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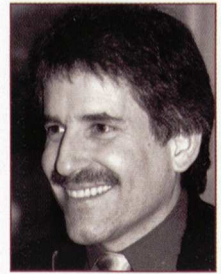


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Founder of
What Is Enlightenment?
magazine



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
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ANDREW COHEN, founder of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine, is a spiritual teacher and acclaimed author widely recognized as a defining voice in the emerging field of evolutionary spirituality. A life-changing awakening in 1986 brought Cohen to the end of his own search for liberation while simultaneously starting him on an exploration of the meaning and significance of enlightenment for our time. This has led him to a profound investigation of the human predicament and into dialogue with sages, saints, and spiritual luminaries from nearly every tradition and beyond.

In 1992, Cohen released the first issue of *WIE*, expanding his own inquiry through the public forum of a magazine and pioneering an innovative form of spiritual journalism reminiscent of classical Socratic dialogue. Over the last decade on the pages of *WIE*, Cohen has brought together leading thinkers—mystics and materialists, philosophers and psychologists—to call for a higher and wholly contemporary synthesis of the spiritual truths found in the East and the empirical rigor of the West. Through the magazine and his writings, Cohen is creating a new context for understanding enlightenment as a human evolutionary imperative. Together with a growing network of integral visionaries, including Ken Wilber and Don Beck, he is helping to define a culture of thought that places spiritual transformation at the center of any vision of transforming the world.

Mentor to hundreds of students worldwide, Cohen has created a teaching of liberation called Evolutionary Enlightenment, which has been lauded as one of the most original expressions of awakened understanding for our time. He travels extensively each year giving public talks, leading intensive retreats, and partnering with spiritual and secular leaders who share his concern for the fate of humanity and the planet. Centers dedicated to his evolutionary vision can be found in Europe, India, and the United States, including an international retreat center in the Berkshire Hills in western Massachusetts where Cohen now has his home. Author of numerous books, including *Enlightenment Is a Secret* and *Embracing Heaven & Earth*, Cohen's most recent release is *Living Enlightenment: A Call for Evolution Beyond Ego*.

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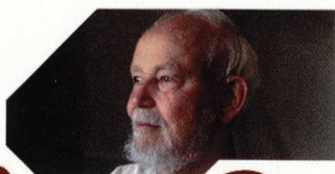
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By Elizabeth Debold

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letters

from our readers

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Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

A Commitment to Transformation

I am hard-pressed to break away from the latest issue of *WIE* in order to send off this email. Thank you so much for the breadth and depth and accessibility of this issue on the vital and dynamic subject of transformation—ours and the planet's. What a stunning array of thinkers and doers you've assembled. I was inspired by nearly every paragraph. I know I will be reading it over and over, especially the article on Spiral Dynamics, which brought to life Ken Wilber's "transcend and include" perspective. Most of all, I want to thank you for the inspiration to commit to my own transformation and that of this world, and for helping me to see them as interlocking pieces of the great puzzle of consciousness and its development. I have a feeling that what you've ignited inside of me with this latest issue will provide a through-line for my emerging participation in the conscious evolution through and beyond this incredible moment we are all in.

Tommy Donovan
Sebastopol, CA

Where's the Compassionate Wisdom?

Your "boomeritis" debate is all very witty and highbrow, but it is so comprehensively critical and so emphatically finger-pointing in my face that both moon and mind are wiped out by the browbeating. You back me up to the edge of an abyss, prohibiting me from reaching out or turning in. You accuse of self-aggrandizement any useful translations of postmodernism that I may have implemented but then warn me against learning from available teachers who are universally immersed in narcissism anyway. Come on now, where's the intermediate encouragement and leadership, the scaffolding and holarchical embrace? Where's the compassionate wisdom and respect that honors and cares about every already divine and essential stage? As Thich Nhat Hanh would say, "Peace is every step." There is no way to happiness—happiness is the way.

Caroline
email

Ego Is Clever

Do I WANT to change?! Does this individual, separate, ego-identity ever WANT to change?! Unequivocally NEVER!! I am

convinced, after striving with thousands and working with hundreds, that the seemingly intractable inertia *underneath* the overt presentation of complacent "I'm OK, you're OK" boomeritis is the *profound* resignation that "I haven't got what it takes." If ego can convince us of this, ego wins; ego gets to survive. When we commit to the work of change, ego fights back so strenuously and cleverly and tirelessly and thoroughly that the deep resignation actually gradually surfaces. ONLY THEN can we "individuals" finally see how ego uses us, and consciously engage with practices that dismantle those ego-structures; the student becomes a partner with (instead of adversary to) the teacher.

Alexis Grasso
Farmingville, NY

The Guru and the Pandit: Breaking the Rules

Comforting the Ego

I just received and devoured the latest (Fall/Winter 2002) issue of *WIE*. There have been some great issues in the past, but all I can say about this one is: WOW! Style, substance, and diversity! On reading the bannered comment by Ken Wilber in his dialogue with Andrew Cohen, "Therapists are basically pimps for *samsara*. They want to hold onto the egoic contraction and make it feel good about itself," I was reminded of this quote from Bernadette Roberts: "I agree that Western psychology is totally taken up with the empirical, phenomenal, non-eternal self. Even when it suggests that the unconscious self be given a divine interpretation, Western psychology is solely concerned with the ego and its comfort."

Dave Spillane
Chiang Mai, Thailand

Limited Vocabulary?

In his dialogue with Andrew Cohen, Ken Wilber makes two assertions with which I fundamentally disagree. The first is his generalization that "therapists are basically pimps for *samsara*." While many may be, all are not. How much more useful it would have been if he had urged people looking for therapy to ensure that the therapist they choose understands and works with the

letters

from our readers

difference between I/Self and ego. Furthermore, Wilber cites the statement, attributed to Jesus, "He who hateth not his own soul cannot be my disciple," as supporting his argument. I believe that Wilber's quote is from the words of an unconscious translator whose vocabulary was limited. I suggest that, "He who will not deal with his own ego with ruthless compassion cannot be my disciple," would probably be more accurate.

