "One with Strong Medicine."

*What seems to have happened in our lifetime, for good or ill, is that we have learned the basic codes and principles of life itself. So we're now in this position: we act like gods. We can change the future, and we have never before had this capacity as a species.*

fulfilled. . . . What's not fully understood is that the pace of change is itself accelerating, and the last 20 years are not a good guide for the next 20 years. We're doubling the paradigm shift rate, the rate of progress, every decade. This will actually match the amount of progress we made in the whole 20th century, because we've been accelerating up to this point. The 20th century was like 25 years of change at today's rate of change; and the next 25 years we'll make four times the progress you saw in the 20th century. And we'll make 20,000 years of progress in the 21st century, which is almost a thousand times more technical change than we saw in the 20th century.

**DB:** Oh, that's an awesome quotation. But it assumes that our biological genetic systems have the complexity of codes in them to support that amount of change that quickly. There is already beginning to be some doubt in the minds of those who study our immune system as to whether or not we actually have a capacity to handle the complexity that's being demanded of us, even physically. So that quote presumes an organism that is able to assimilate that amount of change. I don't know if that's the case. I do know that today we are subjected to *unbelievable* change because there are billions of people who, from my perspective, are passing through different layers and levels of the spiral simultaneously. So rather than our species moving in a singular advance along a horizontal line, it turns out that multiple changes are happening up and down the spiral. Many are now moving into zones that we vacated three hundred years ago.

Then you add in other things, like the impact of the microchip. Furthermore, as we learn more about ourselves in studies of molecular biology, we are uncovering the so-called mystery of our genetics. We can do cloning; we can do gene splicing—but what if we mess it up? What if we release biogenic agents, or bugs, that attack all carbon life? When we begin to play around with the deepest codes in our biology, no one can foresee

what the flutters of little butterfly wings\* in Chaos Theory will produce down the line. That's why there's so much stress on us, which also means we might be looking for new organizational forms—more ensembles of people—because no single person is going to be able to keep all these things in mind.

**WIE:** *Evolutionary biologist Elisabet Sahtouris has said that "stress is the only thing that causes evolution." Is there a relationship between the increasingly greater levels of stress we are experiencing in our current Life Conditions and the potential for a significant percentage of us to evolve up the spiral?*

**DB:** Well, evolution does take crisis. It does take wake-up calls. But that, in and of itself, does not guarantee there will be upward movement. If the Huns are at the gate, literally, for people, or if they're suddenly under threat of losing their job because of downsizing or economic collapse, the energy and the capacity for more complex thinking actually begin to erode, and an earlier, or lower, priority suddenly dominates.

So in addition to the crisis, there has to be some stability in the basic memetic systems. And there has to be the capacity to create new conceptual systems, because just being exposed to problems may regress the whole society. This is exactly what happened in Zimbabwe, which was a very richly endowed place. Now there is the virtual starvation of millions there. That's why stress in itself is not the key. As Nobel prize winner Ilya Prigogine would say, when previous systems start to dissipate, we reach that zone where there will either be an upsurge to a more complex system or a downshift to a less complex one. It happens in that critical zone, that tipping point. Though stress crises are certainly necessary to break out of a memetic paradigm, that in and of itself is no guarantee that we'll make the kind of emergence that is necessary. So far, we have.

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\*The "butterfly effect" illustrates the essence of Chaos Theory. It is the notion that the flapping of a butterfly's wing will create a disturbance that, amplified by the chaotic motion of the atmosphere, will eventually change large-scale weather patterns, so that long-term behavior becomes impossible to forecast.

IF THERE EVER WAS THE PERFECT GREEN EXISTENCE that simultaneously answered every First Tier need for security, I had found it at forty. In the “Green Mountain State” of Vermont, no less, surrounded by organic farms and neighborly folks! After spending ten months driving forty thousand miles, literally, all over the state, looking for the perfect place, my partner and I bought it: a magical, quintessentially postcard-perfect New England farm, complete with a country farmhouse, barn, maple sugar house, pond, fields, and 180-degree views of Vermont’s magnificent mountains. The soil was so fertile that everything in the compost pile took root. A photograph from the 1940s showed a farmer standing next to the barn with a fifteen-foot corn stalk. Our plan was to start a small organic farm, to create a haven for life, including our own. And as if that wasn’t enough—through my partner’s inheritance, I would never again have financial concerns or have to worry about making a living. What could be better . . . ?

Well, spiritual transformation—my own. As the flush of our new farm wore off, I was haunted. In fact, I had been haunted long before we bought the farm, but had gone ahead with it anyway. (First Tier dies hard.) I still thought I could find what I was looking for in personal relationship—a decision ideologically justified by the eco-driven dream described above. (GREEN and relationship get another chance.) So I raked, I mowed, I weeded, I tried to find ultimate meaning with my partner, but nothing seemed to appease this inner restlessness. One afternoon, I drove to Boston to hear spiritual teacher Andrew Cohen speak. The haunted, restless part of myself rejoiced at what was revealed: a higher purpose and untold possibility. And back at the farm, I became even more unsettled. One morning, I was standing in the kitchen next to the maple syrup cans and had a vision: a funnel of pure energy was pulling me headlong into it. I looked out at the trees. Nothing could be more beautiful than our new farm. But no matter how pristine was my own small corner of paradise, no matter how wonderful were the personal Life Conditions I had created for myself, the world was in desperate shape, and those larger Life Conditions seemed to be generating an undeniable calling, a higher purpose that was coming from way beyond all my GREEN ideas, from way beyond my relationship, from way beyond the maple trees, and from way beyond the mountains. No matter how beautiful this place was—and it sure was beautiful—it simply wasn’t enough. Having turned forty, my midlife crisis took the form of an inner imperative: I had to follow this calling, for the sake of life itself. When, a month later, I decided to leave to pursue spiritual transformation for real, my dad was surprisingly even-keeled. A seasoned philosophy professor, he remarked lovingly, “Jess, of all my kids, you’re the one who makes me glad that I’m a philosopher.” An evolved response if ever I heard one, which made it just that little bit easier to take the leap to Second Tier.

## The Leap to Second Tier

**WIE:** Your colleague, the late Clare Graves, had a prophetic sense of the evolutionary transition we would be called to make. Thirty years ago he said, “Humans must prepare for a momentous leap. . . . It is not merely a transition to a new level of existence but the start of a new ‘movement’ in the symphony of human history.” Can you speak about the transformation that is required for us to survive our current Life Conditions, and evolve to Second Tier?

**DB:** In the late 1970s, Graves began to find, in his research and through observations, thinking patterns that he could not explain. He began to observe, in certain people he was testing, an extraordinary quality and complexity in decision-making and other aspects of cognition. They seemed to have different kinds of minds. They could find more solutions more quickly. They seemed not to be driven by status. There was the dropping away of fear, which is perhaps the most significant marker. Fear seemed to have vanished. Now caution didn’t, but fear did. Tribal safety (PURPLE), raw power (RED), salvation for all eternity (BLUE), individual success (ORANGE), and the need to be accepted (GREEN) all diminished in importance. Instead there was a growing curiosity about just being alive in the expansive universe.

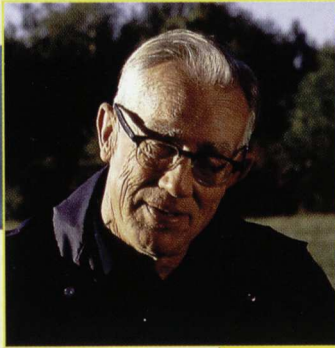
**WIE:** The dropping away of fear would certainly signify an enormous shift in human consciousness and in the motivations that

shape our human existence. Did Clare Graves find any other indications of this approaching evolutionary transition?

**DB:** I believe he had early evidence of minds that were becoming aware of the problems we are facing today, long before these problems became visible to the rest of us. He used to tell me that he felt that probably one in ten thousand brains is produced with different biological features and frequencies. And those individuals don’t conform to the norms of society because their minds are already set for a different paradigm. He finally came to the conclusion that something unique was happening here that didn’t appear to be just the next step up from the GREEN level. It seemed to be a new category. Life Conditions that would require this new thinking complexity that he observed three decades ago have finally appeared on the scene. But his observations were way before the microchip, before the end of the Cold War, and before the discovery of DNA and molecular biology.

So Graves sensed that a change of a profound nature was occurring, one that was beyond the sum total of the first six memetic systems combined. Now that, of course, was a theory. But as we look at the extraordinary complexity we are facing, this theory seems to gain more and more credibility. Because now we can see the planet from the moon, and now we have these wonderful scanning devices and satellites that can even

# the leap to second tier



Dr. Clare Graves, 1980

*"The present moment finds our society attempting to negotiate the most difficult, but at the same time the most exciting transition the human race has faced to date. It is not merely a transition to a new level of existence but the start of a new 'movement' in the symphony of human history."*

Clare Graves

*"Like everything around us, we are in a state of constant motion. We are shaped by the Code of the Spiral. In short, we can change our own psychology. The brain can rewire itself. Society is not static. Today's problems are yesterday's solutions. Evolution and revolution are part of our nature. We are on perpetual treks of the mind. Many believe we are passing now through such a momentous transformation, a major turning point, a history-making sea change. A new and entirely different pattern of thought is beginning to emerge world-wide and in various fields of human activity."*

*This surge into the Second Tier involves a shift into a totally new dimension of thinking, a new conceptual order. The supreme issue is restoration of the world so that life may continue—not just human life, but life itself. For the first time man is able to face existence in all its dimensions. grounded in a value system rooted truly in knowledge and cosmic reality instead of delusions brought on by animal and social needs. The mind is suddenly open for cognitive roaming over the entire human tapestry and up the evolutionary Spiral."*

Don Beck & Graham Linscott

*The Crucible: Forging South Africa's Future*

penetrate beneath surfaces, and for the first time we can begin to understand the planet itself as a total ecosystem in a way that was never possible before. Together with that, the world in which we now live is struggling with the appearance of all of the memetic cultural expressions at once—ethnic tribes, ego-centric warlords, both dangerous and redemptive “isms,” a whole plateful of opportunists and materialists-in-the-making, and a host of postmodern egalitarian political, religious, and professional structures—oh my, it makes a grown man want to weep. What do we do?

**WIE:** *Right—that’s the big question. How will the leap to Second Tier answer this question?*

**DB:** At this point, all of the old memetic systems have been weighed in the balance and have been found wanting. While the full display of the YELLOW meme, the first level of Second Tier, is years in the future, keep in mind that the ultimate texture and capacity within this next memetic level must match and/or exceed the complexity of the Life Conditions that it confronts. It must sense the big picture and the interconnection of everything. So YELLOW will have an enhanced vertical perspective with the ability to transcend *and* include and value what came before,

and also to anticipate what will be next.

I believe that the eighth meme code—TURQUOISE—will rise in conjunction with the seventh, YELLOW. You could think of YELLOW as “left brain with feelings” and TURQUOISE as “right brain with data.” TURQUOISE will focus on the larger waves and energy flows and will work on behalf of the Life Force itself, in its many manifestations in life-forms on the planet. The Second Tier thought structures will combine elements of YELLOW and TURQUOISE in searching for the quality and depth of thinking that can deal with complex problems. And with this is the recognition that the whole spiral itself is spiritual and that we’re on this upward ladder of human emergence. *That’s spirituality.*

But since memes are not types of people but forms of adaptive intelligences *in* people, YELLOW and TURQUOISE rarely exist in full measure in any person alive at this time. Different people possess different fragments, or components, or even versions, and this makes the formation of what I would call “creative brain syndicates” with insightful interactions and dialogues even more important. So it ought to engender some serious talk for the first time, and not just in isolated conferences where everyone does their own thing. It’s going to require some deep dialogue. And whether or not, once again, humans can rise to the occasion is the existential question of the age.

**MY LIFE FLASHED BEFORE MY EYES.** *It didn’t matter that I had given up the farm in Vermont, become a student of a spiritual teacher, and joined a community of students who were genuinely dedicated to spiritual transformation. My GREENness hadn’t gone anywhere. (Nor had the rest of the First Tier memes, for that matter.) Terri, a friend, said to me one day, “Jessica, you’ve been complaining about how we, as a group, are not environmental enough, but just look back on your own life. Despite your eco-image, you were consuming a lot more when you were living in Vermont than you are now!” It was true: My Audi was sitting in the driveway. Shopping sprees were infrequent. Living and working with many others, I was using less electricity, oil, gas, and water. If I let my GREEN self-righteous self-importance drop away for a minute, I had to admit that, objectively speaking, I was actually more environmental than I had ever been in Vermont. How illuminating, and ironic! And together with my long-held GREEN identity, all sorts of other ideas and ideals were exposed, and the First Tier memes fell out like a deck of cards.*

*In light of these new glimpses from a higher perspective, I now realized I really had been at odds with myself. My GREEN eco-consciousness was always in conflict with my ORANGE materialism. My RED independence was in opposition to my GREEN need for acceptance and communality, and the “Mean Green Meme” was hell-bent on pitting itself against Second Tier, luring me with its righteous idealism and narcissistic demands so I wouldn’t have to meet the evolutionary challenge to trust, let go of fear, and actually transform.*

*Now, getting back to enlightenment, well, as we’ve been finding, “Everybody wants to get enlightened but nobody wants to change.” But, to be honest, I didn’t think that applied to me. I mean, I was spiritual. I was serious. I had made sacrifices. But somewhere deep down, evolution was evolving my perspective and I realized: Clare Graves was right, the leap to Second Tier is “momentous,” because it’s pointing to nothing less than the difference between inner conflict and profound inner resolution between all the parts of myself, all the memes. As Don Beck pointed out, it is the dropping away of fear. And that’s no small thing. It means being completely at home in the universe.*

*And in that shift in perspective, I discovered more: the whole spiral is necessary. It’s what got me to where I am today, and to the iota of humility required to recognize that I really am part of the “never-ending upward quest” that Don Beck describes. And this is only the beginning. Because freedom from fear and irresolution means freedom to stand in awe of this miraculous, ever-ascending spiral of human emergence. And freedom to stand in awe of the cosmic order that creates it. As depths of insight and vast realms of consciousness glint from the upper reaches of the spiral, the real possibilities begin. ■*

Excerpts and supporting material used with author’s permission from Beck, Don E. and Cowan, Christopher, *Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership and Change* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Inc., 1996); Beck, Don E., “The Search for Cohesion in the Age of Fragmentation,” (article written for the 1999 State of the World Forum); Beck, Don and Linscott, Graham, *The Crucible: Forging South Africa’s Future* (Denton, TX: New Paradigm Press, 1991); Richard Dawkins quote on p. 111, from Dawkins, Richard, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford University Press, 1989), taken from the website, [www.unlinkingeye.com](http://www.unlinkingeye.com); Clare Graves quotes on pp. 124-125 from Graves, Clare, “Human Nature Prepares for a Momentous Leap,” *The Futurist* (1974); Ray Kurzweil quote, pages 120-121, taken from the website, [www.edge.org](http://www.edge.org); Elisabet Sahtouris quote, p. 123, as told to WIE editor, Carter Phipps, Spring, 2002.

leap into the future



[www.andrewcohen.org](http://www.andrewcohen.org)


enlightenment for the 21st century

# Transformation by Design

an interview with Dee Hock

**YOU DON'T HAVE TO UNDERSTAND** chaos theory to appreciate the new species of corporate organization that Dee Hock has unleashed on the planet, an organizational paradigm that could very well represent the next step in the collective evolution of the human family. You don't even have to know anything about corporate structure, nor do you have to nurse a secret passion for institutional reform. All you have to do is take a long look at a snowflake, reflect on a forest, ponder the neurons in your brain—or use your Visa card—and you will begin to appreciate the intricate, manifold hive of pulsing impulses and multidimensional parleys of information that give rise to everything in the created universe. Sound perplexing? Well, as a group of scientists are discovering, this orderly chaotic buzz is the way of the world, and if you just sit down and think about it, *really* think hard about it, or take long walks in the woods like Dee Hock did, you might find yourself surfing waves of miraculous and intricate order foaming at the narrow edge of chaos. Look deeply enough and you will discover the true nature of all of evolution's architecture, which

by Melissa Hoffman



*"A door like this has cracked open five  
or six times since we got up on our  
hind legs. It's the best possible time to  
be alive, when almost everything you  
thought you knew is wrong."*

*Arcadia by Tom Stoppard*

is what this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* is all about: *living transformation*.

Dee Hock is the founder and former CEO of Visa International, the most successful business venture on Earth. Could this former bank manager with a conscience be evolution's unlikely hero? Visa owes its success, according to Hock, to its structure, which is nothing less than an evocation of nature's "cha-ordic" laws. Hock coined the term *chaordic* to describe that perfect balance of *chaos* and *order* where evolution is most at home. Yes, that's right. A business venture that takes its cues from Mother Evolution, whose "trademark" dynamism, changing change, and explosive originality are forever groping to innovate, prosper, and extend creation's euphoric reach further and further into manifestation.

If you don't think that something as common as the plastic Visa credit card in your wallet could be part of evolution's plan, consider this: Visa International

*... espouses no political, economic, social or legal theory, thus transcending language, custom, politics and culture to successfully connect a bewildering variety of more than 21,000 financial institutions, 16 million merchants and 800 million people in 300 countries and territories. Annual volume of \$1.4 trillion continues to grow in excess of twenty percent compounded annually. A staff of about three thousand people scattered in twenty-one offices in thirteen countries on four continents provides ... around-the-clock operation of two global electronic communication systems with thousands of data centers communicating through nine million miles of fiber-optic cable. Its electronic systems clear more transactions in one week than the Federal Reserve System does in a year.*

Hock has chronicled Visa's spectacular emergence along with his philosophical and personal odyssey in a book called *Birth of the Chaordic Age*. Therein he deftly disassembles assumptions you didn't even know you had; assumptions about how we have come to order, organize, and configure everything, from our desktops to our institutions to the very pattern of our thinking.

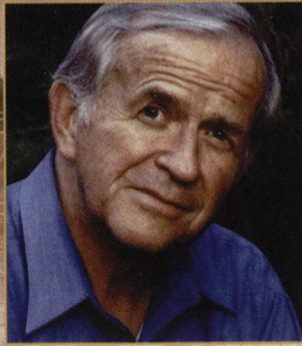
Hock wrote *Birth of the Chaordic Age* in the late nineties, years after walking away from the thriving Visa. He had spent the better part of ten years in retirement, restoring the degraded acreage around his ranch to vibrancy. Then, as the story goes, one night while reading Mitch Waldrop's *Complexity* (a book about chaos theory), he found illuminated in its pages an uncanny echo of the very principles he had invoked to bring Visa into being. His bucolic retirement was soon to come to an end (a fascinating story which you'll have to read about in his book).