Nick Hedley (Pimp for Samsara)
email

Therapy: Bridge to the Impersonal

Thank you, thank you, Andrew and Ken! I am most grateful for the mind-bending, heart-quickenning conversation you two have embarked on about the evolving nature of human transformation in the 21st century. Rarely have I felt so affirmed in who I am becoming and the way I go about it. Though I've not tried traditional therapy myself, I've seen secondhand how therapists, who both Ken and Andrew seem to disparage, can pave the way for serious growth. Great ones, I think, can help lay the all-important personal foundation (of which you both also speak) for making the daring leap to honest impersonal spiritual pursuits. How right Andrew is that "the whole point [of liberation] is how much real maturity . . . the seeker is able to express . . . in life." I, like Andrew, have been discouraged by how few among us seem willing to walk the easy talk of transformation, to live deep and large and responsively. Still, what else is there for some of us to do but to keep walking and talking, holding the lamp high, and inviting everyone who will, to take those first, critical steps in from the dark.

Suzanne Selby Grenager
Lewisberry, PA

A Non-Complacent Narcissist

In regard to *Breaking the Rules*, in which Ken Wilber and Andrew Cohen discuss "boomeritis" and the recalcitrant post-modern ego, is enlightenment the ascendance of a hierarchy or its dissolution? I question the role of hierarchy in the context of Yoga (the process of making self and other One). While we must all practice critical judgment as the exercise of consciousness, Cohen and Wilber's criticism of others seems somehow inappropriate. Willing to risk being accused of boomeritis myself, I question their methods when I absorb the judgmental tones in which they depict many seekers of enlightenment (especially those in counseling) as complacent narcissists. These people are on The Path, seeking awakening; they are us all, and they deserve

more compassion or more expedient means from "the guru and the pandit." Instead of the finger-pointing and exasperation that Andrew Cohen expressed toward people who resist change, I would appreciate an explicit discussion of what this great transformation is. What specific obstacles have people confronted on the path of eliminating the hindering ego? (That was my New Year's resolution and, being a non-complacent narcissist, I wanted to respond to your provocative article and seek the truth.) Thank you for being a catalyst.

Julie Epstein
email

A Valuable Distinction

In their dialogue, *Breaking the Rules*, Wilber and Cohen made a valuable distinction between types of judgment that are inappropriate and those that are useful and necessary. They emphasized the importance of retaining judgments that pertain to lesser and higher levels of consciousness. They bemoaned the fact that they see a generation of spiritual seekers wanting to scrap all judgment, thereby falling into the trap of demanding total acceptance, including that of narcissistic ego demands. I would have to say that I have suffered from something like this "boomeritis" condition for many years. I have been engaging in spiritual practices for decades with a subterfuge agenda of ego wants, and it is only recently that I have recognized this condition and begun to have times of dwelling instead in my essential self.

What I want to explore in response to "Breaking the Rules" is another type of distinction regarding judgment: that between a judgment that is delivered by ego and a discernment that comes from Self—the former being a reactivity with some ego-building agenda on the part of judge and the latter being a simple clear-seeing. Obviously, the message will be received quite differently, accordingly.

Molly Hunt
Santa Fe, New Mexico

A Philosopher of Change

Work to Do

Thank you for your article, "A Philosopher of Change," with Yasuhiko Kimura. Mr. Kimura's thoughts on transformation were inspiring and remind me how much work needs to be done if humanity is to resist the "conspiracy of mediocrity" and evolve into second-tier thinkers.

K.J. Tucker
email

continued on p. 163



The Inside Story

from the editors

"Some fifty interviews later, our heads are still spinning with the vision of our future world that has opened up before us. . . ."

AT WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT? WE'VE ALWAYS had a deep appreciation for the great traditions. Indeed, in our ongoing attempt to bring a critical eye to a postmodern spiritual culture hell-bent on reducing the quest for truth to a self-improvement program, we have often leaned heavily on the hard-won wisdom of the world's religions for inspiration, insight, and plain old backup. As a result, over the years, our pages have provided a welcome and much applauded platform for the enlightening words of many of the most revered traditional teachers of our time. So when our Spring/Summer 2002 issue, "The Future of God," hit the stands, we have to admit we were more than a little surprised by the wave of strong reactions we received from some of our more traditional spiritual friends. You see, in that issue, in the inaugural chapter of "The Guru and the Pandit," Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber made a proposition that to many traditionalists, it turns out, was nothing short of blasphemy. They suggested that enlightenment—the timeless goal of the spiritual quest—might itself be evolving over time.

Now, in the twenty-first-century West, where the dynamics of evolution are widely recognized to be at play everywhere—from organisms to organizations, from quarks to galaxies—the possibility that the farther reaches of spiritual attainment might themselves be evolving along with the rest of the universe seemed to us a reasonable enough idea to explore. But as the letters and emails started to pour in, it soon became clear that although many of our readers found the discussion as enlightening as we had, in the eyes of some, this line of inquiry was an indication that we had taken a serious wrong turn. "To foster the belief that we have discovered or stumbled upon something that has never occurred in human existence until now could be . . . dangerous," cautioned one letter. "God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow," exhorted another. One friend, a Western lama, even wrote me a personal letter to express his annoyance at the "short shrift" our ponderings on the evolution of enlightenment gave to traditional Buddhist ideas. But what really stopped us in our tracks was the barrage of letters we received from an entire spiritual community—all longtime friends of ours—who had rallied together to write in protest of our suggestion that something new could ever emerge on the spiritual horizon. The essence of their often barbed message: "Put the conversation back where it belongs: squarely in the human possibility that has always existed, exists now, and will always exist. . . . There is nothing new under the sun."

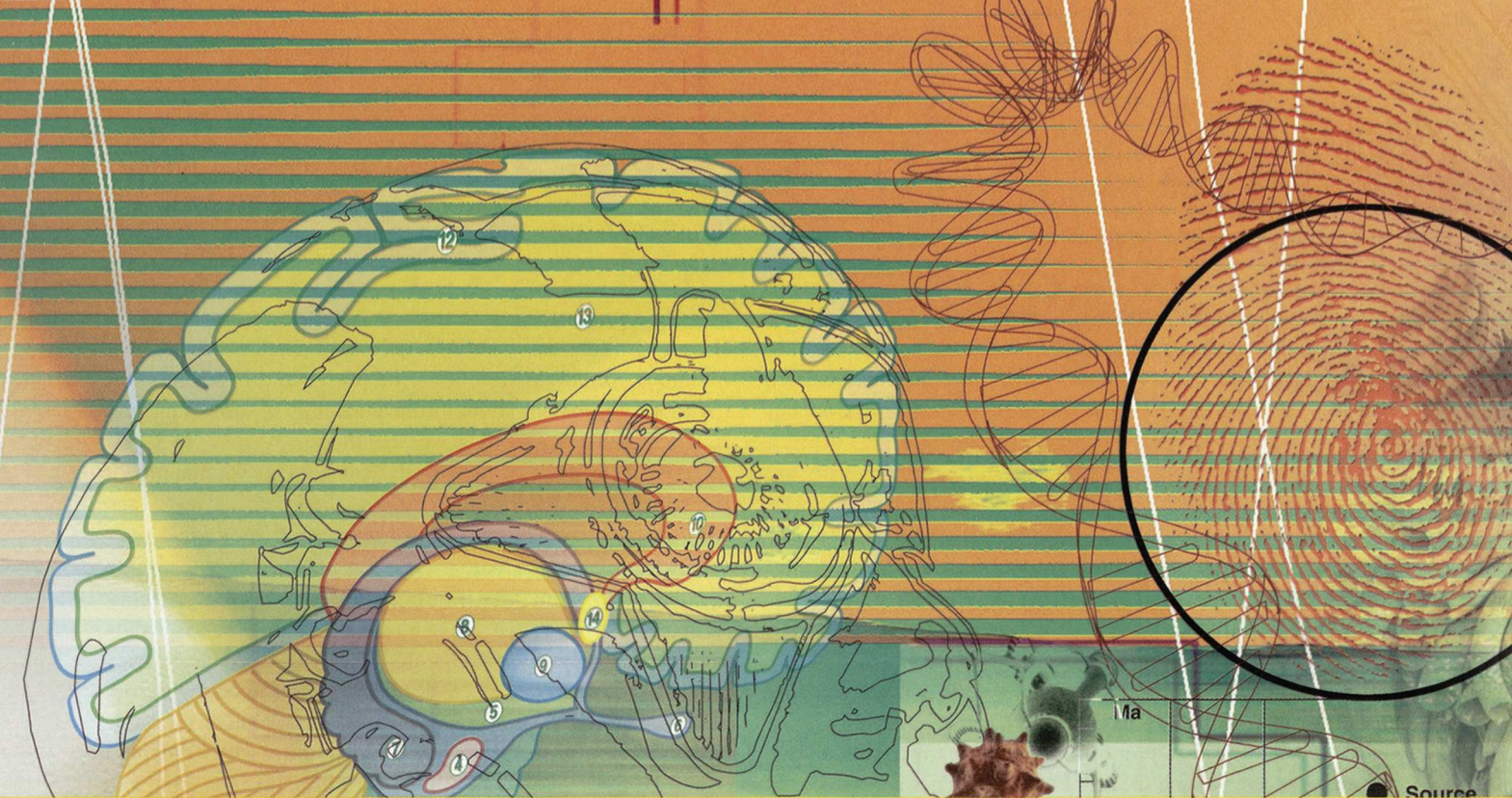
Perhaps we should have seen it coming. After all, it is no secret that the old resists the new and that tradition, in its commitment to preserving our connection with what has come before, must necessarily shield itself to some degree against the forces of change that threaten its very integrity. But what was most surprising for us was that the most vehement objections to our inquiry came not

from the barnacled offices of orthodoxy but from groups and individuals who consider themselves to be at the leading edge of their traditions—innovators, pioneers, the avant-garde. If anyone in the traditions was making room for the possibility of something new, we thought, surely it would have been them.

Which brings us to the issue you hold in your hands. If you've paid any attention to the futurists these past few years, then you, like us, have likely been learning a lot about the overwhelming insecurities that face all of us as we venture forth into the new millennium. Like it or not, these cultural and geopolitical forecasters tell us, we are entering an era in which sweeping catalytic and possibly cataclysmic forces will converge in ways that will transform culture, and even life, into something we can hardly imagine. In this brave new world, change will be the name of the game, we are told, and our ability to move with it, adapt to it, and even drive it will be what determines our individual and collective fate. And herein lies the rub. For in the face of this volcanic picture—which is looking less and less like science fiction every day—the rigidity we seemed to have hit up against in even the most progressive traditionalists raised what for us seemed to be a crucial question: Are the traditions equipped to move with the explosive rate of change that the future holds in store? Is there enough flexibility in these vast repositories of the world's wisdom to bend to meet an age of transition and transformation the scale of which the world has never seen? And if not, what will take their place in providing a moral, ethical, and spiritual rudder to guide humanity through the greatest set of challenges we have faced yet? Do we need a new spirituality? Perhaps even a new religion, more adapted—and more capable of adapting—to the new and ever-changing life conditions of our time? And if so, what might such an entity look like? What sorts of structures would the perennial impulse to manifest a higher order give birth to, once freed from the myths and mindsets of a bygone age?