You may be wondering what a chaordic organization looks like, and if you ask Hock, he would likely point you in the direction of a snowflake or a bee's wing. But fortunately his book, along with the website of the nonprofit organization he helped found

(The Chaordic Commons, [www.chaordic.org](http://www.chaordic.org)), explains this phenomenon in captivating detail. Principally, a chaordic organization is a self-organizing and self-evolving entity, which ends up looking more like a neural network (like the Internet) than a hierarchically-organized bureaucracy in which decision-making power is centralized at the top and trickles down through a series of well-regulated departments and managers. Chaordic organizations do not fear change or innovation. They are, by their very nature, supremely adaptive. They also tend to be inclusive, multicentric, and distributive and, ultimately, strongly cohesive due to their unshakable focus on common purpose and core principles. If you can't quite visualize it, there's a good reason, which Hock will explain in the following interview.

So the reason that this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* had to include Dee Hock—a corporate innovator whose personal risk taking and conscientious peeling of life's onion has led to the emergence of a new collective life-form—is this: our spiritual canon, while replete with examples of personal transformation, has rarely addressed the intricacies of real *collective* transformation. And since the ability of the *many* to communicate, coalesce, and coordinate as *one* may be the only hope for humanity's future, we thought that what Dee Hock had to offer was nothing less than a profound example, wrought out of his own sweat and experience, of just where we humans might be heading for our next evolutionary leap. Hock has proved that a very large group of individuals can come together under the cohesion of a unifying purpose while *enhancing*—rather than swallowing—the autonomy of each participating individual. To say that the individual and collective benefit each other in this arrangement would be an understatement, for, ideally, the intricate dance between part and whole endlessly releases new creative capacities in both. Hock talks a refreshing brand of truth and proves that it's possible for a unified yet diverse group of people to wend its way through tumultuous change while continuously growing and transforming itself as it embraces the hidden potentials of an unknown future.

Finally, Hock's own odyssey made us wonder: What would it take to be fully chaordic in this crazy, fomenting world, teetering on dual brinks of salvation and disaster? Must we, as Hock suggests, consistently sweep our minds of their old, beleaguered Newtonian concepts, which act as an invisible lens through which we behold a mechanistic and controllable world? What manner of dedication on our part would be needed to cast aside our old ways of thinking so that we might even begin to directly *perceive* the ever-present genius of evolution's design? In the following interview, Dee Hock talks to *WIE* about the mind-stopping implications of the "chaordic age," an age that may have begun more than thirty years ago, in part, with this ordinary bank manager, who looked around, saw what was happening, asked a heck of a *lot* of questions, and took action.



Dee Hock

## Transformation by Design

**WIE:** *In your book Birth of the Chaordic Age, you describe how you combined the first syllables of chaos and order, inventing the term chaordic to describe a dynamic form of organization modeled on the fundamental organizing principles of evolution and nature. Your work, the underpinnings of which have much in common with the science of chaos theory, involves reconceiving organizations according to these fundamental chaordic principles and represents a departure from the traditional, relatively rigid, mechanistic model that characterizes most organizations today.*

**DEE HOCK:** Yes, and to add to the definition a little more, *chaordic* simply describes the behavior of any self-governing organism or system that harmoniously blends what were previously conceived to be opposites, such as chaos and order or cooperation and competition. But most importantly, this is a *way of thinking*. And in fact, everything I could say about it, you already know. It's already there because you are chaordically organized. It's the way nature has been organizing things since the beginning of time, including you—your brain, your immune system—and every living thing. So in terms of a chaordic commercial, political, or social organization, the question becomes: Can you *evoke* it, or bring it into being?

**WIE:** *What inspired you to become involved in organizational transformation?*

**DH:** Well, years and years ago, I started to ask myself three very simple questions, which dominated my life for many years. One of them was, "Why are organizations everywhere, whether commercial, social, or religious, increasingly unable to manage their affairs?" The second question was, "Why are individuals throughout the world increasingly in conflict with and alienated from the organizations of which they're a part?" And the third was, "Why are society and the biosphere increasingly in disarray?" When I asked these questions to audiences a few years ago, they

didn't have that much meaning to most people. But with such recent events as September 11 and the collapse of Enron and WorldCom, it's all pretty obvious now. So if all those things are true—and to me they're just as obvious as the nose on anybody's face—there has to be some deep, universal, underlying thing we're not getting at. There has to be.

**WIE:** *How do you help people understand chaordic principles in relation to the current forms of organization that are so much a part of our lives?*

**DH:** An illustration I use to get people to understand it is this: I'll ask major corporate audiences: Why don't you just take all your traditional beliefs about organizations, and apply them to the neurons in your brain? Organize the neurons in your brain, the most complex, infinitely diverse organ that has ever emerged in evolution, as you would a corporation. The first thing you've got to do is appoint the Chief Executive neuron, right? Then you've got to decide which are going to be the Board of Directors neurons and the Human Resources neurons, and then you have to write an operating manual for it. Now, if you could organize your brain on that model, what would happen? You would instantly be unable to breathe until somebody told you how and where and when and how fast. You wouldn't be able to think or see. What if your immune system were organized on

this basis? First you'd have to do some market research to determine what virus, if any, was attacking you, right? Then you'd have to write a business plan for how you were going to deal with it. And you'd have to get it approved by the senior executive neurons in your brain. Then you'd have to have marching orders for all the various aspects of your immune system. Okay. So why in God's world do we think we can use something like the brain, which is organized on this beautiful set of chaordic principles to organize society in a superior manner? That's an exercise in arrogance and ego.

**WIE:** So, basically, what you're saying is that it just doesn't make sense for us, as part of evolution's intricate design, to think we can organize society in a manner that is superior to the way in which nature has so perfectly organized us?

**DH:** Exactly. It's unbelievably arrogant and foolish.

## THE COLLAPSE OF FLOAT

**WIE:** Before we talk further about why our old models need to be abandoned, I'd like to ask you about the current climate of change surrounding the emergence of chaordic systems. We just interviewed Don Beck, a leader in large-scale systemic transformation, and he emphasized how our climate of rapidly accelerating change and increasing complexity is generating the need for new organizational forms. This is how he put it:

We know what's happening everywhere on the planet within ten minutes after it happens, and it's on the TV news live. The complexity has been there in the past, but it didn't arrive here until the ship came in six

months later or by telegraph maybe twenty-four hours later. Now all these things that are happening on the planet are suddenly right in our face in real time. And that's one reason why there's so much stress on us, which also means that we might be looking for new organizational forms—more ensembles of people—because no single person is going to be able to keep all these things in mind.

*Now, you have actually brought a new organizational form into being. Does what Beck describes here match your experience?*

**DH:** Well, I agree completely with what he's saying, except I think he's understating the case. I use two different examples to try to get people to understand this: one called "float" and one called "CRUSTTI," which is an acronym for the Capacity to Receive, Utilize, Store, Transform, and Transmit Information. You can probably remember the days when a check would often take weeks to find its way through the banking system. That was called "float." This float was used as an early form of venture capital. Now, stop and think about other kinds of float. Think about information float (this is what Beck is speaking about): if you go back just a few centuries, it took, for example, almost a century for the knowledge about the smelting of iron ore to cross one continent. That brought in the Iron Age. When we landed on the moon, it was known and seen in every corner of the world in 1.4 seconds. Think about technological float: it took centuries for the wheel to gain universal acceptance. Now any microchip device can be in use around the world in weeks. Think about cultural float: it used to take centuries for one culture to even learn about or be exposed to a tiny bit of information about another. And now anything that becomes popular

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Peace Pilgrim

Peace Activist  
20th Century USA



**THAT CAME WHEN I WAS** out walking in the early morning. All of a sudden I felt very uplifted, more uplifted than I had ever been. I remember I knew *timelessness* and *spacelessness* and *lightness*. I did not seem to be walking on the earth. There were no people or even animals around, but every flower, every bush, every tree seemed to wear a halo. There was a light emanation around everything and flecks of gold fell like slanted rain through the air. This experience is sometimes called the illumination period.

The most important part of it was not the phenomena: the important part

of it was the realization of the oneness of all creation. Not only all human beings—I knew before that all human beings are one. But now I knew also a oneness with the rest of creation. The creatures that walk the earth and the growing things of the earth. The air, the water, the earth itself. And, most wonderful of all, *a oneness with that which permeates all and binds all together and gives life to all*. A oneness with that which many would call God.

Peace Pilgrim, *Peace Pilgrim* (Santa Fe, NM: Ocean Tree Books, 1991).

anywhere in the world can sweep through other countries in weeks. Consider space float: in just one long lifetime, a hundred years or so, we've gone from the speed of the horse to interstellar travel. People and materials now move in minutes when they used to move in months. And even life float—the time it takes to evolve new life-forms—is collapsing with genetic engineering.

What all this means is the loss of *change* float—the time between what was and what is going to be, between the past and the future—so the past then becomes ever less predictive, the future ever less predictable, and everything *is* accelerating change with one exception: our institutions. There has been no truly new concept of organization since the ideas of nation-state and corporation emerged several centuries ago.

Now even more important—and you have to think hard about this—is the history of what I call the “capacity to receive, utilize, store, transform, and transmit information.” If you go back to the first single-cell form of life, it clearly possessed the capacity to receive, to utilize, to store, to transform, and to transmit information. This capacity even precedes the cell, for that's the very definition of DNA. So the key to understanding what Beck is speaking about is that the greater the capacity of any entity or organization to receive, utilize, store, transform, and transmit information, the more diverse and complex the entity. You can track this capacity from particle to neutrino to nucleus to atom to amino acid to protein to molecule to cell to organ and to organism. Or the phrase I like to use: from bacteria to bee to bat to bird to buffalo right on through to the baseball player.

And evolution went on, and in time this ability to receive, utilize, store, transform, and transmit information escaped the individual entity and became shared—as the song of birds, the

sonar of bats, the pheromone of ants, or the language of humans. With the capacity to communicate, immediately came the evolution of complex communities of organisms: hives, flocks, tribes, herds, whatever. Language was a *huge* expansion of that capacity to deal with information. And immediately you had a huge leap in societal complexity. With mathematics, the first global language, you had the same thing—a huge increase in societal diversity and complexity. With the printing press came the capacity to include that which can be mechanically recorded and transported. Then the telegraph brought electronic capacity, and the telephone brought phonic capacity, and television brought visual capacity. Every single one of those expansions was immediately followed by a *huge* leap in societal complexity.

All of a sudden, just within the last three decades with the emergence of microtechnology, we have on the order of a thousand times better algorithms, five hundred thousand times more computing power per individual, and five hundred million times more mobility of information. As I like to say, the entire collective memory of the species—that means all known and recorded information—is going to be just a few keystrokes away in a matter of years. Now, what does that explosion in the capacity to receive, utilize, store, transform, and transmit information mean for organizational forms and for the complexity and diversity of our problems?

But that's nothing. Take nanotechnology—which in simple language is the engineering of self-replicating computers and assembly machines so tiny they can arrange atoms as though they were bricks—that's the way that we're going to be constructing organs, organisms, products, and services within three or four decades. With nanotechnology, information will move

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### St. Catherine of Siena

Christian Mystic  
14th Century Italy



“IF ONLY YOU COULD UNDERSTAND how I feel, Father! I don't believe that anyone who really knew how I feel inside could be obstinate enough not to be softened or be proud enough not to humble himself, for all that I reveal is nothing compared to what I feel. . . . My mind is so full of joy and happiness that I am amazed my soul stays in my body. . . . There is so much heat in my soul that this material fire seems cool by comparison, rather than to be giving out heat; it seems to have gone out, rather than to be still burning. . . . This heat has generated in my mind a renewal of purity and humility, so that I seem to have gone back to the age of four or five. And at the same time so much love of my fellow-men has blazed up in me that I could face death for them cheerfully and with great joy in my heart.”

George Lamb, *The Life of Catherine of Siena* (New York: P.J. Kennedy and Sons, 1946).

in speed and quantities hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times greater than it moves today, okay? And equally important, each such change brings an equal increase in our power to alter and destroy nature. That's where we are. So unless evolution has totally changed its ways, we're going to face an explosion of societal diversity and complexity, and a disruption of biological systems, enormously greater than we now experience or can yet imagine. The essential question then becomes: Can we deal with it with the same old seventeenth-century mechanistic command-and-control forms of organizations? There's not a snowball's chance in hell. I always tell my audiences, if you think this change isn't going to happen, or isn't happening, or that you can prevent it, or that you can operate in the old way and not deal with it, just try to remember the last time evolution rang your telephone number and asked your permission. It is going to happen. But there are two ways it could happen. We can continue to perpetuate these old forms and try to make the world behave in accordance with our old mechanistic internal model of reality, or we can change our internal model of reality. The first is not only foolish, it's futile. The second is difficult, but it is essential if we are to have a livable world.

**WIE:** *The way you're describing it, our individual and collective willingness to change our internal model of reality is fundamental to meaningful transformation. But what you seem to be saying is that what we're replacing the old model with isn't merely a new substitute model. What we're actually attempting to do is to align our perception and behavior with the essential nature of evolution.*

**DH:** Yes. We don't have to remain in this radically destructive mind-set and institutional-set. We can change, and the natural order of things could emerge in all of our societal organizations—government, commerce, religion—it's right there, waiting to happen. I often tell people that every mind is like a room in an old house, stuffed with very old furniture. Take any space in your mind and empty it of your old conceptions and new ones will rush in, good or bad. So change is more a getting rid of rather than an adding to or an acquiring.

## BEYOND THE MECHANISTIC MINDSET

**WIE:** *At the end of your book you emphasize that you hadn't anticipated the power of individuals' resistance to change. You noticed this phenomenon throughout your experience with Visa. Since then, how have you come to understand this resistance to change?*

**DH:** The reason people have so much trouble with change, I think, is a matter of conditioning. It arose many thousands of years ago, but essentially, this mechanistic way of thinking came into dominance about the time of Newton and Descartes, when Newtonian science postulated that the universe and everything in it could only be understood as a clocklike mechanism, a machine, with each part acting on the other part with precise

linear laws of cause and effect. So when this way of thinking came into being through science, we began to try to apply it to everything. Starting about four hundred years ago, we tried to organize every aspect of society based on this mechanistic, scientific perspective. The Newtonian way of thinking has marvelous uses. For example, if I go in the hospital for eye surgery, I don't want a chaotic operating room. If you're going to build a perfect silicon chip, you need a totally controlled, very clean, highly organized, almost mechanistic environment. But that doesn't mean it's a good way to run Intel, or a good way to run a health care system.

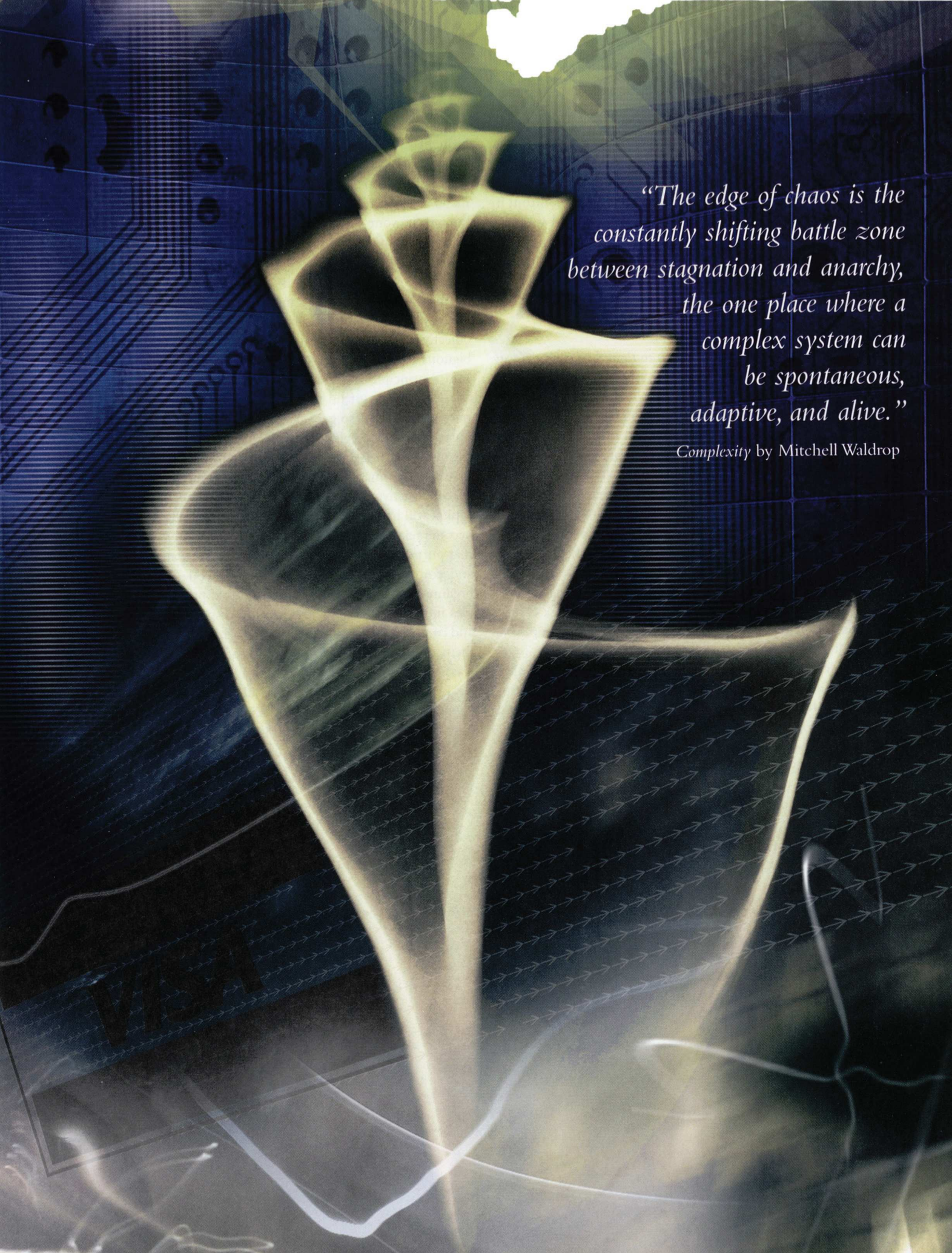
So for four hundred years we've been trying to build all our organizations as though the Newtonian mechanistic internal model of reality were universally applicable. You know, this person reports to that person who reports to that person. Planning comes from the top and is distributed down. Everything else—money, power—is distributed up. Everything has linear cause and effect, which leads to endless manuals of rules and regulations.

If you think about it, you realize that every institution you have experienced in your lifetime is consciously or unconsciously based on that metaphor and that model. Your school operated that way, and your church, and your community, and your state. Your internal model of reality is the machine. So it doesn't surprise me at all that it's difficult to think otherwise or even to really understand that you are thinking in a mechanistic way. Stress arises out of having this internal model of reality at a subconscious level, literally in your genes, without knowing you've got it, and without asking how you've got it, and why you've got it, and whether it's useful any longer. And it's enormously more difficult, even if you can intellectually understand it, to literally get it in the bone.