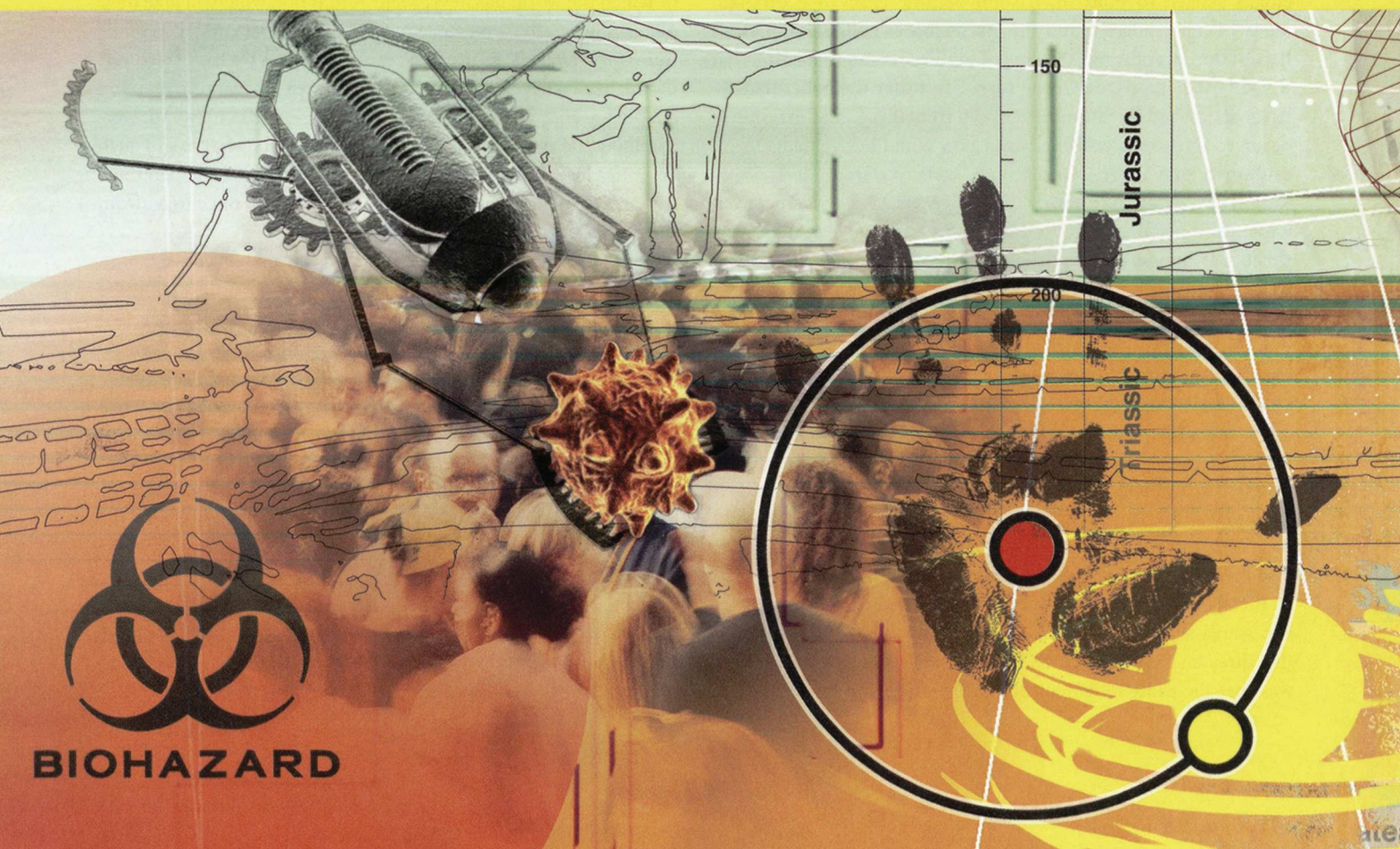
Based on our recent experience, we are acutely aware that in asking questions like these, we run the risk of again taxing the capacity of our mailbox. So in this issue, which is dedicated entirely to exploring these pivotal questions, we have gone to every length we could to make sure we haven't given "short shrift" to anybody. Which, in practical terms, means we spoke with almost *everybody*—from traditionalists to futurists, from Zen masters to scientists, from professors to prophets, from self-styled organizational consultants to self-proclaimed avatars and messiahs. Some fifty interviews later, our heads are still spinning with the vision of our future world that has opened up before us. It's a world as ripe with promise as it is fraught with peril. And it's a world that, whatever part tradition plays in it, is going to require a courageous willingness from all of us to leave behind whatever isn't working in order to allow the living creativity of Spirit to help us chart our course through the stormy seas ahead. ■

Craig Hamilton



faster forward:

impressions of our emerging future





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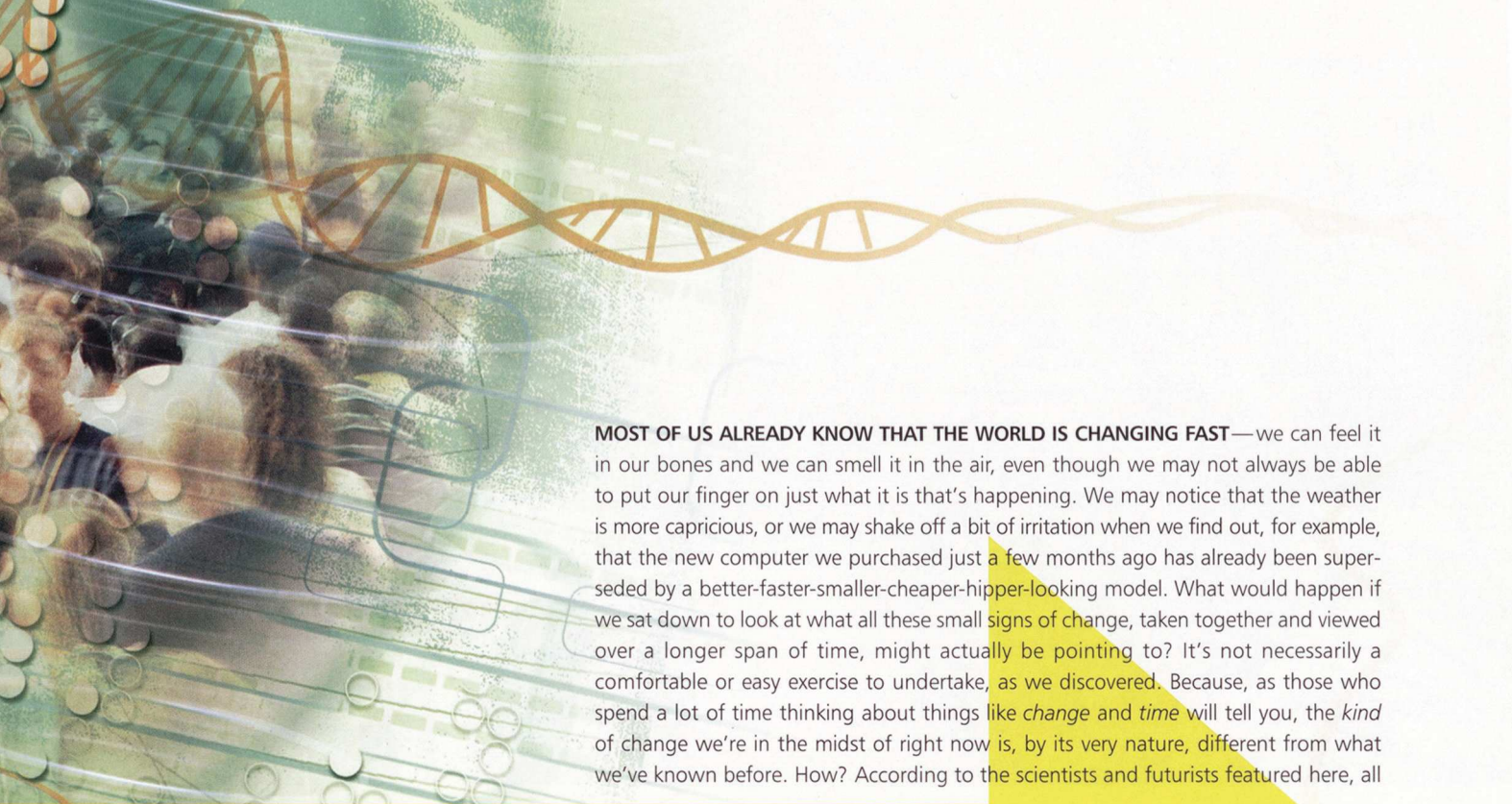
From the far out to the close at hand, four futurists take a bold look at the shape of things to come
jeremy rifkin + elisabet sahtouris + barbara marx hubbard + ray kurzweil



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MOST OF US ALREADY KNOW THAT THE WORLD IS CHANGING FAST—we can feel it in our bones and we can smell it in the air, even though we may not always be able to put our finger on just what it is that's happening. We may notice that the weather is more capricious, or we may shake off a bit of irritation when we find out, for example, that the new computer we purchased just a few months ago has already been superseded by a better-faster-smaller-cheaper-hipper-looking model. What would happen if we sat down to look at what all these small signs of change, taken together and viewed over a longer span of time, might actually be pointing to? It's not necessarily a comfortable or easy exercise to undertake, as we discovered. Because, as those who spend a lot of time thinking about things like *change* and *time* will tell you, the *kind* of change we're in the midst of right now is, by its very nature, different from what we've known before. How? According to the scientists and futurists featured here, all

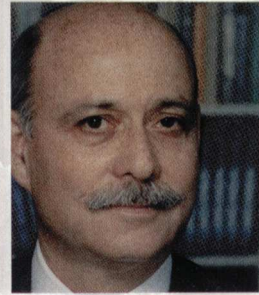
faster forward: impressions of our emerging future



of these apparently isolated changes are part of a larger wave of *systemic* change that is now occurring with a magnitude and complexity greater than anything the human race has yet experienced. And that rate, some say, is accelerating exponentially—a concept that alone is overwhelming to comprehend. Indeed, the more we learned about change and the future, the more we found ourselves asking the question: Can our existing spiritual and ethical structures—both traditional and contemporary—equip us to handle the enormity, the speed, the complexity, and the overwhelming nature of the changes we're undergoing? Changes that may shortly take us, as you will see in the interviews that follow, far beyond our current capacities of imagination.

As a first step toward finding the answers to these questions, we spoke with a number of scientists, evolutionary thinkers, and futurists, who each view the world of change from a slightly different perspective. From biologist Elisabet Sahtouris's microscopic empires of warring bacteria to inventor Ray Kurzweil's intravenous brain-enhancing nanobots; from futurist Jeremy Rifkin's deathblow to the oil age to Barbara Marx Hubbard's birth of a new consciousness, each contributor opens a unique window into the many dimensions of our changing life conditions. Whether the subject of discussion is as large as our universe or as small as a nanotube, whether it's as tangible as petroleum or as ephemeral as consciousness—one thing you can count on is that it's ALL changing. And just how much and how fast is something that all of us, like it or not, are about to find out.

Interviews by Melissa Hoffman



Jeremy Rifkin is author of sixteen books on the impact of technological changes on the economy, the workforce, and society. He is an advisor to heads of state and government officials worldwide and speaks frequently before business, labor, and civic forums. Currently a fellow at the Wharton School of Business and the president of the Foundation on Economic Trends, he spoke with *What Is Enlightenment?* from his office in Washington, DC.

the end of an era jeremy rifkin

WIE: *The human species is experiencing unprecedented change at almost every level of its existence—technological, ecological, social, and political—and this is all happening on a global scale. From your perspective as a futurist and corporate consultant, can you describe what kinds of changes you’re seeing now and expect to see in the future?*

JEREMY RIFKIN: During the twenty-first century, we are going to see the end of mass wage labor on this planet. Sophisticated new technologies—software technologies, computer technologies, robotic technologies, intelligent technologies—are already beginning to replace entire job categories. Within less than a decade, we’re going to produce goods and services we can’t even imagine yet, and many new professional skills will emerge, but these will not be mass labor jobs. We will see smaller and smaller elite workforces working side by side with increasingly intelligent technology. By the mid-decades of the twenty-first century, we’re going to be able to produce goods and services for the whole world with a fraction of the workforce we have now.

The key question this raises is, what will happen to millions of human beings when we no longer need them to produce basic goods and services? We’re already seeing that there is nowhere in the world where we are not facing long-term structural unemployment. So how do we redefine what a human being is in the twenty-first century? Whether consciously or unconsciously, we have become so accustomed to defining humans in terms of their productivity at the workplace that we scratch our head when we try to think: Is there something else human beings on earth can do? If you think about it, you start to see how narrowly constructed our consciousness is about ourselves.