So it's just not surprising at all that people should have such difficulty after so many years of conditioning, and given the fact that even if they start thinking in a different way, they are immediately head-to-head with a society in which virtually every institution and situation is operating on the old Newtonian model. That's why it's difficult. I think it will take several or more generations to break completely free of the Newtonian mechanistic mindset.

**WIE:** *In light of the enormity of this conditioning and our reluctance to let it go, what do you think actually provokes the leap out of the old system? You were incredibly motivated to do this. What do you think it's going to take for individuals to be willing to endure the discomforts of leaving the old model behind?*

**DH:** Well, first of all, you really need to open your mind to try to understand what your existing internal model of reality is and how it functions. And then you need to familiarize yourself with it. Emerson had a wonderful line. He said, "Everywhere you go you take your giant with you." So you have this giant unconscious thing, this internal model of reality, against which you

The background is a complex, layered composition. A central, glowing yellow funnel of light tapers downwards, its edges blurred and wispy, suggesting movement or energy. This funnel is set against a dark blue background. In the upper left, there are faint, circular patterns resembling rivets or holes on a metallic surface. Diagonal lines, possibly representing circuit traces, run across the middle ground. The lower right portion of the image is filled with a dense, repeating pattern of small, white, arrow-like shapes pointing towards the right. At the very bottom, there are thin, white, curved lines that look like stylized waves or perhaps tangled wires. The overall effect is one of dynamic complexity and technological or scientific abstraction.

*"The edge of chaos is the  
constantly shifting battle zone  
between stagnation and anarchy,  
the one place where a  
complex system can  
be spontaneous,  
adaptive, and alive."*

*Complexity by Mitchell Waldrop*

judge and measure everything. You're never going to get rid of it, so you might as well turn around, introduce yourself to it, and say, "We're going to be together the rest of our lives, but I'm not going to let you drive my thinking any more. *You* have to live with my ability to think in a different way." You just confront it. I often tell audiences, "Lord, I was raised to command and control. I'm a sort of command-and-control-a-holic." I may never get it out of my system. But unless I understand it, I can't begin to deal with it.

## PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES

**WIE:** *How can a group of people learn to think in a different way on a collective level?*

**DH:** Well, you really have to go deep. I spent months and months asking myself, "What is an organization?" If I'm talking about institutional and organizational change, what am I really talking about? What is an organization in the deepest sense? It surely isn't just a set of bylaws, because I can write a set of bylaws and shove it in a desk drawer, and it just becomes an old moldering piece of paper. And if you really think deeply about it, you discover that every organization and every institution, without exception, has no reality save in your mind. It's not its buildings. Those are manifestations of it. It's not its name, it's not its logo, and it's not some fictional piece of paper called a stock certificate. It's not money. It is a mental concept around which people and resources gather in pursuit of common purpose.

Now let's follow this just a little further. If that institution has no reality save in your mind and the minds of all your associates and the people who deal with it, then what is its real nature? What's its real strength? And that led me to believe that the heart and soul of every organization, at least every healthy

organization, is *purpose and principles*. What is the purpose that brought you together and what is your system of beliefs about how you intend to conduct yourself in pursuit of that purpose? If your beliefs are based on the old model of top-down command and control, specialization, special privilege, and nothing but profit, your organization will, in time, turn toxic. It will become antithetical to the human spirit and destructive of the biosphere. The evidence is everywhere around us.

Your organization needs to be absolutely clear about purpose and principles and must be very careful to know what a purpose and a principle is—you know, a purpose is not an objective, it's not a mission statement—a purpose is an unambiguous expression of that which people jointly wish to become. And a principle is not a platitude—it is a fundamental belief about how you intend to conduct yourself in pursuit of that purpose. You have to get very precise about these things. If the purpose and principles are constructive and healthy, then your organization will take a very different form than anything that you ever imagined. It will release the human spirit and will be constructive of the biosphere. Natural capital and human capital will be released in abundance and monetary capital will become relatively unimportant. To put it another way, I believe that purpose and principle, clearly understood and articulated, and commonly shared, are the genetic code of any healthy organization. To the degree that you hold purpose and principles in common among you, you can dispense with command and control. People will know how to behave in accordance with them, and they'll do it in thousands of unimaginable, creative ways. The organization will become a vital, living set of beliefs.

I've found that it's very difficult to lead people through enough metaphors and enough thinking about this—you can only think about it so much and your circuit breakers just go out. You have to rest, reset them, and come back to it. And you

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

**Yaeko Iwasaki**

*Zen Practitioner  
20th Century Japan*



Dear Harada-Roshi:

Today for the first time I have attained great enlightenment. I am so overjoyed that all of me is dancing in spite of myself. No one but you can possibly understand such ecstasy. . . .

From the bottom of my heart I thank you and raise my hands in gassho to you.

Buddhas and patriarchs haven't deceived me! I have seen my Face before my parents were born clearer than a diamond in the palm of my hand. The

absolute truth of every word of the patriarchs and the sutras has appeared before my eyes with crystal clarity. . . .

My mind's eye is absolutely identical with yours—neither Buddhas nor devils can unnerve me. This state defies description. I have forgotten everything and returned to my real Home empty-handed. . . .

My world has been revolutionized. How vain and needless my anxious strivings of the past! By following your wise instructions and patient counsel, I wouldn't allow myself to rest satisfied

go over and over it. But what I find is that once you get a group of people who *really* begin to understand this, then energy, excitement, and enthusiasm literally explode out of them—they *know* what to do. You know, it's just in their nature. You can't stop it.

So to go back to the question of change—you can see that because of these four hundred years of intense conditioning, we've been taught to fear change. If you're in a rigid, mechanistic, cause-and-effect society and/or organization, then any change becomes a crisis in self-esteem. It destroys our identity, our sense of being, our sense of time and place. And we're never sure we're going to be of any value in the new order of things. We falsely see this as terrifying. But my God, this might be the greatest, most exciting adventure for the species that ever occurred.

**WIE:** *You're pointing to a strong relationship between an individual's willingness to change and the emergence of new organizational forms.*

**DH:** Once you understand that you and your organization are inseparable (since every organization exists only in your mind), then the idea that it's about individual change or it's about organizational change, and that one can proceed independently of the other, is utter nonsense. It takes both. I was working with one group—and this always happens in one way or another when people truly begin to understand chaordic concepts—one woman stopped the meeting to say, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. I thought we were here to work on changing our organizational structure. This is about changing *me*. I'll have to change my consciousness, my spirit, my way of thinking, in order to function in this new organizational form." She said, "I'll probably have to withdraw. I don't think I'll be capable of making that kind of personal change."

Individual and organizational change go hand in hand. It takes openness and a strong will to make such a change. And this comes back to why I started doing this work and what it takes to create an organization that's more harmonious with nature, and based on, the same concepts around which nature organizes every living thing and, in fact, organizes the inanimate functioning of the universe as well. When you start thinking this way, the distinction between animate and inanimate begins to vanish, and you can't be sure that the universe is not a form of life, a different manifestation of a living organism.

## ETERNAL BECOMING

**WIE:** *So for individuals to really go somewhere with this work requires that they embrace the evolutionary dynamics of the universe in a very personal way. This sounds like a thrilling prospect that, by its nature, provokes constant transformation.*

**DH:** I wrote in my book about one of my deepest beliefs, which is that life is not about doing, it's not even about being. Life is eternal becoming, or it's nothing. It can't exist without eternal becoming. Fundamentally, the whole story of evolution is a story of experimentation and change, is it not? So if you think you can freeze that, if you think you can create a controlled environment, you are living a life of total illusion. And you are going to be full of angst and conflict, because you are essentially trying to live contrary not only to nature and evolution but to your own nature. So change is not a strange thing. It's the very essence of life.

But the bigger question people always ask is, "But, gee, so if I'm embedded in these huge command-control organizations—in the school it's the same, and my church is much the same,

with the little peace which my still-deluded mind believed adequate. I can't tell you how joyous I am and how thankful for my present state. This is all the outcome of persistent zazen, of a determination never to stop with a small success but to go on no matter how many lifetimes elapse. . . .

Now I can commence the unending task of rescuing every living being. This makes me so happy I can scarcely contain myself.

All is radiance, pure radiance. I can now forever progress toward perfection in natu-

ral harmony with my daily life. . . .

I have been resurrected, as have you and everything else, for all eternity. When you read this letter you too, I believe, will shed tears of thanksgiving. . . .

You alone can understand my mind. Yet there is neither you nor me. My body and mind in fact have completely dropped away. . . .

Since it is impossible to talk of all this except with one who has actually experienced himself, I had to write to you. I imagine you must be happy to have such a

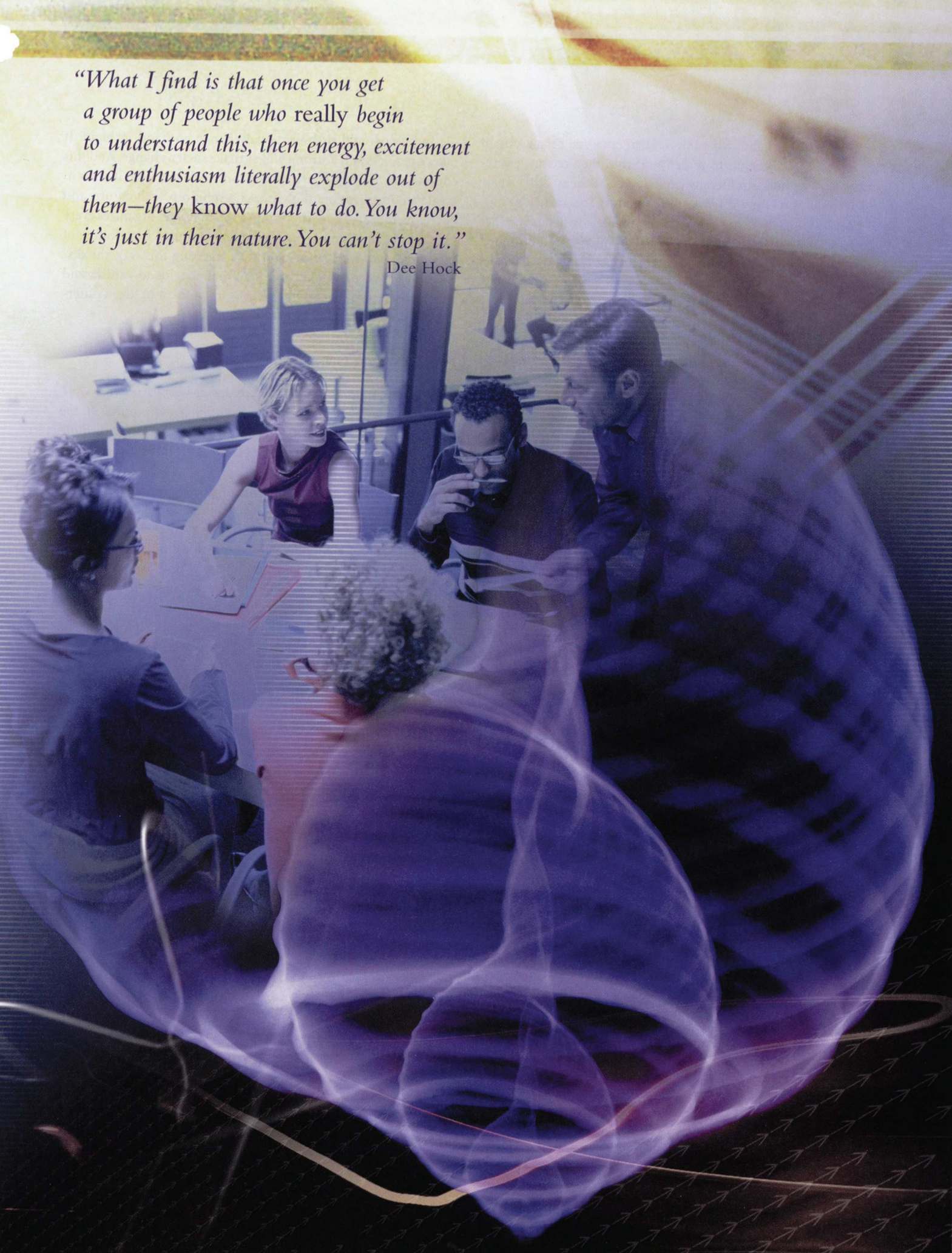
disciple as I who have drunk so deeply from the fountain of your wisdom. I prostrate myself nine times to express my heartfelt gratitude.

Yaeko

Roshi Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), pp. 289-291.

*"What I find is that once you get a group of people who really begin to understand this, then energy, excitement and enthusiasm literally explode out of them—they know what to do. You know, it's just in their nature. You can't stop it."*

Dee Hock



even the city operates this way—what can *I* do? Where do I begin?” And my answer is very obvious. I say, “Right now, right where you are, with what you’ve got—and don’t hesitate for a moment.” If you start pursuing these concepts, you’re going to find dozens and dozens of people within your own organization and in other organizations who support these concepts. And if you don’t get the support and understanding from your own organization, then cross the boundaries and link with people in other organizations who are moving this way.

**WIE:** *You’re describing quite a high level of individual commitment, the kind that has the power to create sweeping change.*

**DH:** At one time I got interested in trying to understand how great leaders created enormous social change—take Christ, take Muhammad, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Joan of Arc, Martin Luther King, Jr. When you look back at their history, almost without exception they were nobodies. Nobody! Gandhi was just a mediocre attorney who got thrown off a train into the dust by the British because he was Indian. Mother Teresa—just an ordinary nun. And so I studied—what made their ideas so compelling? Their ideas weren’t that unique. In fact, they were often pretty traditional. Why, then, did their articulation of their beliefs have such profound effect? What I discovered was something that I think is almost universally true. They really examined what was happening around them, and examined all the existing institutions, and saw with clearer vision. They didn’t delude themselves about it. Furthermore, they had the capacity to project themselves into the future and deal with the four aspects that I think are essential to understanding anything: how things *were* (history), how they *are* today, how they *might become* or where they’re heading, and how they *ought* to be. They had the capacity to take that larger question of “how things ought to be” into the future and *decide* how they ought to be.

Now, the interesting thing is that almost without exception, they didn’t start by preaching it. They started by *living* as *though it were already true*. They profoundly changed their way of living and said, “I don’t have to live the way I am now.” Mother Teresa said, “I can pick up a beggar in the street and tell him God loves him and help him die with respect and dignity. That I can do.” Right? So once they began to live as though what ought to be was true, they had an *authenticity* that was just compelling. *Complexity theory* would call it a strange attractor, a *legitimacy*, an *authenticity*. And then they talked about it. They never wavered, no matter what the obstacle, or what the condemnation. And many of them died because they couldn’t live any other way. Some of them were killed. I don’t think they were unique. I think that capacity is in *every single living human being*. We just have to get in touch with it. And begin.

**WIE:** *Your work calls on people to stretch and grow tremendously, in part because you’re evoking something at a collective level. By definition, what a group can accomplish is beyond what any one individual can imagine or encompass. This seems to be calling for a release of something in our nature over which we fundamentally have no control.*

**DH:** What gets released, and what is arising, is what complexity theory would call an *emergent phenomenon*. Something starts to emerge in multiple thousands of places and nobody can figure out what caused it to happen. The kind of consciousness I’ve been describing is an emergent phenomenon. These kinds of organizations are going to happen. There is no alternative. The question becomes: Are they going to happen by the old Newtonian model of collapse, destruction, and reconstruction—tear the building down, build another one—or will they move in a totally different direction? For example, there are architects who say a building should be a living thing that evolves in total harmony with nature. And they’re doing it. This way of thinking is emerging almost everywhere in surprising places. But it’s not yet emerging as fast as the change in societal complexity and diversity that I described. It may catch up, but it’s not there yet.

## ON THE KNIFE’S EDGE

**WIE:** *Where would you say we are on a global scale? Are we poised to move in a different direction?*

**DH:** I think we’re on the knife’s edge where we’re going to undergo cataclysmic institutional failure. We have it all over the world. Look at some of the countries that are in a state of perpetual starvation and revolution; there’s just no present institutional structure capable of dealing with societal complexity and diversity with anything other than more centralization of power and increasing violence and force. So we’ll have one of two possible scenarios. The first would be that we’ll have a massive series of institutional failures, social anarchy, and enormous societal and biological carnage—far more than we now experience—and then maybe out of that will emerge these new concepts. But I think if we do experience massive institutional failure, the first thing that will emerge, before we see the new forms, is almost total centralization of power and control, which will result in a widespread loss of liberty and freedom. That will last for a while, but it ultimately will not work, much like the Soviet Union. And when *that* collapses, then we’re in for a second period of social carnage that will be unbelievable.

**WIE:** *So you’re talking about a double cataclysm?*

**DH:** Yes. And out of that, right from the ashes, may emerge the new forms of organization.

**WIE:** *What's the second scenario?*

**DH:** The second scenario is that enough momentum can be put behind more chaotic ideas of organization, and there can be enough interconnection and enough actual examples of these organizations built so that as the old institutions are failing, the energy of the people goes into the emerging new forms. Existing organizations can even come to realize that transformation is essential for their health and continued existence. You would then see people's energies and resources move away from destructive behavior toward constructive behavior. If that happens, it's going to be the emergence and rebirth of a community in harmony with the human spirit and biosphere, such as we've always dreamed of.

*Because of the collapse of change float, either one of these scenarios can happen in a fraction of the time we would ever expect. As I said before, we can change and allow the natural order of things to emerge—it's right there, right now, waiting to happen—*

**WIE:** *—if we choose to go along with the natural order of things.*

**DH:** Yes, but we don't *have* to go along. I also believe in free will. Within us as a species for the first time is the capacity to say, "Yes, I *want* to go along. I want to affirm this, to consciously choose it." It's an affirmation of where we came from, what we are, and it is totally compatible with every living thing, with the living Earth, and with the universe. We have the possibility of a regeneration of these natural characteristics that will bring us totally in harmony with the human spirit and the biosphere. I see it as the greatest opportunity that I can imagine in history.

**WIE:** *And it seems that through your work you're attempting to create the very conditions whereby this regeneration can occur now.*

**DH:** You said the magic words. You cannot cause such things to happen. You can only create the *conditions* by which they can emerge and realize that they're already there. Everything I described already exists in the universe, in the Earth, in every individual, in every collective of individuals. It's just waiting to be evoked. So you create the conditions and you try to evoke it, and that's the most you can hope to do.

**WIE:** *Perhaps that's what real transformation is.*

**DH:** Yes. It's an evolutionary approach. And if our societal institutions and our consciousness are contrary to the fundamental organizing principles of evolution and nature, we're on a collision course. They represent the ultimate in arrogance and ego. What we need is a huge dose of humility. By the way, all those great leaders I mentioned were invariably quite humble people. But that humility did not prevent them from being very pragmatic and practical about getting things done. I'm fond of saying that we don't have any idea what the Earth could produce if we came into harmony with it.