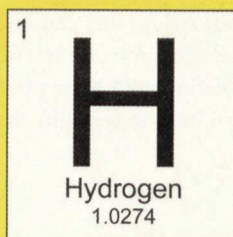
The Age of Biology

Physics and chemistry dominated the first two industrial revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and we’re now moving into the age of biology, which will be the foundation and the basic framework for the third industrial revolution of the twenty-first century. The age of biology, which is already under way, is going to raise unprecedented issues because we now have the ability to manipulate life at its component level: genes, proteins, cell lines, organs, tissues—even whole organisms. In addition to provoking serious public debate, the age of biology is going to raise the issue of how we define all of creation in a world where we can begin to reassemble it, manipulate it, redefine it, and organize it as a utility.

We’ll have to decide: Do we take a hard path or a soft path? Which means deciding: Will we use the new science to create a second genesis, to redefine and reconfigure millions of years of evolution, including our own, and, in a sense, play God? Or, will we use the new science to better understand the relationship between genes and environment, so that we can more fully—and more humbly, if you will—integrate ourselves into the first evolution on this planet? The soft path asks how we can better integrate our science and technology into working *with*, as opposed to against, millions of years of evolution and the ecosystems that support it. It represents a more elegant, more intellectually sophisticated, and much more scientifically advanced approach because it requires a deep understanding of framework, of context, of all the relationships and choreography that exist in nature. So, the age of biology is going to be critical for humanity. It’s going to force us to define, and even possibly redefine, what a human being is. We’ll have to carefully discern what our relationship is



A "power plant on wheels"—the new hydrogen car prototype by General Motors



The New Hydrogen Regime

"What's amazing about hydrogen is that when you use it to produce power, heat, and light, the only byproduct is pure water. You can drink it! Hydrogen produces no carbon dioxide at all. So if we were to move to this "forever fuel," it would potentially address all the major oil-related crises we now face: we could radically reduce global warming, the Middle East would become increasingly less important in the geopolitics of the world, and we could narrow the divide between the haves and have-nots—because once it's harnessed, hydrogen's available everywhere on the planet."

Jeremy Rifkin

to our fellow species. What are our obligations to the planet, and how do we judge the intrinsic value, as opposed to the utility value, of life?

Energy Is Power

Right now, we have three great crises facing the human family, and they're all connected to oil. The first is global warming, the second is the increasing debt in the third world, and the third is the potential for more wars in the Middle East.

Global warming is probably the most impressive challenge faced by humanity. It represents the dark side of the Industrial Age; it's the bill for two hundred years of burning fossil fuels. I think that if you were to measure human accomplishment on this planet in terms of sheer impact, you would have to say that global warming is the greatest single accomplishment of the human race, although it's a negative one. Why? Because global warming has affected the entire biochemistry of the earth in less than one century. That's very impressive—negative but impressive! Even if the temperature change will be in the lower range predicted by the studies (the higher range is a ten degree Fahrenheit increase in temperature; the lower range is three or four degrees), we're still in trouble. These changes will force, in less than a century, a shift in climate that is equal to the change from the last ice age to today—and that took fifteen thousand years. Remember, half the planet was under ice fifteen thousand years ago. So we're talking about changes of that magnitude in less than a century, and our ecosystems and human systems cannot accommodate that without some serious losses.

If you look at the situation in terms of economics, there are also indirect financial costs associated with global warming, which we tend not to factor in. When I consult with leaders in the reinsurance industry, they don't know how to deal with it. The big question that comes up is: How do you insure against agricultural depletion, coastal flooding, wildfires, droughts, and severe weather patterns? The magnitude of these issues and the amounts of money involved become just enormous. Some companies have already begun to analyze the costs of all these problems, and it's so much money that the total will eventually start to approach the actual value of our gross domestic product.*

Third World Debt

The second crisis we're facing is third world debt. It's easy for people in the West to forget that there's a great divide between the haves and have-nots—and it's getting worse and worse. Never before in history have so few enjoyed access to so much of the world's resources and so many been denied. We don't know of any proportional example in history—from the Paleolithic era to early modernity—where we've seen a divide of this magnitude in our human race. It's truly unparalleled. Some of us are aware of this tremendous divide, but most of us don't connect it with oil. When OPEC imposed the oil embargo back in the seventies, the price of

oil shot up from \$3 to \$12 a barrel. And since then it's never gone down. So, for thirty years, third world countries have been desperately borrowing money from the IMF, the World Bank, and other lending institutions to try to pay for oil they can't afford in order to modernize their economies. So now, 83 cents out of every dollar borrowed in the third world is being used to pay off bad debts—and they're not even getting the oil. These countries are now spending more money to pay back past loans than they are spending on basic human services. So eighty-nine countries out there are worse off than they were ten years ago. Keep in mind that as the price of oil continues to go up and as we reach global peak, the third world is going to be caught in a downward cycle of ever-deepening poverty and despair.

The Middle East

The third crisis we're facing is connected to the increasingly volatile situation in the Middle East. If you take a step back, you can see that the modern age has been driven by the use of fossil fuels. Look at how we've been living for the past one hundred years and you'll understand how critical oil and fossil fuels are to our very existence. Our foods are grown in petrochemical fertilizer, our clothes are made out of chemical synthetics, our plastics, our building materials, our heat, our light, our pharmaceuticals all come from oil. But we're just beginning to see that we will have used up half of the world's supply of cheap crude oil (this is called "global peak") sometime between 2010 and 2035—and whichever date you believe, it's still an incredibly short time from now. That's the critical point though; that's when the era is over. Because from that time forward, prices will never go down.

When we do reach peak, two-thirds of the remaining reserves of cheap oil will happen to be in the Middle East, which is the most troubled and politically volatile area of the world. If we think the Middle East is a trouble spot today, imagine what it will be like seven or fifteen years from now when that's where all the remaining oil is. And not only that, but other nations, like China and India, are expected to need as much oil as the U.S. and the European nations within ten years from now; so everyone's going to be fighting for that oil. It's a dangerous, dangerous geopolitical game being played out.

So if you add it all up—global warming, an increasing divide between the haves and the have-nots, more third world debt, and growing geopolitical and military pressures in the Middle East, compounded with the fact that global production of oil is likely to peak sometime within the next ten to thirty-five years—it means we're at the end of an era. As we move toward this very dangerous endgame for the current energy regime, a new hydrogen energy regime is on the horizon. The key question is: How do we get from here to there in a way that will allow us to cross the divide and not collapse civilization?