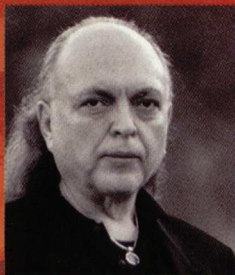
**WIE:** *Maybe by its very nature it's impossible to imagine.*

**DH:** Well, is it so far-fetched to believe that somehow something wonderful and incredible beyond our present imagining could occur? I don't think so. I think that's what's been going on in evolution since the beginning of time. So let's give it a chance. ■

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Adi Da Samraj

*Spiritual Teacher  
20th & 21st Century USA*



**IN AN INSTANT, I BECAME** profoundly and directly aware of what I am. It was a tacit realization, a direct knowledge in consciousness itself. It was consciousness itself, without the addition of a communication from any other source. I simply sat there and knew what I am. I was being what I am. I am Reality, the Self, the Nature and Support of all things and all beings. I am the One being, known as God, Brahman, Atman, the One Mind, the Self.

There was no thought involved in this. I am that Consciousness. There was no reaction either of joy or surprise. I am the One I recognized. I *am* that One. I am not merely experiencing Him.

Then truly there was no more to realize. Every experience in my life had led to this. The dramatic revelations in childhood and college, my time of writing, my years with Rudi, the revelation in seminary, the long history of pilgrimage to Baba's Ashram, all of these moments were the intuitions of this same Reality. My entire life had been the communication of that Reality to me, until I am That.

Avatar Adi Da Samraj, *The Knee of Listening* (Clearlake, CA: Dawn Horse Press, 1996).



# Epistemology, Fourth Order Consciousness, and the Subject-Object Relationship

or...  
How the Self Evolves  
with Robert Kegan



Robert Kegan

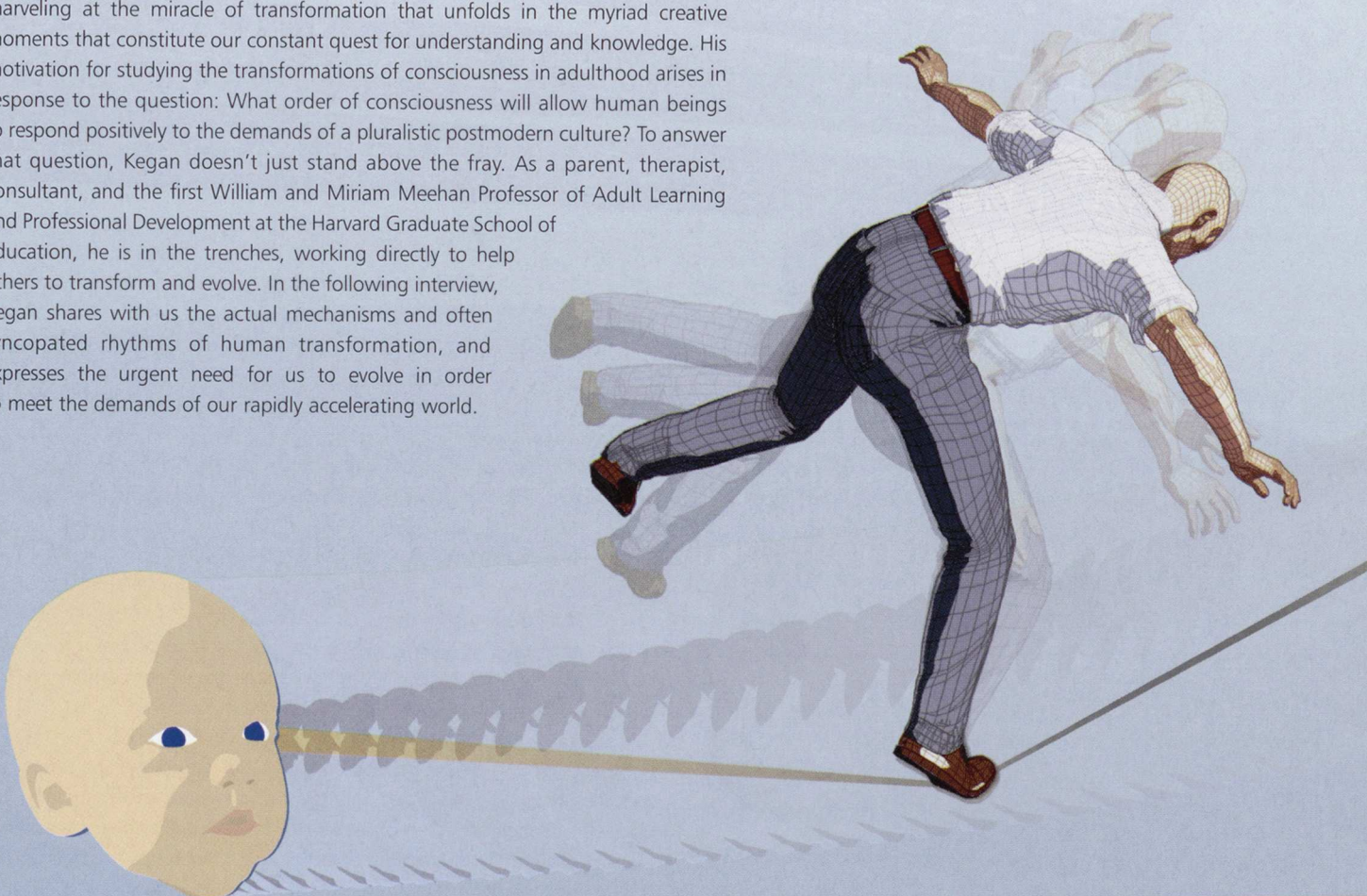
HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OF YOURSELF as an *epistemologist*? Epistemology: the study of the nature and limits of knowledge. Yikes, what a mouthful—one of those too-long words bandied about in philosophy classes. But how about taking a different tack: Have you ever shared the thrill of triumph with an infant taking her first steps? Or been amazed by the experience of all of the pieces coming together in an epiphany of a new and different perspective? Or even wondered how you and another could seem to speak the same language, use the same words, and not really understand each other? In other words, have you ever been struck by how absolutely remarkable, complex, and sometimes frustrating is the human capacity for learning and understanding? Then maybe you are a bit of an epistemologist. This is epistemology, Robert Kegan style, taken out of the philosophy classroom into the trials and triumphs of the struggle to make meaning—to know and understand—through the course of our lives. Kegan, a noted Harvard developmental psychologist, has charted the evolving upward movement of consciousness across the life span, revealing

an interview by Elizabeth Debold

how the self transforms through the subject-object relationship.

Right—*the subject-object relationship*. Now, don't turn the page! Yes, it does sound abstract and perhaps a bit boring, but, frankly, as Kegan makes clear, this is the crux of the transformation of consciousness. Think about it: When the great philosopher and teacher J. Krishnamurti calls us to observe and join him in inquiry, asking, "Now why is there this division in me? The 'me' and the 'not me,'" he is pointing to the relationship between subject (me) and object (not me). As Kegan explains, this reality-making relationship—what we identify with as subject and what we consider to be object—ultimately determines the difference between a baby and a buddha. And most of us fall somewhere in between. The transformation of the subject-object relationship, enabling us to become truly objective and see what is true, is actually a goal of much spiritual practice. Maybe all of us are closet epistemologists.

But it wasn't just Kegan's approach to epistemology that made us so interested in speaking with him. Kegan is a humanitarian in the deepest possible sense. He bears witness to the "astonishingly intimate activity—the activity of making sense" that defines our struggle for dignity in the face of the overwhelming immensity of the universe and the fragile finitude of our lives. To listen to Kegan is to join him in marveling at the miracle of transformation that unfolds in the myriad creative moments that constitute our constant quest for understanding and knowledge. His motivation for studying the transformations of consciousness in adulthood arises in response to the question: What order of consciousness will allow human beings to respond positively to the demands of a pluralistic postmodern culture? To answer that question, Kegan doesn't just stand above the fray. As a parent, therapist, consultant, and the first William and Miriam Meehan Professor of Adult Learning and Professional Development at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, he is in the trenches, working directly to help others to transform and evolve. In the following interview, Kegan shares with us the actual mechanisms and often syncopated rhythms of human transformation, and expresses the urgent need for us to evolve in order to meet the demands of our rapidly accelerating world.



# Epistemology, Fourth Order Consciousness, and the Subject-Object Relationship

or . . .

How the Self Evolves  
with Robert Kegan



**WIE:** *I'd like to begin by asking you, from your perspective, what is transformation? What exactly is it that transforms in our development, creating different stages or, as you've called them, orders of consciousness?*

**ROBERT KEGAN:** First, let me say that because both the subject and the phenomenon of transformation are enormously exciting and appealing, there's a temptation to become intoxicated by the thrill, hope, and sheer spectacle of it all, which can make it difficult to get at what transformation actually is. You might say that we can easily confuse the rose with its perfume. These emotions that are associated with transformation, which are what I'm calling the perfume, are a very important part of the rose. However, if you have an actual interest in bringing transformation about in relationship to yourself or others, then it's very important to separate the rose from the perfume. Because the emotions and the experience, the gratitude or the terror, associated with transformation are very different from what

transformation actually is. To look at transformation itself requires us to make a shift that can initially feel dry because we're tending to its analytic dimension as opposed to its aesthetic dimension. And to make this analytic shift, I think it's useful to think about the word *transformation* itself. At the heart of the word is "form." So if you're interested in the analytic side of the rose, not only the perfume, then you can't even begin to engage the question of transformation without asking a very simple question, which is: What form is transforming? What is the form that is undergoing some gradual or dramatic reconstruction of its parts into what is really a new whole?

Transformation entails a reconstruction of basic forms of the distribution of energy or information or production. Take,

for example, the cooling of the universe since the big bang—you have a redistribution of energy that changes how the universe hangs together. Or take the transformation of the written word—beginning with manuscripts inscribed by hand on parchment and preserved in urns in the possession of a very tiny priesthood, then to the Gutenberg revolution of the printing press that made possible the mass production of text, and now to the instant distribution of language through a keystroke on a computer—this is the reconstruction of the very form in which information can be composed and distributed. So, first of all, you have to put a stake in the ground and name what form you are following in looking for transformation. And that requires you to have some grasp of the internal architecture of that form and also of the process by which it comes apart and re-forms itself.

So, with that said, let me go back to your starting question about stages of human development and transformation.

**WIE:** And from what you've just said, I understand that we have to identify what "form" in human consciousness transforms in development.

**RK:** Yes. And if I look at the discussions about transformation and the ways in which people talk about its practice, I'd say that the piece that I can add to the story here—and it's just a piece, but it is too often missing—is what comes from thinking more seriously about the activity of our knowing, which, in philosophy, is the world of epistemology. Epistemology, which is often considered a very dry and analytic topic, is actually a very dynamic thing. It is, after all, not about what we know but about the process by which we *make* reality, the process by which we *create* knowledge.

This is simultaneously a rational and passionate matter. All kinds of emotions are associated with having a given way of knowing the world and being identified with it as well as with the process of transition from one way of knowing to another. Why? Because we take our way of *composing* reality to be *reality*. The

great embarrassment or liberation of transformation itself is the recognition that what we have been taking as reality is actually only a *construction* of reality.

## THE SUBJECT-OBJECT RELATIONSHIP

**WIE:** How do we construct our reality? This must be an extremely complex process.

**RK:** Well, actually, simplicity is the key to understanding this process. I think it was Oliver Wendell Holmes who talked about the simplicity on one side of complexity and the simplicity on the other side of complexity. The simplicity on the wrong side of complexity is dull and dumb, but when you get to the other side, you have a simplicity that gets elementally to the point. So, in terms of how we make meaning, at its simplest, we are talking about the transformation of the subject-object relationship.

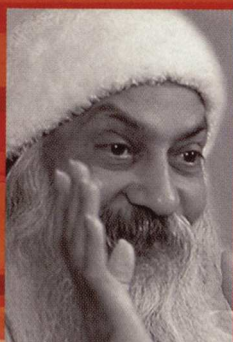
Have you ever heard such a big buildup to the subject-object relationship, which is usually presented as the driest thing in the world? The darling of sophomore philosophy class, it just puts everyone to sleep. But what I'm trying to do is create this recognition that it's a sleeping key to a better understanding of transformation. For the past thirty years, I've been attending to this one thing: the evolution of the subject-object relationship.

So what is the "subject-object relationship"? It is a fundamental distinction in the way that we make sense of our experience—a distinction that shapes our thinking, our feeling, our social relating, and our ways of relating to internal aspects of ourselves. The subject-object relationship is not just an abstraction but a living thing in nature. What I mean by "object" are those aspects of our experience that are apparent to us and can be looked at, related to, reflected upon, engaged, controlled, and connected to something else. We can be *objective* about these things, in that we don't see them as "me." But other aspects of our experience we are so identified with, embedded in, fused with, that we just experience

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Osho

Spiritual Teacher  
20th Century India



SEVEN DAYS I LIVED in a very hopeless and helpless state, but at the same time something was arising. . . . There was no ground underneath, I was in an abyss . . . a bottomless abyss. But there was no fear because there was nothing to protect . . . nobody to be afraid.

Those seven days were of tremendous transformation. . . . And on the last day, the presence of totally new energy, a new light and a new delight, became so intense that it was almost unbearable—as if I was exploding. . . .

This was so alive. It was like a tidal wave of bliss. . . .

The past was disappearing . . . as if it were somebody else's story. . . . Boundaries were disappearing, distinc-

tions were disappearing.

Mind was disappearing . . . it was rushing farther and farther away, and there was no urge to keep it close. . . . By the evening it became so difficult to bear it. . . . It was like when a woman goes into labor, . . . suffer[ing] tremendous pain. . . .

Something was imminent. Something was going to happen. It was difficult to say what it was—maybe it was going to be my death—but there was no fear. I was ready for it. . . .

I went to sleep nearabout eight. . . . The body was asleep, I was awake. It was so strange—as if one is torn apart into two directions, two dimensions; as if the polarity has become completely focused, as if I were both the polarities together . . . the

*The great embarrassment or liberation of transformation itself is the recognition that what we have been taking as reality is actually only a construction of reality.*



them as ourselves. This is what we experience *subjectively*—the “subject” half of the subject-object relationship.

What gradually happens is not just a linear accretion of more and more that one can look at or think about, but a qualitative shift in the very shape of the window or lens through which one looks at the world. A given subject-object relationship establishes the shape of the window. Thus, for a certain period of time, a particular distinction between what is object and what is subject persists. Then you know the world through that system, and while your knowing gets increasingly elaborated, it all goes on within the terms of that system. So, for example, when you get to be what we call a “concrete thinker,” usually between the ages of six and ten, you are able to learn facts, more and more facts, but you’re still just learning the facts. Children at this age and stage collect baseball cards, bugs, leaves from trees—they come to understand the world around them by identifying, naming, and labeling the objects in it. But you have to make a qualitative move to transform the subject-object relationship before you are able to *organize* these facts into bigger abstract ideas, themes, and values. This, then, becomes the next epistemology. Each qualitative move takes a whole mental structure that had been experienced as subject and shifts it so that it becomes seen as object.

If you study the processes of the forming and re-forming of ways of knowing from childhood right through adulthood, you come to recognize a rhythm in this process. We start from a position, in earliest infancy, where there’s absolutely no subject-object distinction at all, because the infant’s knowing is entirely subjective. There’s no “not me,” no internal vs. external. There’s

no distinction, for example, in the source of the discomfort caused by bright light or hunger in the belly. There’s no distinction between self and other.

**WIE:** *And what is the ultimate extension of this process? The evolutionary goal?*

**RK:** The ultimate end state of this story—of this process of gradually but qualitatively shifting more and more of what was subject to object—would be a state in which the subject-object distinction comes to an end again, in the *opposite* direction than in the first minutes of life. You know, in the sixties, Alan Watts was fond of saying that his baby was a buddha. But that showed a total misunderstanding. There are two different ways that you can get out of the subject-object split. One way is by being entirely subject with no object—that was Watts’ baby. And the other way is through the complete emptying of the subject into the object so that there is, in a sense, no subject at all—that is, you are not looking out on the world from any vantage point that is apart from it. You’re then taking the world’s perspective. That’s the Buddha. There’s an enormous difference between the adualism of an infant and the adualism of the Buddha.

The ultimate state of development would have to do with some way in which the self has become entirely identified with the world. It would be the recognition essentially of the oneness of the universe, which is something we have heard over and over

positive and negative were meeting, sleep and awareness were meeting, death and life were meeting. . . .

Nearabout twelve, my eyes suddenly opened—I had not opened them. The sleep was broken by something else. I felt a great presence around me in the room. . . . I felt a throbbing life all around me, a great vibration—almost like a hurricane, a great storm of light, joy, ecstasy. I was drowning in it.

It was so tremendously real that everything else became unreal. . . . Now there was for the first time reality. . . .

I rushed out of the room. . . . And immediately as I came out, the feeling of being suffocated disappeared. It was too small a place for such a big phenomenon. . . .

I walked toward the nearest garden. It

was a totally new walk, as if gravitation had disappeared. . . . I was feeling weightless—as if some energy was taking me. . . .

For the first time I was not alone, for the first time I was no more an individual, for the first time the drop had fallen into the ocean. Now the whole ocean was mine, I was the ocean. There was no limitation. A tremendous power arose, as if I could do anything, whatsoever. . . .

Something was pulling me toward the garden. It was not within my capacity to prevent myself. I was just floating. . . .

I was relaxed, I was in a let-go. I was not there, *it* was there, call it God—God was there. . . . It was there and I was just carried away . . . carried by a tidal wave.

The moment I entered the garden

everything became luminous, it was all over the place—the benediction, the blessedness. I could see the trees for the first time—their green, their life, their very sap running. The whole garden was asleep, the trees were asleep. But I could see the whole garden alive, even the small grass leaves were so beautiful.

I looked around. One tree was tremendously luminous—the maulshree tree. It attracted me, it pulled me toward itself. I had not chosen it. God himself had chosen it. I went to the tree, I sat under the tree. As I sat there things started settling. The whole universe became a benediction.

Osho, *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), pp. 70-72.

again in wisdom literatures of the East and West, but which usually goes in one ear and out the other, because what does it actually mean to most people?

**WIE:** *That's true. But this would have to be more than a recognition or idea of oneness. As a stage of development, it would mean that one's ongoing state of consciousness would transcend the limitations of the subject-object relationship itself. As far as I understand it, however, this ultimate state is not one of the stages of development that you have identified in your research—not yet, at least. But you have observed that there is a regular pattern to the way that our experience of what is subject and what is object changes over the life span, moving in the direction of greater objectivity.*

**RK:** Yes. At each point in time or development, what gives a form of psychological meaning-making its integrity is that there is a definable, literally namable, distinction being made between what is subject and what is object. These forms have a temporary durability, if you can accept that contradiction in terms, because each sustains itself for some period of time.