*The total market value of all the goods and services produced within the borders of a nation during a specific period.



Elisabet Sahtouris, PhD, is an evolution biologist, futurist, author, and consultant on Living Systems Design. Dr. Sahtouris speaks and consults internationally, showing the relevance of biological systems to organizational design in businesses, government, and global trade. Her books include *EarthDance: Living Systems in Evolution*, *A Walk Through Time: From Stardust to Us*, and *Biology Revised*, coauthored with Willis Harman.

the wisdom of living systems elisabet sahtouris

"The Globalization of humanity is a natural, biological, evolutionary process. Yet we face an enormous crisis because the most central and important aspect of globalization—its economy—is currently being organized in a manner that so gravely violates the fundamental principles by which healthy living systems are organized that it threatens the demise of our whole civilization."

Elisabet Sahtouris, "The Biology of Globalization"

WIE: *At this unique time, we're faced with unprecedented change in almost every dimension of human existence—biological, social, political, economic, technological—and all of this, as you have noted in your work, is happening in the context of our historic move toward economic and social globalization. Can you describe, from your perspective as a futurist and evolution biologist, the nature of the global changes we're experiencing and what new opportunities and challenges they present us with at this time?*

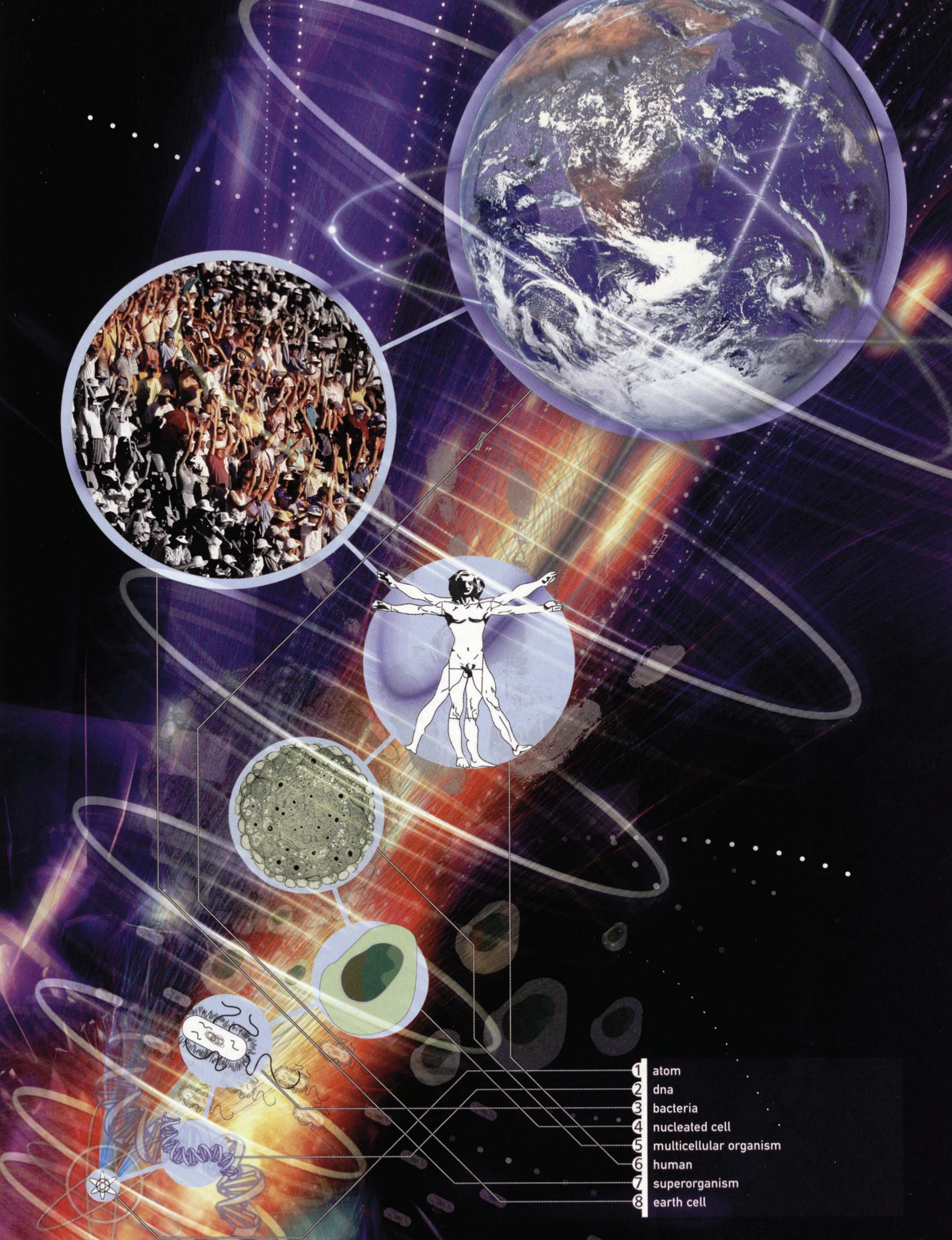
ELISABET SAHTOURIS: From my perspective as an evolution biologist, what I see happening now in the human species' move to social and economic globalization is, in essence, the same thing that has happened previously on Earth to almost all other species. For example, billions of years ago, ancient bacteria, after millions of years of hostile competition that ultimately threatened them with extinction, began to negotiate with each other to form amazingly cooperative colonies. In their competitive phase, they had developed elaborate technologies such as the electric motor, solar energy plants, and heat-producing nuclear piles, along with infrastructures resembling cities that we can only now see under the newest microscopes. The tiny archaeobacteria, with their specialized lifestyles and technologies, then created the most dramatic event to occur in Earth's evolution since their own initial appearance out of the Earth's mineral crust. The nucleated cell—an entirely new life-form about a thousand times larger than an individual bacterium—formed, as the bacteria took on divisions of labor and donated

part of their unique genomes to the new cell's nucleus. Thus, the nucleated cell—the only kind of cell other than bacterial ever to evolve on Earth—represents a higher unity than the bacteria achieved after eons of tension and hostilities, as they engaged in successful negotiations and cooperative evolution. This process—whereby tension and hostilities between individuals lead to negotiations and then ultimately to cooperation as a greater unity—is the basic evolutionary process of all life forms on our planet, as I see it.