## AN EVOLUTIONARY TRUCE

**WIE:** *In your book The Evolving Self, you call this an “evolutionary truce.”*

**RK:** That's right. And that's what creates a stage of development. In using the word “truce,” I am pointing to the fact that this process of formation and re-formation of these natural epistemologies is very dynamic. So, when I say we're constructing reality, I don't mean it in the sense of constructing a house so that we can live in it for the next four or five years with no attention to the continuous constructing and preserving of the house. My hope in choosing a word like “truce” was to suggest that it has to continuously maintain itself. When you

keep balance, you are always going out of balance and back in balance, continuously. But when you have a hardy capacity to maintain a balance at a given point of equilibrium, it looks like there is a stability.

For example, when you see someone walking across an expanse, what you are mainly impressed by, if you are really thinking about it, is the stability of that very extraordinary gymnastic activity called walking. And if you have ever lived with an infant and watched him or her gradually acquire this capacity, you come to appreciate this. Because in walking, with each leg, with each foot, you push and propel yourself off that foot and you throw yourself out of balance. You *must*, in order to move forward. And then, with the other foot, you simultaneously correct yourself and throw yourself out of balance again. You continuously do this, and when you get good at it, what it looks like is a tremendously stable dynamic motion of balance. But it actually is a continuous imbalance and restoring of balance, according to a single principle. Similarly, to maintain a certain evolutionary truce, or stage of development, there is this continuous balancing, a setting and resetting of the distinctions between what is subject and what is object.

**WIE:** *This sounds similar to the balancing mechanism that you call “dynamic equilibrium,” which is something that you say impedes transformation. Could you speak about how this works?*

**RK:** Okay—but first some context. I've always liked what philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said about the two great forces of the universe: One is what physicists would basically call *entropy*, which is essentially the loss of focus, and dissipation of energy, and increasing randomness, and so on, and the other is the opposite of entropy, or *negentropy*, which means becoming more complex, having more focus, and operating at a higher harmonic or concentration of energy. He was impressed with the way in which everything in the universe, living and nonliving, was participating in one process that had to do with entropy and then also has the possibility of participating in the opposite process—not just “running down,” but “running up,” so to speak.

What order of consciousness do we reach?

**MOST**

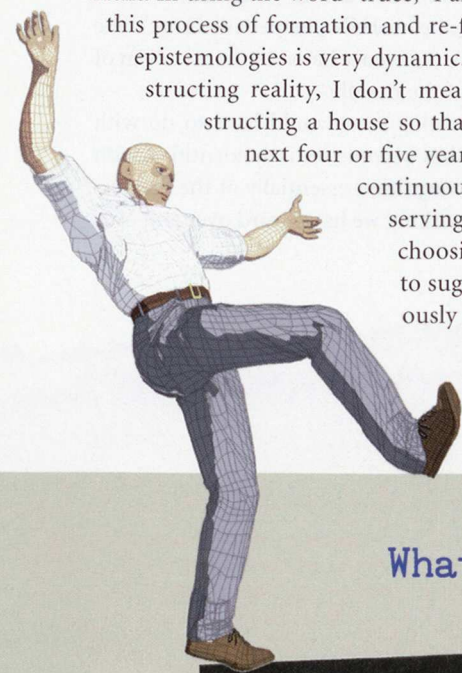
**3RD ORDER: Socialized Mind**  
Absorbs values and ideals of society and community

Less than **50%**

**4TH ORDER: Self-Authoring Mind**  
Creates own ideology and identity

Less than **10%**

**5TH ORDER: Self-Transforming Mind**  
Sees beyond own ideology to integrate contradictions, inner and outer



The study of development, at least as I see it, is an *attending to*—both a reverencing and a seeking to support—the negentropic processes of increasingly concentrated energy or increasing focus. Now, in actual practice, when you're trying to be a part of supporting these processes, you pretty quickly come up against a third force that Whitehead never talked about. This force is not about things running down or running up, or even being still—it is a *dynamic*. There's a lot of energy and movement in it, but because it involves energy and movement in countervailing directions, the *effect* is a balance, or a tendency for things to stay pretty much as they are. And that's what we call *dynamic equilibrium*.

Now described analytically from the outside, a dynamic equilibrium is an evolutionary truce, which essentially can be described as an epistemology. It creates a boundary between what can be seen (object) and what one is identified with (subject)—and so it names a way of structuring or shaping the world. From the inside out, described phenomenologically, this equilibrium is a truce between what we call *basic life commitments*. On the one hand, you have those commitments that you have and can name—that are the objects in consciousness. But if you work with people enough, and you gain their trust and help them find a language for it, they can begin to name not only the objective commitment they *have*, but the commitment that *has them*. The commitment they're subject to, that they are not even aware of. For example, a leader who has a commitment to giving up hierarchical forms of leadership may also have a competing commitment to maintaining control, or to being loved and admired, to being the “big daddy” who dispenses all the goodies. So these two very powerful commitments create a conflict, which leads to a living contradiction. The dynamic equilibrium is itself a contradiction that is maintaining itself, which we are caught up in. And in a way, you can say that growth and development is a process by which, instead of being caught in the contradiction, we have a bigger space where we can look *at* the contradiction. This gives us the chance to move to some new equilibrium or some new epistemology.

## DO ADULTS TRANSFORM?

**WIE:** *What capacity do we adults show for transformation? In his new book, Boomeritis, Ken Wilber writes, “Psychologists who track adult life-span development find that most individuals go through a series of major transformations from birth to adolescence, whereupon transformation tends to taper off. Although many horizontal translations subsequently occur—the ‘seasons of a person’s life’—vertical transformations to higher levels tend to completely stop. From age 25 to around 55, very few vertical transformations occur.” His conclusion is: “It’s almost impossible to get an adult human being to transform.”*

**RK:** Ken and I have talked about this *exact* question on numerous occasions. If you tend to focus only on adulthood, as he is doing, you can tend toward a somewhat discouraging conclusion about how rare development is after we've reached our full physical stature.

We need to keep in mind that every adult has a history of a number of extraordinary developmental transformations, and each transformation builds a more complex and elaborated edifice. The process of its undoing—the capacity of the universe to win through these increasingly complex defenses that have better and better ways of deluding us into the belief that we have grasped reality as it actually is—gets harder and harder to do. For example, there's a dramatic transformation from birth to about twenty-one months. In not even two years, a tremendous transformation takes place from having almost no distinction between subject and object to the beginning of a distinction between what is me and what is not me. The child becomes a member of a social world! That's an enormous transformation. But the next transformation takes maybe twice as long, and then the following one takes twice as long as that one, and so on. So then looking at adult development, you could say, “My goodness, things have really slowed down.” There's a way in which that's true, but there's another way in which, if you step far enough back, it's understandable that it takes more time.

The great glory within my own field in the last twenty-five years has been the recognition that there are these qualitatively more complex psychological, mental, and spiritual landscapes that await us and that we are called to after the first twenty years of life. Much of my time in this period has been spent following the development of people exactly between the ages that Ken was talking about there. And if you revisit people systematically every three years for twenty years, and then put the different pictures together, the amount of development is actually very impressive.

**WIE:** *Could you speak about what those transformations in adulthood look like?*

**RK:** In adolescence and early adulthood, a transformation occurs in which we essentially develop the complexity to internalize and identify with the values of our surround—an epistemology that enables us to be truly a socialized member of the tribe. Socialization, from a psychological point of view, is the process by which we become more a part of society because the society actually becomes more a part of us. Thus, the self feels whole, connected, and in harmony through its identification with a set of values and beliefs that both make the self up and simultaneously preserve its intimate connections—relationships to the bigger tribe or to the culture of which one is a part. So a person who has reached this level is able to think more long term, more abstractly. Based on the particular tribe or culture, one constructs a set of values with which one is identified. And we call this the *socialized mind*, or third order consciousness.

Now, the transformation that is most common to the period from twenty-five to fifty is a move out of this orientation of being shaped by one's surround to become what we call *self-authoring*. This is fourth order consciousness. While this particular transformation doesn't happen for everyone, it does take place with considerable density. In our highly pluralistic post-modern world, we do not have a homogeneous definition of who

we should be and how we should live. We're living in the midst of a rapidly expanding pluralism of tribes, which means that there are competing demands for our loyalty, faithfulness, time, money, attention, and so on. Thus, the stance of being shaped by our surround is actually insufficient to handle modern life. Rather, we are called on to have an internal authority by which we ourselves are able to name what is valuable, or respond to the claims and expectations on us, sort through them, and make decisions about which ones we will and will not follow. So we are not just made up by or written on by a culture, but we ourselves become the writer of a reality that we then are faithful to. Within a Western context, this move is often characterized in terms of personal empowerment. This transformation, to the fourth order, is enormously powerful and has a captivating perfume. It is, in fact, a highly prevalent and dramatic transformation between the ages of twenty-five and fifty. But it's not the transformation that people who think about higher stages of consciousness are interested in.

## AN UNPRECEDENTED COMPLEXITY

**WIE:** *But it's the foundation for a transformation to higher levels of consciousness. Moreover, the transformation you have just been describing from third to fourth order, from the socialized to the self-authoring mind, is what enables us to live successfully in a changing pluralistic society. This relates to a question that I have about our rapidly changing present moment. Dee Hock, a leader in organizational change, told us that "life is eternal becoming, or it's nothing." In other words, he's saying that change is the very nature of life. So, because of the rapidity of change in our lives, we're all under a different kind of pressure than human beings have experienced before. What effect does our current historical context, which is characterized by change in a way that is different from ever before, have on our development?*

**RK:** In my book *In Over Our Heads*, I'm basically addressing a rather similar question, which is: What is the nature of the mental demands that modern life makes on us adults? If you think of the culture itself as a school in which every adult is compulsorily enrolled and the subjects of the school are our various roles (spouse, parent, worker, etc.), then what you find, over and over again, is a demand for a particular order of consciousness that is of unprecedented complexity. The order of complexity that is actually being demanded is probably pretty close to the GREEN meme [in Beck's system of Spiral Dynamics, see page 105], or what I have just called the self-authoring mind or fourth order consciousness. In fact, I think if we are to overcome the tribal hostilities and the big lesions in the human family, then more and more people need to develop fourth order, self-authoring consciousness. That is the modal growing edge of the species as a whole.

However, some people who think a lot about consciousness and transformation see the fundamental growing edge as the move *beyond* the GREEN level to a recognition of the limitations of one's own self system, which in my lingo would be a move to the fifth order or the *self-transforming self*. This is a very important transformation that some small, very small, percentage of the human population is working on. But the data across a number of studies suggest that a majority of even well-advantaged, well-positioned adults haven't yet reached even the self-authoring mind, fourth order consciousness. This means that they do not have the capacities that would enable them to *thrive* within today's increasingly pluralistic world that requires individuals to exercise a kind of authority that, throughout human history, human beings have never had to do. In fact, pooling lots of different studies, we found that 58 percent of a composite sample of people, who were middle-class and most likely had the great advantages, had *not* reached the self-authoring level or what would be a pretty good correspondence to the GREEN meme in Beck's system.

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### Abraham Abulafia

*Jewish Mystic & Teacher  
13th Century Spain*



**AND YOU SHALL FEEL** another spirit awakening within yourself and strengthening you and passing over your entire body and giving you pleasure, and it will seem to you that balm has been poured over you from the crown of your head to your feet, once or many times, and you shall rejoice and feel from it a great pleasure, with gladness and trembling.

Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 76.

*Jesus, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr.—  
these people died relatively young. You don't often live  
a long life being too far out ahead of your culture.*



**WIE:** So, this is 58 percent of a selected sample who have not reached the self-authoring level, or the GREEN meme. What about in the population as a whole?

**RK:** Among a composite sample of people from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds in the U.S., 79 percent have *not* reached the fourth order. This means that 21 percent of the sample reached the self-authoring level or beyond. And only a tiny percentage of people in the studies are *beyond* the fourth order.

**WIE:** So what about that tiny percent of people beyond self-authoring, or fourth order—what are the characteristics of the next, fifth order of consciousness?

**RK:** When you get to the edge of the fourth order, you start to see that all the ways that you had of making meaning or making sense out of your experience are, each in their own way, partial. They're leaving certain things out. When people who have long had self-authoring consciousness come to the limits of self-authoring, they recognize the partiality of even their own internal system, even though like any good system, it does have the capacity to handle all the "data," or make systematic, rational sense of our experience. In the Western world, we often call that "objectivity." But just because you can handle everything, put it all together in some coherent system, obviously doesn't make it a truthful apprehension—or truly objective. And this realization is what promotes the transformation from the fourth to the fifth

order of consciousness, from the self-authoring self to what we call the self-transforming self. So, you start to build a way of constructing the world that is much more friendly to contradiction, to oppositeness, to being able to hold on to multiple systems of thinking. You begin to see that the life project is not about continuing to defend one formation of the self but about the ability to have the self literally *be* transformative. This means that the self is more about movement through different forms of consciousness than about the defending and identifying with any one form.

**WIE:** I think Don Beck would call your fifth order of consciousness a move to the Second Tier, which is an evolutionary transformation that takes us beyond survival mode to a more integral perspective on life.

**RK:** Yes. And it is also important to keep in mind that in this move from the fourth to the fifth order, from self-authoring to self-transforming, you have very important distinctions between those who are in the earlier process of that transition and those in the later stages—who have actually achieved the fifth order. So, there's a critical distinction between on the one hand, a negative postmodernism that is all about trashing any ideological form, which is only deconstructive and is all about a fatigue with and critique of the ideological, and on the other, what I call a more reconstructive postmodernism that is not just about trashing. When you get to the other side of this four to five shift,

and you've moved to this more reconstructive or transformative side, then there's a whole capacity for reconnecting to these ideologies and recognizing that each of them is partial. You're building relationships among them rather than holding on to one and projecting the other. It's a much more positive spirit.

## GOD & THE FRONTIERS OF DEVELOPMENT

**WIE:** *For my last few questions, I'd like to step back from where we are now developmentally to look more at the motivation behind and future possibilities of human transformation. First, a fundamental question: What drives the movement of development?*

**RK:** Well, that's a very good question essentially for getting at what a person's beliefs are. I can give you a domesticated answer that has a certain surface integrity to it. Something like: Organisms organize, that is their nature, and they are drawn to experiences of discrepancy in order to give them form. We have all kinds of good empirical evidence that shows how we seek to give order to things. And so you could posit that there is a "drive" within living forms, including humans, to shape reality and create ever more satisfactory connections or relationships to the universe. So a given truce is a good enough way of putting the world together for a certain period of time, because we not only put the world together that way, we then defend it. But this domesticated response still begs the heart of your good question. It's like pulling a rabbit out of a hat and just saying, "There is this drive."

So, then you have to ask, well, what's the source of this "drive"? Now you really are asking a religious question about what is the nature of life itself, or energy itself, this intelligent energy that forms and re-forms itself. At another level, I could just as happily answer the question by saying God. God moves all this—where God is the name of the ceaseless, restless, creative flow of energy in the universe. I'm Jewish by upbringing so that's my first lens. I also feel very attached to many Eastern approaches,

but my introduction to anything spiritual was as a Jew. There's a very central prayer in the Jewish liturgy that has to do with declaring that God is One. *Echad*. One. And what that means to me today is a transcendent affirmation that this intelligent energy, this restless, creative flow that we can follow within any one single life, is actually something in which the universe as a whole participates. It's really one energy that's running through the whole thing. It's not something we *share*, so much as it is something that *shares us*.

If you ask me about ultimate motives, I would say that it's all going somewhere. The process by which each living thing in the universe organizes and reorganizes itself—which is transformation—is a process by which each living piece, or part, is, in a certain way, better recognizing its true nature. And this is a declaration of faith here—its true nature is ultimately its participation in a single intelligent whole. Prayer is sometimes described as an expression of our dependence on this force that is bigger than ourselves. And that may be so, but our own transformation is an expression of God's dependence on *us*. That's what we are called to do, what the universe needs of us. And each living thing in the universe has the opportunity, through the process of transformation, to move toward a more complex form. This creates a trajectory that you start to see reflected in both Eastern and Western conceptions of higher stages of consciousness, a convergence of thought that has to do with forms of increasing complexity that move you toward a summit of complexity, or a summit of this special simplicity that recognizes the whole.

**WIE:** *So, from this, then, what is ultimate human maturity?*

**RK:** Well, it's a big risk to think about maturity as only the highest state of complexity or something that's just entirely within each person, decontextualized from the world in which one lives. Maturity has something to do with the fit between the person and

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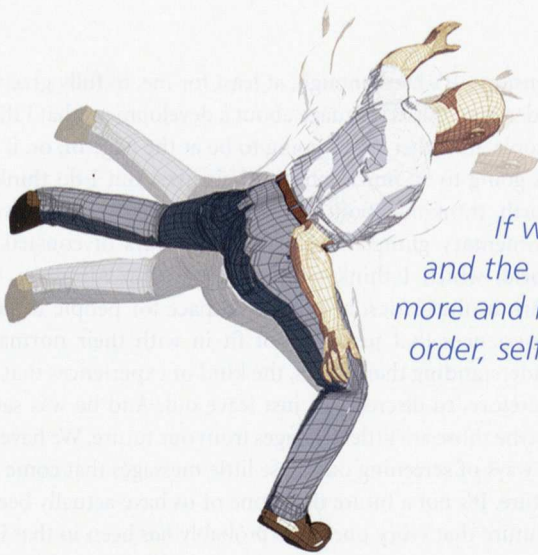
**Robert Adams**  
Spiritual Teacher  
20th Century USA

**WHEN I HAD MY SPIRITUAL** awakening, I was fourteen years old. This body was sitting in a classroom taking a math test. And all of a sudden I felt myself expanding. I never left my body, which proves that the body never existed to begin with. I felt the body expanding, and a brilliant light began to come out of my heart. I happened to see this light in all directions. I had peripheral vision, and this light was really my Self. It was not my body and the light. There were not two. There was this

light that became brighter and brighter and brighter, the light of a thousand suns. I thought I would be burnt to a crisp, but alas, I wasn't.

But this brilliant light, which I was the center and also the circumference, expanded throughout the universe, and I was able to feel the planets, the stars, the galaxies, as myself. And this light shone so bright, yet it was beautiful, it was bliss, it was ineffable, indescribable.

After a while the light began to



*If we are to overcome the tribal hostilities and the biggest lesions in the human family, then more and more people need to develop fourth order, self-authoring consciousness.*

the nature of the demands of the surround. Otherwise, the question of what is full maturity is essentially tautological with the question of what is most complex. The most complex would just be the most mature, by definition. But I think maturity is a more interesting and more psychosocial phenomenon. So, for example, if you were living in the eighteenth century, in a traditional homogeneous culture in which there is no real need to be able to stand over against the culture, I would call a person fully mature who is able to be a responsible member of the tribe and internalize the beliefs of that tribe.

Also, you have to think about what it means to actually be more complex than what your culture is currently demanding. You have to have a name for that, too. It's almost something beyond maturity, and it's usually a very risky state to be in. I mean, we loved Jesus, Socrates, and Gandhi—after we murdered them. While they were alive, they were a tremendous pain in the ass. Jesus, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr.—these people died relatively young. You don't often live a long life being too far out ahead of your culture.

**WIE:** For my last question, I'd like to ask you a little about what we are exploring here in our community, because we have been wondering about the developmental implications of what we are discovering together. What we are finding is that when a group of individuals come together as One, and in surrender to that intelligent energy that you described as animating the One, something miraculous happens. It feels almost like a call from the future, a glimpse of another level of development or evolution. It seems to lead to the emergence of a collective spiritual being—something beyond just a group of individuals sharing an experience. This emergence, which our teacher Andrew Cohen has called Evolutionary Enlightenment, has the potential for combining the most radical autonomy—what you might call ultimate self-authoring—with profound communion. Our experience suggests that the individuals involved move beyond a focus on individual survival to another order of collective being that is neither traditional hierarchy nor pluralism.

**RK:** Well, this is a delicious taste of something. Or, to some, a worrisome narrative that sends up alarms. When you follow the story

fade away, and there was no darkness. There was just a place between light and darkness, the place beyond the light. You can call it the void, but it wasn't just a void. It was this pure awareness I always talk about. I was aware that I AM THAT I AM. I was aware of the whole universe at the same time. There was no time, there was no space, there was just the I AM.

Then everything began to return to normal, so to speak. I was able to feel, to understand, that all of the planets,

the galaxies, the people, the trees, the flowers on this earth, everything, were myriads of energy, and I was in everything. I was the flower. I was the sky. I was the people. The I was everything. Everything was the I. The word "I" encompassed the whole universe. . . .

I felt love, a compassion, a humility, all at the same time. That was truly indescribable. . . . This particular love is like no thing that ever existed on this earth, consciously. There is nothing you can compare it with. It is beyond dual-

ty, beyond concepts, beyond words and thoughts. And since the "I" which I was, was all pervading, there was no other place for anything else to be. There was no room for anything, because there was no space, and no time. There was just the I AM, ever present, self-existent. The love of everything was the love of the Self.

Robert Adams, *Silence of the Heart*. (Sedona, AZ: Infinity Institute, 1997).

of development, you can already see there's a rhythm in it. And your description has a lot of music in it that I think is very resonant. The elements seem to be present that one would need to orchestrate an intelligent conversation about these kinds of things, or to begin to get a picture of them. If you just follow the logic of the rhythm, it's going to lead to something like what you've described, where those are the kinds of words that you have to use—union and oneness, autonomy and communion, and connection.

To my mind, the big question is: What does it actually *mean*? You know, what does it actually mean to live it or to experience it, as opposed to just talking about it? Do we actually have the language to speak about it? Because language has all these constraints built into it, where much of the language we use may make it impossible to talk about these notions of union and oneness. But I know your own work is not just talking about it, it's about the *practice* of it and how one brings it about. And, in a certain way, that's where the "proof of the pudding" all rests.

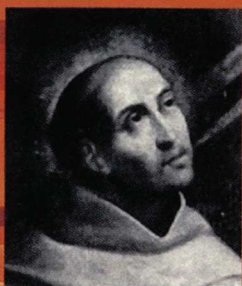
Now I think what you're describing are post fifth order appre-

hensions. It's hard enough, at least for me, to fully grasp the fifth order. And this is language about a development that I think most people are either never going to be at the edge of, or, if they are, it's going to be much later in their lives. But I do think that it's worth thinking about ways of being more receptive to the momentary glimpses of these other ways of constructing the world, which I think people do have. In Abraham Maslow's work in the sixties, he created a space for people to talk about experiences that just did not fit in with their normal way of understanding themselves, the kind of experiences that we tend, therefore, to discredit or just leave out. And he was saying that maybe those are little messages from our future. We have all kinds of ways of screening out these little messages that come from the future. It's not a future that none of us have actually been in, but a future that every one of us probably *has* been in that is outside the ways we construct reality. If we can find ways to actually start listening to these messages even though we cannot quite make them fit in to our current way of constructing the world, they might be of enormous value. ■

## TALES OF TRANSFORMATION *Personal accounts from masters & seekers throughout the ages*

### St. John of the Cross

*Christian Mystic  
16th Century Spain*



#### Stanzas Concerning an Ecstasy Experienced in High Contemplation

*I entered into unknowing,  
And there I remained unknowing,  
Transcending all knowledge.*

*I entered into unknowing,  
Yet when I saw myself there  
Without knowing where I was  
I understood great things;  
I shall not say what I felt,  
For I remained in unknowing  
Transcending all knowledge.*

*That perfect knowledge  
Was of peace and holiness  
Held at no remove  
In profound solitude;  
It was something so secret  
That I was left stammering,  
Transcending all knowledge.*

*I was so whelmed,  
So absorbed and withdrawn,  
That my senses were left  
Deprived of all their sensing,  
And my spirit was given  
An understanding while  
not understanding,  
Transcending all knowledge.*

*He who truly arrives there  
Cuts free from himself;  
All that he knew before  
Now seems worthless,  
And his knowledge so soars  
That he is left in unknowing  
Transcending all knowledge.*

*The higher he ascends,  
The less he understands,  
Because the cloud is dark  
Which lit up the night;  
Whoever knows this  
Remains always in unknowing  
Transcending all knowledge.*

*This knowledge in unknowing  
Is so overwhelming  
That wise men disputing  
Can never overthrow it,  
For their knowledge does not reach  
To the understanding of  
non-understanding,  
Transcending all knowledge.*

*And this supreme knowledge  
Is so exalted  
That no power of man or learning  
Can grasp it;  
He who masters himself  
Will, with knowledge in unknowing,  
Always be transcending.*

*And if you should want to hear:  
This highest knowledge lies  
In the loftiest sense  
Of the essence of God;  
This is a work of His mercy,  
To leave one without understanding,  
Transcending all knowledge.*

Hilary Huttner, *Mystical Delights* (Incline Village, NV, 1996), pp. 38-39. Originally from Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (trs.), *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* (Washington, DC: I.C.S. Publications, 1991).

- a truly imaginary spiritual satire -

# WHO'S TRANSFORMING ANYWAY?

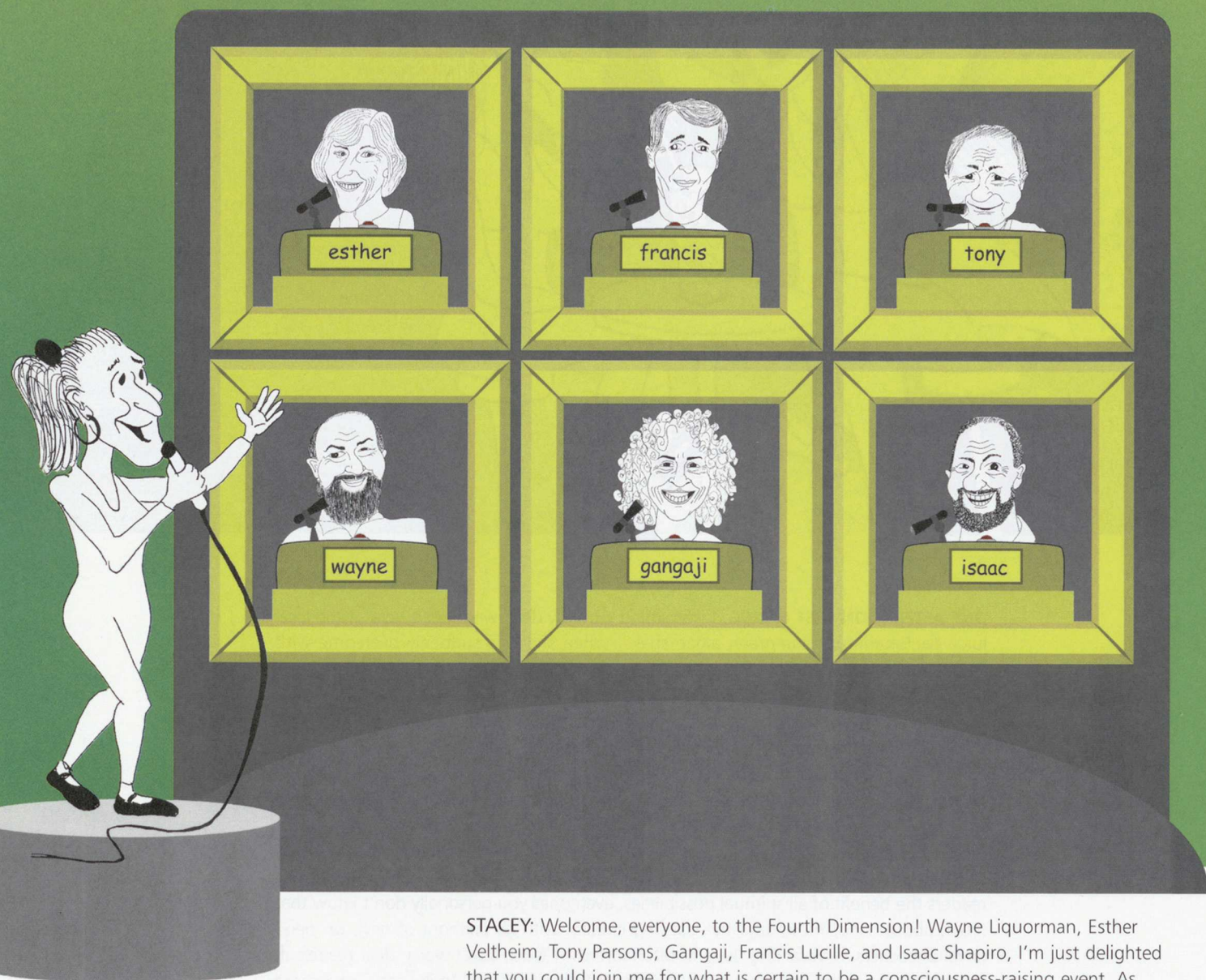
STACEY HEARTSPRING ENCOUNTERS  
THE POSTMODERN CRAZE OF NEO-ADVAITA



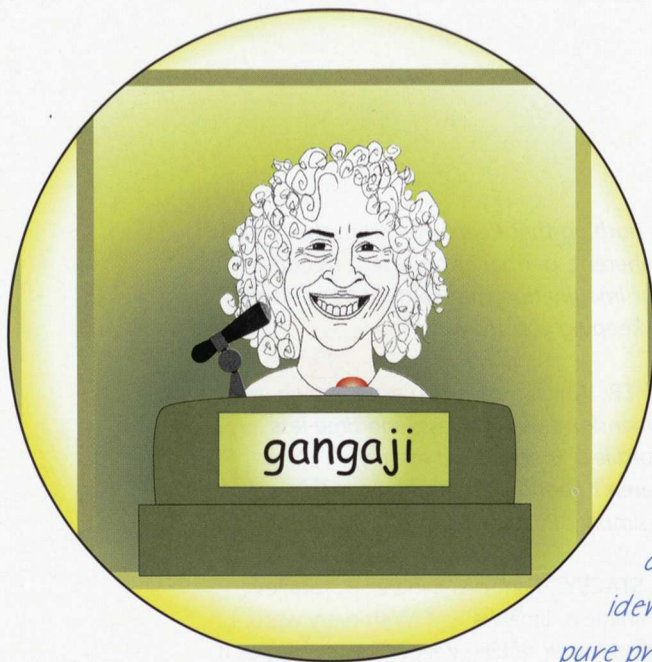
**ONE AFTERNOON LAST SPRING,** I was sitting with my dear, wise friend Vera at the local juice bar, sharing a blue-green algae shake, when she was suddenly overcome with inspiration. "Stacey, your debut in the last issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* was truly evolutionary. I mean, there you were, hosting luminaries from the Buddha to Teilhard de Chardin, who were popping in to *WIE*'s new Fourth Dimension Conference Room to offer their views on the latest developments in the spiritual world. You have quite the job, old girl. So, I was thinking, why don't you continue breaking spiritual ground and present the world's first fourth-dimensional *satsang*?!" "*Satsang*?" I replied. "Vera, I have to admit that even with all the advanced personal growth work I've done, like in my lunchtime yoga class and with my holotropic breath counselor, I've never actually been to a *satsang*." "Well, Stacey," she said, "don't let that stop you because you owe your readers the benefit of all spiritual possibilities, even ones you personally don't know that much about. And, these days the '*satsang* circuit,' with its plethora of new, or 'neo,' advaita teachers, is attracting quite a bit of interest." Now, don't worry, dear readers if, like me, you're in the dark about *satsangs* and advaita, because I took Vera's advice, did some research, made a few calls, and am here now to present, for your spiritual edification (and mine), this very special event: the first neo-advaita "*satsang*," or spiritual gathering, to take place without the usual impediments of space and time.

*Stacey's fourth-dimensional, satirical satsang is constructed from direct quotes connected by short, fictional linking words and phrases. All quoted material appears in italics.*

# the neo ADVAITA PANEL



STACEY: Welcome, everyone, to the Fourth Dimension! Wayne Liquorman, Esther Veltheim, Tony Parsons, Gangaji, Francis Lucille, and Isaac Shapiro, I'm just delighted that you could join me for what is certain to be a consciousness-raising event. As some of the most well-known Western teachers on the current neo-advaita scene, you trace your roots to Advaita Vedanta, the ancient Hindu philosophy of nonduality, conducting satsangs with people all over the world. This is my first satsang. So, could you begin by telling us what a satsang is, and how it relates to Advaita Vedanta?



**GANGAJI:** *Stacey, somehow, by some stroke of good luck, your individual consciousness has been called to satsang. . . . [Since] this is your first time in satsang, let me tell you what satsang is. Satsang means in Sanskrit association with the truth. . . . If there is some obstruction to that truth, it is brought out in satsang. . . . Satsang confirms your true identity as pure consciousness. . . . There is only pure pristine consciousness.*

**WAYNE:** Gangaji, it must be God's will because I'll confirm that. *Pure advaita points to the understanding that everything is ONE . . . all is Consciousness . . . all is God.*

**ESTHER:** I'll put it this way: *A wave appears in the ocean, but that doesn't change the nature of the ocean—it's still water. The wave has never been anything separate to the ocean—they are not-two.*

**TONY:** *[And everything is discovered to be] the ground of unconditional love, for there is nothing that is not sacred and . . . grace is continuously available.*

**ISAAC:** Yes, Stacey, *and to be with Yourself is to be love, peace, and silence. . . . This is the ultimate truth.*

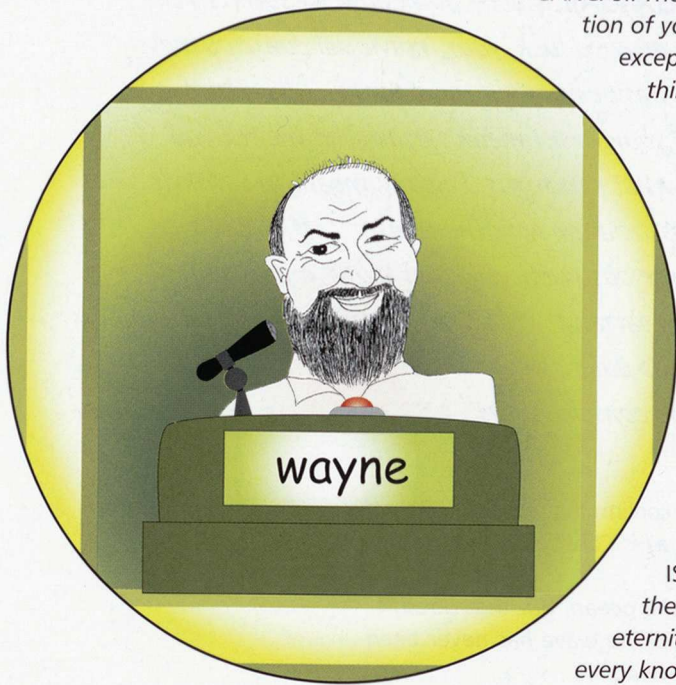
**STACEY:** Wow, the effect is immediate. I can already feel myself starting to relax and expand . . . "I am love, peace, silence . . . All is consciousness . . ." You know, I really appreciate hearing that because I got stuck in a massive traffic jam on my way to work. And even though, on a deep intuitive level, I know that what you're all saying is true, it's really easy to forget that "grace is continuously available" when you're on the New Jersey Turnpike, not to mention just about everywhere else.

**ISAAC:** *You can be in prison or in any circumstance. . . . This is not dependent on time, place, circumstance, or anything else.*

**FRANCIS:** Right, Isaac. *There comes a moment where this feeling of . . . benevolent space around you no longer goes away; you find yourself at home everywhere, even in the packed waiting room of a train station.*

**STACEY:** Or in bumper-to-bumper traffic! Boy, this could totally change my relationship to commuting.





GANGAJI: *There is nothing that keeps you from the realization of your inherent, permanent, present freedom except your imagination that somebody or something is keeping you from that.*

ESTHER: Which means *You are everywhere . . . dimension-less, limit-less, and time-less . . . formless, infinite, and eternal. . . . You aren't bound or limited by any-thing, You simply ARE.*

STACEY: "I am everywhere . . . formless, limitless, timeless . . ." With every word, I feel myself sinking deeper and deeper, as if I were in a warm bath, with little bubbles. The truth is so comforting, reassuring, and freeing!

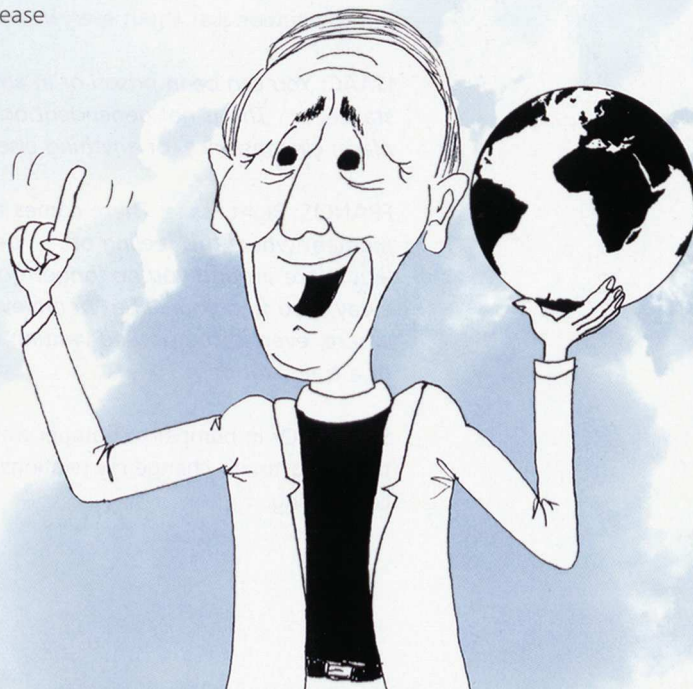
ISAAC: *Yes, beautiful. Simply be. . . . Because . . . the entire universe is appearing in you. . . . All of eternity, every known universe, every known reality, every known galaxy is appearing in you.*

WAYNE: *And speaking of the universe, my dear teacher wrote: "The Universe is uncaused, like a net of jewels in which each is only the reflection of all the others, in a fantastic interrelated harmony without end."*

STACEY: Wow, "a net of jewels." I just love that. My beloved grandmother Bertha, may she rest in peace, used to call me her jewel. And now you're telling me that all these jewels are appearing inside me. How perfect! I could rest in this blissful feeling forever, but for the sake of my readers, I have to inquire further. Could you please say more about advaita?

WAYNE: God wills me to, Stacey. *Consciousness [is] the Source and the Substance of everything. . . . It is infinite potentiality. . . . And whether you call that Genesis or the Big Bang, doesn't matter; this is the point at which that which is infinite potential expresses into manifestation . . . into all this stuff of life.*

STACEY: Infinite potentiality . . . You know, at the end of my last interview



I learned something extraordinary from one of my guests, Father Teilhard de Chardin. I learned that I had significance, *evolutionary* significance, and potential. And I discovered how the universe, which includes me, is evolving.

(. . . Of course your life has evolutionary significance.)

STACEY: Oh Father, how kind of you to drop in.

TEILHARD DE CHARDIN: Bonjour, Stacey, it is just wonderful to see you again. I was on my way to the Omega Point, and knew that even a short visit here would be evolutionary. So remember, *in us, the evolution of the world towards spirit becomes conscious . . . as the terms of a vast process in which the whole mass of the universe is involved.*

WAYNE: *It is an appealing notion . . . because it gives a purpose to this incredible manifestation that is comprehensible to the human mind, "Ah, this is God setting in motion a process whereby there is a disidentification seeking reunification." Such a concept is an overlay on this existence which is as valid as any. But understand that it is a human mental construct that is overlaying this phenomenal Reality.*

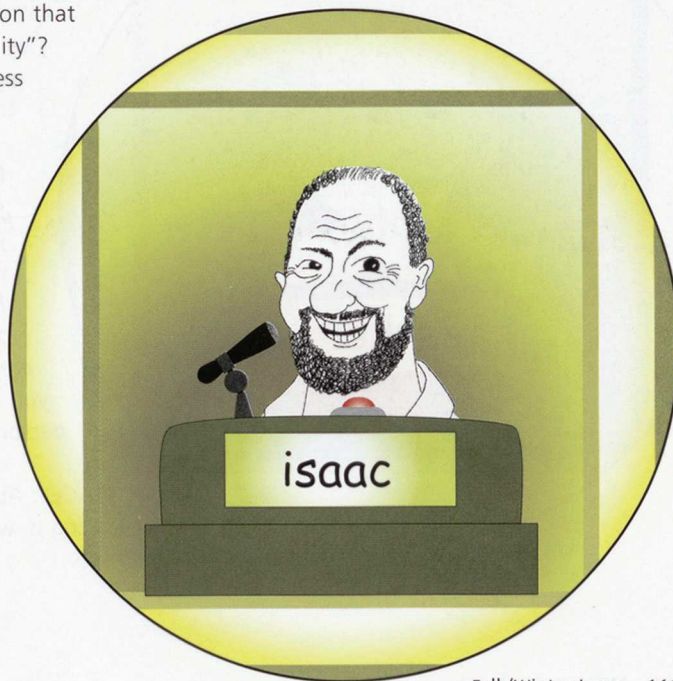
TEILHARD: *Our perfection, our interest and our salvation as elements of creation can only be to press on with this evolution with all our strength. . . . Remember, we hold the earth's future in our hands.* But the Omega Point is calling. I'll have to be on my way now.

WAYNE: Stacey, let me describe the nature of Reality another way. *Out of this incredible potentiality extrudes Universes and Solar Systems, and out of the Solar Systems is extruded this planetary system, and this little planetary system here is extruding out into Earth, and out of this Earth are extruding all of these various body-mind mechanisms. And they arise and they live a little span and then they fall back into this infinite potentiality; and new ones are created . . . so that you have this one particular extrusion—we'll call it 'you'. . . .*

STACEY: I, Stacey Heartspring, "an extrusion that merely arises and falls back into potentiality"? To be honest, I think I liked being a timeless jewel better. And getting back to my evolutionary potential—

GANGAJI: *This idea of you becoming more of what you are, or of the world becoming something different, is nonsense.*

ISAAC: *As funny as that sounds, there is nothing you have to do, because you cannot control anything. There is not a you to do it!*



TONY: *We are so locked into the belief that our lives have some sort of purpose . . . but when there is an acceptance and a resting in there being no purpose, a new wonder can arise.*

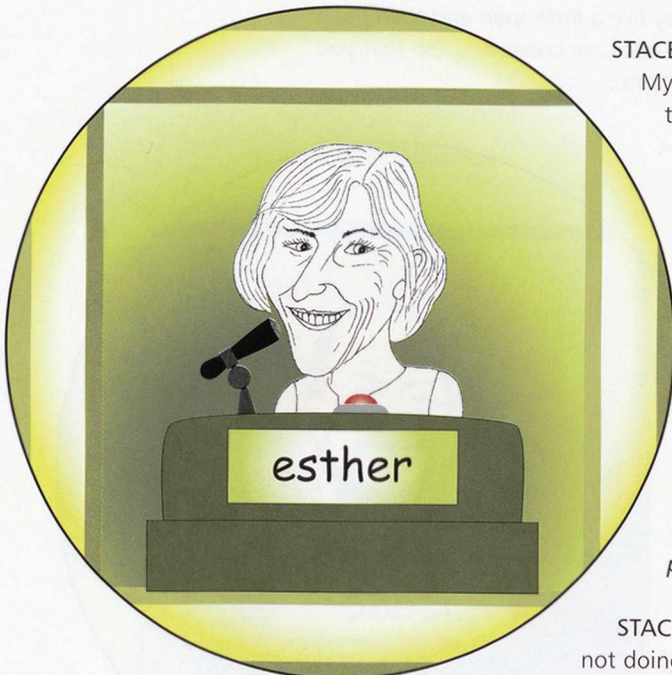
STACEY: A "new wonder" can arise through accepting that my life has no purpose? I think Father Teilhard would have certainly put his two cents in here!

TONY: Stacey, I really have to disagree with your friend Teilhard. *Consciousness simply is. It is energy manifesting without any interest in any of the concepts that our minds have about . . . purpose or meaning. It is absolutely impersonal and has no particular direction. It is playing the game of creation and destruction.*

ESTHER: *And with each arising and subsiding of the Absolute, universes are created and destroyed. With the appearance of each bodymind, one could say a droplet of Consciousness is superimposed upon, or assumes a manifest appearance. Each droplet is unique in its own way, but all the droplets are still only Consciousness. The droplet plus the bodymind give rise to "I am."*

STACEY: So, let me see if I'm getting this right. According to advaita there is no real evolution, no becoming, no purpose. Instead, I'm a droplet of consciousness that's fallen onto my *bodymind*? I can relate to the droplet part—you know, consciousness—but "bodymind" . . . ? That sounds a little dry, even *with* the droplet.

ESTHER: *And to use you as an example, Stacey, your "birth" is simply part of a coincidental chain of events, a synchronicity that comes about spontaneously and for no particular reason. . . . One could say that your "birth" is just an accident. There is no particular reason for it.*



STACEY: No particular reason for my being here? My birth just an accident? Just try and explain that to my dear Grandma Bertha, who always called me her jewel. You know, I've done a lot of personal growth work to deal with my anger, but Esther, *that's* hitting below the belt.

ESTHER: Angry? Well, *if you think others make you feel and act a certain way, you are saying they have power over you. This would mean that you blame them for how you feel. If you think it's your fault that you act a certain way, you are saying you are to blame. Either way, you are saying that you and others have personal will, personal volition—aren't you?*

STACEY: Absolutely yes, of course. I mean, if I'm not doing it, who is?

TONY: *So what is it that is angry?*

STACEY: Me, I am.

TONY: *And who are you?*

STACEY: I am myself, Stacey.

TONY: *So are you your name?*

STACEY: No, but that is my identity.

TONY: *But it is not constant and it arises from memory. It can change—and so who are you?*



STACEY: Boy, is this how you talk in advaita? I'm not only feeling confused, I'm feeling dizzy, like I'm in a trance, and let me tell you, not the kind of trance I would recommend to anyone.

ESTHER: Don't worry, *confusion is good because it means your mind has been thrown off balance. But of course this isn't to say it was actually balanced in the first place!*

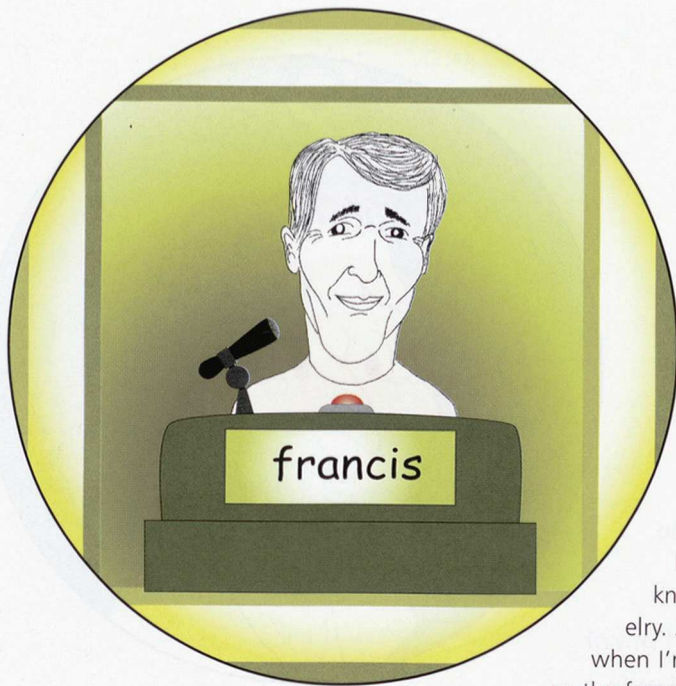
STACEY: Esther, did you actually say that?! I'm beginning to feel a little desperate here!

GANGAJI: *Find who is feeling desperate. The feeling of desperation only continues because you assume that you are, in fact, something that the feeling is hooked on to.*

ESTHER: Right. And *what you have given lip service to up until now is being questioned. And about "purpose," to find your life's purpose may help you cope and feel better about yourself. But if you are unable to then carry out that purpose . . . you discover that it helped you feel in control. Don't you think that is what finding a purpose is all about—control?*

STACEY: Control? I don't want to be in control. I want to have evolutionary significance. I want to help create a brighter future. I mean, the future is calling, can't you just feel it? And my intuition tells me that my personal evolutionary significance is about more than just being a bodymind extrusion—

TONY: Relax, Stacey, you are *the divine expression exactly as [you] are, right here, right now. [You do not have to] surrender, be purified, or go through any kind of change or process. . . . [You] don't need to be serious, honest, dishonest, moral or immoral, aesthetic, or gross. . . . The infinite is not somewhere else waiting for us to become worthy.*



**FRANCIS:** *In this welcoming we live in the Now. There is nothing to gain, nothing to lose. . . . We already have all we need.*

**STACEY:** Gosh, I'd love to be reassured that it was all so simple. But what about evolution and the fact that everything's obviously changing? And not only that—if I'm honest, I'd also have to admit that there are things I need to change about *myself*—you know, like more than just my taste in jewelry. And I'm reminded of that fact every day when I'm ready to kill the guy who cuts me off on the freeway, and I avoid acting on my impulses.

**WAYNE:** But *you will 'choose' one way in one moment and entirely differently in the very next moment. . . . Because a moment from now . . . another thought will have gone through the mind, or another hormonal change will have taken place in the body. . . .*

**STACEY:** Yes, that impulse *is* definitely stronger at certain times of the month.

**WAYNE:** And in any case, *all of these bodymind mechanisms are created by Consciousness and operated by Consciousness, [so] that every thought, every action, every emotion and every response is the thought, the action, the emotion, and the response of Consciousness.*

**STACEY:** The response of Consciousness? Does this mean that I, Stacey, actually have no free will of my own?

**WAYNE:** Yup. *Everything IS. The script is written. The entire film is in the can. . . . Everything [is] happening in accordance with the will of God, or the play of Consciousness, or the dance of Shiva, or whatever you want to call it.*

**ISAAC:** Right, Wayne. *It's simply a functioning of this bodymind: it has nothing to do with You.*

**TONY:** *So relax and let it all happen—because it will anyway. . . . You have no responsibility in any way for anyone or anything. There is no one there, and there never has been anyone there who can take responsibility.*

**ESTHER:** And, anyway, *in certain areas of the world a very different value is placed on human life. Very different "laws" exist in different areas of the world. What one culture sees as bad, another finds quite acceptable. You may say they are wrong, but who made you the morals police? . . . The actions themselves aren't the problem. It's the belief systems that accompany actions that are the problem.*

(. . . Esther, that is music to my ears! After all, it is all relative, a matter of perception, a point of view.)

STACEY: Who's that?! The Marquis de Sade, the notorious and scandalous French author?! Well, for obvious reasons, you most certainly were not invited. But since you made the trip all the way from the eighteenth century, what have you got to add?

**MARQUIS DE SADE:** Stacey, you're already outnumbered. And, I'm sorry, but I'm going to add insult to injury. I agree with Esther. *Similar to the concepts of virtue and vice, [justice and injustice] are purely local and geographical; that which is vicious in Paris turns up, as we know, a virtue in Peking . . . that which is just in Isfahan they call unjust in Copenhagen. . . . Justice has no real existence . . . . So let us abandon our belief in this fiction, it no more exists than does the God of whom fools believe it the image: there is no God in this world, neither is there virtue, neither is there justice; there is nothing good, useful, or necessary but our passions. . . . [And] the idea of God is the sole wrong for which I cannot forgive mankind. . . .*

ESTHER: *The misinterpretations [of God] that have been given to the various world religions have come about because man wanted to have a reason for everything. If you ask me, the religions that teach you that God created you sinful, so that He can save you depict a pretty sadistic God.*

DE SADE: Ah, sadism . . . well, we are no guiltier for following the primitive impulses that govern us than is the Nile for her floods or the sea for her waves. . . . All universal moral principles are idle fantasies.

ESTHER: Right, and *to understand this is to realize that guilt is just a fanciful notion and that it has absolutely no validity.*

STACEY: No guilt? No moral principles? But, what about all the awful events in the world? I mean, just look at what happened to all those people in the World Trade Center—

WAYNE: Stacey, I recently explained in a workshop that *from the point of view of the*

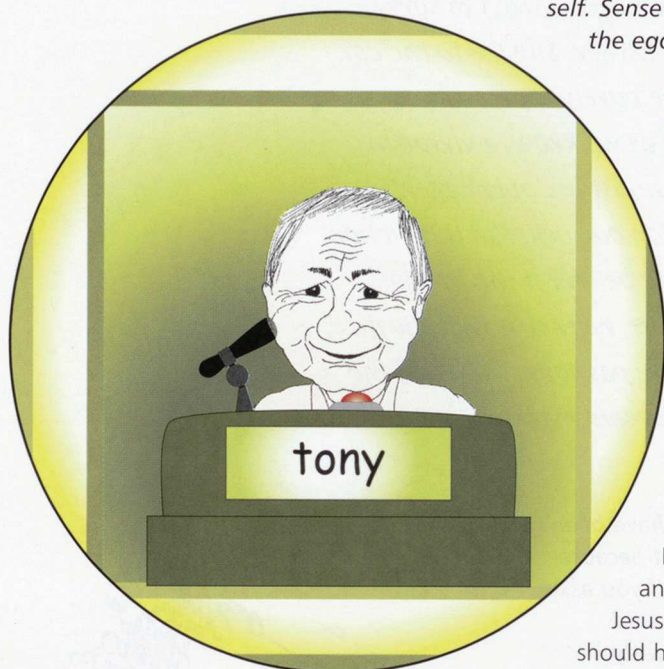


*bacteria that got to feed on those bodies, it certainly wasn't a tragedy, so who are we to judge what's right or wrong?*

STACEY: What?!! I mean, all those innocent people! It was an unspeakable act, the most shocking—

TONY: Well, if you want to call it a sin, Stacey, from an advaita point of view, *all concepts of good or bad, original sin, karma or debt of any kind are products of an unawakened mind. . . .*

FRANCIS: *The only sin is to take oneself for a sinner. . . . There is no point in condemning oneself as a sinner or in trying to change oneself. Sense of guilt and desire to change also reinforce the ego.*



TONY: *And, for that matter when [Christ] told people their sins were forgiven, he was really saying to them that they had never had a past that they could be held responsible for. They had simply been characters lived through by the infinite, never having had any choice or free will.*

STACEY: Tony, are you serious? You know, I'm Jewish, so no, I didn't go to Sunday school and I'm hardly an authority, but I'll be damned if Jesus ever meant anything like that! He really should have the opportunity to respond to this, but I just don't have the courage to invite Him to join us. I'm afraid of what He would do! And far from being uplifted by all this, I'm starting to find it really depressing.

ESTHER: Stacey, actually *what is "depressing" is the misperception that you need to care and that things need to matter. You see if you understand that your True nature IS neutrality, caring and making things matter is really missing the mark.*

STACEY: But I can't *not* care. Aren't care and love important, you know, in a human way? And for that matter, what about God? Doesn't most everyone say, "God is Love"?

ESTHER: *When it is said that "God is Love," the word love signifies neutrality. It has nothing to do with the opposite of hate. God is just another word for neutrality, and neutrality denotes "not helping or supporting either of two opposing sides. . . ."*

*And remember, there is no point, no purpose, and no meaning. . . . You think of caring as something important because you misunderstand caring to mean "something to do with the heart."*

STACEY: Whoa, just wait a minute. Of course it has to do with the heart. I mean, what about when people suffer? What about all those poor people in the World Trade Center? And, for that matter, what about my Great Uncle Mischa? Even though I've never told anyone his story, he's often on my mind. You see, one day dear Aunt Beryl took me aside and confided in me: "Stacey, you should know what happened to our family during World War II, so I'll tell you. When the Nazis invaded Romania, which is where some of your Jewish ancestors were from, they first looked for the Jewish doctors and teachers in the small villages. And they came upon your Great Uncle Mischa, who was a teacher and was in the middle of teaching his young class. And they marched him out of the school at gunpoint, with his class of students following him. And right in front of his students, in the school yard, they forced him to dig a large ditch, and then in front of all his students, they buried him alive. And that was how the Nazis destroyed the Jews, and it worked."



(Of course it worked. . .!!!)

STACEY: Who's there? Who said that!? Adolf Hitler?!! Oh my God!!

**HITLER:** *Stacey, since you were talking about God's will and the extermination of the Jews, nothing could stop me. I had to respond. You see, I received a divine mandate while I was recovering from a gas attack during the first World War. And as I lay there, it came over me that I would liberate the German people and make Germany great. . . .*

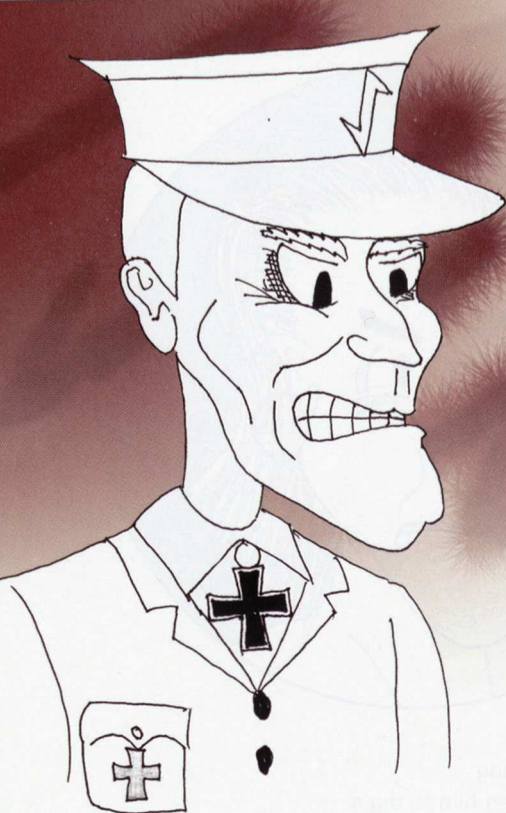
*[And I was] animated with an inexorable resolve to seize the Evil [the Jews] by the roots and to exterminate it root and branch. To attain our aim, [I knew] we should stop at nothing, even if we must join forces with the Devil.*

STACEY: And I heard that the people who participated in this extermination wanted to commit these unspeakable acts. Through their own free will.

TONY: *Stacey, there is no question of there being free will, simply because there is no one there in the first place who can have a will or make a choice.*

HITLER: But, I could not have done it without so many willing participants. And here with me is one of my commanders, Eduard Strauch, who will testify to that.





**STRAUCH:** *Heil Hitler! No one should ever doubt the eagerness of the men who served under you. Even if the killing was hard and unpleasant . . . we [were] convinced that someone must carry out these tasks. I can state with pride that my men [were] proud to act out of conviction and fidelity to their Führer.*

**TONY:** *Everything that happened . . . could not have been any other way.*

**ESTHER:** *And while the spontaneous, uninhibited, unpremeditated action is happening there is peace. . . . While you are acting with full focus and putting all your energy into it, minus judgments, there is peace. You see, peace is there when you experience what is as it is fully.*

**STACEY:** *Peace? What do you mean peace? Do you think my Uncle Mischa or his students or his family or any of the families of the World Trade Center victims experienced peace on those fateful days? And what about the fact that Hitler, and everyone who committed these heinous acts, had personal responsibility?*

**TONY:** *Don't worry, Stacey. [Hitler], like everyone else, played out the character that consciousness chose, and death is simply a return to the source from where the character appeared. The beloved plays every part in the play. . . . From the point of view of the separate self, everything . . . seems to be a battle ensuing between good and evil. . . . Once awakening happens, it is seen that there is no such thing as right or wrong.*

**WAYNE:** *Yes, Tony, and when there's the understanding that this manifestation is the perfect functioning of God, of Consciousness, or Totality, in that acceptance is peace. . . .*

*[Because] what we're talking about here is What Is, not how you think it should be, how you would like it to be, how you, if you were God, would make it! God is not human-hearted.*

**GANGAJI:** *Pain is simply pain; sensations in the physical and emotional body. Suffering is in time and has with it some story line about pain. The story line generates infinite strands and permutations—who caused the pain, why, when, how, and on and on. There can be an enormous investment in the story, and therefore, a reluctance to let it all go.*

**TONY:** *And anyway, where is this suffering? I don't see it.*

**STACEY:** *Well, dear readers, I think it's time to call on a true authority—Sri Aurobindo, philosopher, revolutionary leader, and spiritual visionary. I couldn't imagine anyone better qualified to guide us toward the Truth, and boy, do we need guidance. I sure am hoping that God wills you to join us from the subtle physical plane.*

**SRI AUROBINDO:** Yes, Stacey, I shall join you for the evolutionary benefit of all. And this is how I can best answer this most fundamental question of human meaning: *Man's greatness is not in what he is but in what he makes possible. His glory is that he is the closed place and secret workshop of a living labour in which supermanhood is made ready by a divine Craftsman.*

*But he is admitted to a yet greater greatness and it is this that, unlike the lower creation, he is allowed to be partly the conscious artisan of his divine change. His free assent, his consecrated will and participation are needed that into his body may descend the glory that will replace him. His aspiration is earth's call to the . . . Creator.*

*If earth calls and the Supreme answers, the hour can be even now for that immense and glorious transformation.*



**GANGAJI:** Well, I disagree with you radically. . . . I would say that's a "landing." . . . [Because] what's missing is the realization that this idea of a doer is a thought and empty.

**STACEY:** A "landing"? I was just starting to feel elevated. I mean, Sri Aurobindo, there is some way it can all make sense, and there is some greater purpose to our lives, isn't there? I would end with your exquisite, glorious words, except for one thing I know my dear readers would want to understand: What does make this new, or neo-advaita teaching different from traditional advaita? Sri Ramana Maharshi, as one of the greatest advaita teachers of all time, could you please join us from your sacred mountain in India?

**RAMANA:** I'll join you, Stacey, because God has willed me to set the record straight. I agree that *it is true that we are not bound and that the real Self has no bondage. It is true that you will eventually go back to your source. But meanwhile, if you commit sins, as you call them, you will have to face the consequences of such sins.*

**TONY:** As I said before, *all concepts of good or bad, original sin, karma, or debt of any kind are the products of an unawakened mind . . .*

**STACEY:** Tony, are you implying that Sri Ramana is—?



**RAMANA:** Don't worry, Stacey. Just concentrate on what I'm saying here. *Whatever is done lovingly, with righteous purity and with peace of mind, is a good action. Everything which is done with the stain of desire and with agitation filling the mind is classified as a bad action. Do not perform any good action through a bad means . . . because if the means is bad, even a good action will turn out to be a bad one. Therefore even the means of doing actions should be pure. . . . You cannot escape them. . . . [Otherwise] what is the use of merely saying with your lips, "I am free"?*

**STACEY:** Dear Ramana, Gangaji said at the beginning that "if there is some obstruction to the truth, it is brought out in satsang," and I think that obstruction has been revealed. I do think I'll sleep better tonight.

**FRANCIS:** *From the vantage point of a personal entity, of a bodymind, deep sleep is . . .*

**TONY:** Francis, *the sense of a separate entity is illusory. Presence is what you are.*

**ESTHER:** Tony, *where did that thought come from?*

**GANGAJI:** And *if thought is insubstantial and is not there, what is there?*

**TONY:** *There is no one here doing anything. There is energy in a form discussing something with energy in another form.*

**ISAAC:** Yes, *it's simply a functioning of this bodymind: it has nothing to do with You.*

**WAYNE:** Right, *a bodymind mechanism in the phenomenal dream-play, just like all of the rest of these bodymind mechanisms. . . .*

**STACEY:** Even if I am a bodymind mechanism, I'd like to conclude on that note, by expressing my gratitude, most of all, to you dear readers—

**ESTHER:** *For gratitude, there has to be someone (a ME) experiencing the gratitude and someone . . . to direct the gratitude towards. Again, this is evidence that you are not there yet and that the mind is still playing its conceptual tricks.*

**STACEY:** Esther, tricks or no tricks, my dear readers are out there, and they certainly deserve thanks for staying with me as I navigated the high seas of the spiritual world's first fourth-dimensional satsang—which God has certainly willed to be a very enlightening event! ■

References for quoted material; numbers in parentheses refer to the pages of Stacey's "satirical satsang" on which the quotes appear. Rudolph Binion, *Hitler Among the Germans* (New York: Elsevier, 1976), p. 136(167); Marquis de Sade, from *Aline et Valcour* as quoted on the website: [www.geocities.com\(165\)](http://www.geocities.com(165)); Marquis de Sade, *Juliette*, as quoted in Ken Wilber, *Boomeritis* (Boston: Shambala, 2002), p. 139(165); Marquis de Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom*, as quoted on the website: [www.geocities.com\(165\)](http://www.geocities.com(165)); Gangaji, *You Are That!*, Vol. 1 (Novato, CA: Gangaji Foundation, 1995), p. 1(159), 2(159), 62(170), 90(160); Gangaji, *You Are That!*, Vol. 2 (Novato, CA: Gangaji Foundation, 1996), p. 84(163), 188(161); Gangaji, as quoted from written and audiotape material from website: [www.sentient.org\(159,168\)](http://www.sentient.org(159,168)); Gangaji, as quoted in "The Advaita Shuffle," *What is Enlightenment?* (1992), p.13-14(169); David Godman, ed., *Be As You Are: The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* (New York: Arkana, 1985), p. 215-16(169-70); Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), p. 134 (167), 405(168); Peter Heehs, ed., *The Essential Writings of Sri Aurobindo* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 230(169); Wayne Liquorman, *Acceptance of What Is* (Redondo Beach, CA: Advaita Press, 2000), p. 25-26(160-1), 43(164), 47(160), 61(164), 85(161), 98(168), 102(168), 120(164), 210(170), 241(164); Wayne Liquorman, as quoted in "Does the World Need to Be Saved," *What is Enlightenment?* (2001), p. 114 (159); anecdote from Boston-area workshop, Summer, 2002 (165) Francis Lucille, *Eternity Now* (Middletown, CA: Truespeech Productions, 1996), p.24 (166), 59(170); Francis Lucille, as quoted from "A Talk in Napa, CA, June 9, 1995," from the website: [www.sentient.org\(159,164\)](http://www.sentient.org(159,164)); Tony Parsons, *As It Is* (Carlsbad, CA: Inner Directions Foundation, 2000), p. xii (159), 62(166,169), 73(163), 87(163), 89(168), 96(162), 98(167-8), 100(164), 120 (162,170), 121(170), 122-3(168), 136(166); Isaac Shapiro, quoted material from the book, *Outbreak of Peace*, as presented on the website: [www.isaacshapiro.de\(164,170\)](http://www.isaacshapiro.de(164,170)); Isaac Shapiro, quoted material from the book, *It Happens by Itself*, as presented on the website: [www.isaacshapiro.de\(159-61\)](http://www.isaacshapiro.de(159-61)); Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 47(161); Esther Veltheim, *Beyond Concepts* (Sarasota, FL: Parama Press, 2000), p. 43, 168; Esther Veltheim, *Who Am I?* (Sarasota, FL: Parama Press, 2001), p. 27(162), 31(163), 48(160), 51(159,166), 53(166), 68(165), 69(164,168), 105(163), 145(165), 236(162).

## **The Great Bombay Tea Shop Debacle**

### **The Silent Scam**

Have you heard a whisper out of this silent scam to take over the world through the promoted inability to respond to life in a responsible manner? Seems to be spreading like wildfire, this non-choice, no-driver story by the likes of the Reverend Balsekar. Seems to be a nice little white lie! I mean, you don't get a more perfect recipe for world domination than telling everybody they've got no choice about it! Once they believe it then the movie's in the can, the rest of their life's on autopilot. But my question is, who designed that program? Certainly not the Great Spirit, me thinks. Keep up the good work!

Yann Housden  
email

### **Too Naïve**

As a result of reading Chris Parish's interview with Ramesh Balsekar, I read several of Ramesh's books and, although I had never previously had the slightest inclination to visit India, I subsequently went to Bombay to see him. Ramesh's uncompromising teaching has answered all my questions. In my case, striving for higher evolutionary consciousness is not arising. On the contrary, I have found peace and harmony, while continuing to live as before. I am grateful to Chris Parish for his accurate recording of Ramesh's concepts in the interview, despite any misgivings he may have had. Being new to "Planet *What Is Enlightenment?*" I was too naïve to realize that the epilogue was a spoof—but who cares?

June Parker  
Cumbria, England

### **I Side with Balsekar**

*What Is Enlightenment?* magazine retracted their apparent endorsement of Ramesh Balsekar's assertion that enlightenment is the affirmation of determinism [*The Great Bombay Tea Shop Debacle*]. *WIE* satirically doubted and mocked Balsekar's version of enlightenment, pooh-poohing determinism-as-enlightenment. Readers took their satire seriously, and a storm of controversy arose, with many claiming to have been enlightened. Now, in their retraction, *WIE* has basically declared that determinism is *not* true and is not enlightenment. I am against *WIE* magazine and against most religion; I side with Ramesh Balsekar and endorse enlightenment as determinism. I define enlightenment and determinism in distinctive ways, but I essentially agree with Balsekar, against *WIE*. Most religion is lower religion which is freewill religion. Mystics define higher religion which is no-free-will religion and is associated with no-separate-self. Freewill religion is separate-self religion. Ego is the freewill

assumption; ego is separate self. The separate, ego-self is the agent who supposedly has free will.

Michael Hoffman  
email

## **In the World But Not of It**

### **Bumping into Enlightenment**

Aggh! Your review of Jack Kornfield's book *After The Ecstasy, The Laundry* [Issue 18, Fall/Winter 2000] just irritated me so much and made me angry, livid at times. Had to print out parts of your review and pencil in my caustic rebuttals and considered opinions, one of which is that I haven't even read the book yet, but I'm ordering it now from Amazon.com and after I read it you will be in for a more severe red penciling job right here on my desktop. Seriously, I love the way you unapologetically proceed. You woke something in me up. I'm a serious meditator and had just left the whole concept of enlightenment floating, figuring someday I will bump into it . . .

Bump.

Doug  
Sunnyvale, CA

## **www.wie.org**

### **Pure Gold**

Your e-magazine is fantastic! Wonderful! Excellent! Please forgive my wild enthusiasm, but it is a genuine surprise, a real treasure, pure gold, to find such quality on the web.

Beatnik  
email

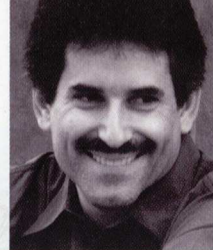
## **WIE Subscriber's Extra Winter 2002**

### **An Intimate Foe**

Elizabeth Debold's article, *True Jihad* [available on our website, [www.wie.org](http://www.wie.org)], speaks what requires our full attention. Truly, the principle battle of life is against the intimate foe. To surrender, to shine with the source of life is the aim, and to do so requires allowing the Beloved to pull aside the veils of delusion. The ego shifts and hides itself in any form. Beware of the father of lies, the delusionary self that makes a hell of paradise. It requires a total honesty that illuminates the darkness to dispel the phantasms of ego's projection. The purest love, the love that unfolds through the *hadith*, "I was hidden and wanted to be known," which leads to the threshold of the wedding chamber, in the empty mirror of complete surrender: Here and now, the Beloved is present when my intimate foe surrenders. Blessed is Allah who mercifully unveils and consumes me in the purifying flame of love.

anonymous

# Enlightenment for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



by  
**andrew  
cohen**



## ARE YOU READY TO CHANGE NOW?

**EVERYBODY WANTS TO GET ENLIGHTENED BUT NOBODY WANTS TO CHANGE.** This is the simple, daunting truth that has been staring back at me from the eyes of countless seekers over the years. “I really want to get enlightened,” they insist. “But are YOU ready to CHANGE *now*?” I ask. “What?” is the inevitable response—surprised and even slightly stunned. And I repeat, “Are YOU ready to CHANGE *now*?” What follows is always a strange and surreal moment of ambiguity, confusion, and backpedaling. “But I thought you wanted to get enlightened . . .”

It is a very rare moment indeed when the evolutionary impulse—that mysterious urge toward unbounded freedom and our own potential for radical transformation in this life—arises in awareness, unimpeded by the endless fears and desires of the separate ego. But it is infinitely more rare that, when that impulse arises, there is a bold and fearless response that says *yes* and *yes* and *yes* and only *yes*, now and forever.

The price of radical transformation is always the same—we have to let go of fear and attachment. And, in that letting go, discover a *completely* different perspective on what it means to be alive. But it is these two tasks—transcending fear and attachment and being willing to embrace a new way of seeing—that most seekers find so challenging. When the spiritual experience sweeps through our entire being, spontaneously emptying us of fear and attachment and opening our inner eye to higher levels of perception, temporarily there is nothing to let go of. Temporarily, we are lifted out of our unconsciousness, and the way we perceive reality and our place in it shifts dramatically. And so it *appears* that a real transformation has occurred—that maybe we have indeed *changed*. But when the higher state of consciousness begins to recede, when the intensity of the spiritual experience becomes the simplicity of life as it is, when we discover that we have not changed as much as we thought we had, how profound is our interest in the miracle and mystery of the revelation that just

descended upon us? Indeed, how much do we *really* want to change, even now that we have seen the yonder shore? Are we willing to pay the price of permanent transformation, when it demands everything from us?

More often than not, the spiritual experience, the taste of enlightened consciousness, merely gives us a glimpse of the possible. In other words, the spiritual experience is rarely the end of the path. But if we are sincere in our aspiration for genuine transformation, it can be the *real* beginning. The beginning of a completely different life—one that is free from fear and attachment and informed by revelation and an inspiration that comes from an unknown source beyond the mind. But for this to be the case, we have to WANT TO CHANGE NOW. When? Now. And now. And *now*. Why? Because the genuine willingness to change now is itself the letting go of fear and attachment that reveals a completely different perspective—now, and now, and *now*.

Enlightened consciousness not only is founded upon the desire for change but is the one and only place inside us all that ever thrives *as* change. That means FREEDOM itself. The freedom of enlightened consciousness is that relationship to the life process that, precisely because it holds on to nothing, *seems* to be changing all the time. Of course, it isn't. One who is truly enlightened never moves, abiding permanently beyond this world of time and becoming. But because of that immovable position, he or she is able, in the world of time and becoming, to be a striking manifestation of a passionate and unbridled creativity, a powerful force of conscious evolution in action.

So you see, wanting to change now, fearlessly and wholeheartedly, *really* being willing now, not only is the door to the freedom of enlightened consciousness but is simultaneously its expression.

So . . . are YOU ready to CHANGE *now*? But I thought you wanted to get enlightened . . . ■