This same cycle accounts for how competing nucleated cells united into multicelled creatures (like us), and it is happening now for a third time, as we competitive multicelled humans are driven to evolve a new, cooperative *global* society or "cell," which will function at a higher level of complexity and unity than any species before us could achieve. Like the ancient bacteria, we humans are evolving from a competitive, aggressive, juvenile phase to a cooperative mature phase as we complete the cycle.

WIE: *Just to clarify what you said about globalization, are you talking about the emergence of a wholly different organism, as different as the nucleated cell was from bacteria?*

ES: Yes. From my perspective, globalization is the biggest thing that's happened since the nucleated cell. Our global economy, and more generally, our global family, will be made up of existing individuals, families, and larger social units, but we will weave



- 1 atom
- 2 dna
- 3 bacteria
- 4 nucleated cell
- 5 multicellular organism
- 6 human
- 7 superorganism
- 8 earth cell

ourselves together in unforeseeable new ways. In essence, we are forming a species superorganism that will be able to merge cooperatively into our ecosystems and the living systems of the Earth. So far, in our adolescent empire-building phase (which has lasted for ten thousand years), we have used up huge amounts of Earth's resources to build our societies, nations, and corporations. But now we recognize that this destruction must be ended by forging more cooperative alliances. That's our biological imperative, and our alternative to species suicide.

WIE: *What do you think it's going to take for more of us to grasp the seriousness of our situation? How would you describe those conditions that are going to provoke us to really change?*

ES: A deteriorating atmosphere, a polluted water supply (we are already beginning to fight water wars rather than oil wars), soils deteriorating from erosion and chemical pollution, the proliferation of nuclear and biological weapons, highly dangerous agricultural toxins, and "engineered" plants and animals. Genetic engineering has already caused terrible disasters in Canada, the United States, and Mexico and is quickly spreading to the rest of the world. In the United States, we can't guarantee soy or corn as organic anymore because pollen from genetically modified (GM) plants is blowing everywhere and contaminating non-GM crops. In Mexico, wild stocks of corn that were carefully protected as insurance against diseases threatening our monocultures [large expanses of single-strain agriculture] are all polluted now by GM corn pollen. This is a major, major disaster, but you're just not seeing it reported. In America, one researcher was fired after demonstrating that the organs of rats, including their brains, were shrinking and becoming leather-like after being fed genetically modified potatoes. In our supermarkets, over sixty percent of the food is GM now, with no labeling requirements and no research on how it affects our children.

Food-supply corporations jumped in with enthusiasm to create and sell these products before we knew how they would affect either people or ecosystems. Most "bioengineers" simply do not understand living systems. All Earth's species trade DNA among themselves, but they know what they're doing. You see, nature is fundamentally very intelligent, but scientists think they can treat genomes like mechanisms, chopping out a gene here and sticking it in somewhere else, like substituting screws in machines. But genomes just don't work that way. If you put the same gene into six different people, it will express in six different ways. The system as a whole is intelligent. Genetic engineering failed thoroughly in early trials because genomes identified implanted genes as inappropriate and edited them out. But now scientists shoot the genes in under force and "Krazy Glue" them into place, so that the organism is forced to accept them. Last summer, I visited a Dutch dairy farm where they were doing very interesting research showing the disruption of entire plants by a

single gene implant. It seems that the whole organism tries to protect itself, somewhat in the way flesh hardens and reddens around a splinter.

WIE: *So given the critical conditions that you have outlined here, what are the primary capacities that human beings will have to develop in order to respond?*

ES: Well, what holds us up is our economic system because its win/lose mindset is appropriate only for a juvenile species. Competitive capitalism is a system designed to concentrate wealth among the few while inevitably depleting the wealth of the vast majority. Such destructive behavior is permitted only because we have not recognized that we, as a species, are a living system, just as are our individual bodies and our families. Notice that families don't starve three children to overfeed the fourth, for example, or beautify one corner of the garden by destroying the other three. We understand living systems up close, but we have not been taught to see the larger systems, such as our global economy, as equally alive and in danger!

We haven't recognized ourselves as a living system because we don't understand living systems. Science has interpreted nature in terms of physics and engineering, seeing it as composed of mechanisms. The biggest innovation we need is a completely new scientific worldview from a living-systems perspective. A biology-based model of a living universe shows self-organized and self-regulated holarchies (self-contained systems which are interdependently embedded in each other, such as a cell, an organism, a family, or an ecosystem). Gravity and radiation, entropy and syntropy, are in cyclic balance, just as are anabolism and catabolism—the buildup and breakdown/recycling of living tissue. It's a beautiful, elegant universe. Yet it's difficult to change a scientific worldview—the old guard can't afford to understand and acknowledge the well-researched information that will turn their whole worldview over. It's like expecting a caterpillar to be enthusiastic about dissolving so that a butterfly can form!

WIE: *So you're saying that the primary capacities required would be, first, to recognize how destructive our current worldview is and, second, to be willing to bear the discomfort of letting that worldview go?*

ES: Yes. It's hard to create anything new in the living world without some chaos or disruption or dissolution of old systems. We're in a situation now that's very much like the development of a butterfly in a chrysalis. The caterpillar's immune system is still trying to protect itself as a caterpillar—and to me, that's what our insistence on clinging to the oil age is all about. From a biological perspective, it's the job of the old system to protect itself as long as possible. But it's equally the job of the new system to rally its forces until it can overcome the old immune system and build the new.

evolve or die! barbara marx hubbard



WIE: *We're at a unique time in history. We're faced with unprecedented change at almost every level of human existence—biological, social, political, and technological—and all of this is occurring on a global scale. Could you describe, from your perspective as a futurist and someone who's been involved in this work for decades, what the changes are that we're actually seeing? Many of us can't even perceive them at this time. What can we anticipate the life conditions of the future to be?*

BARBARA MARX HUBBARD: Well, we happen to be the generation born at the most dangerous time since the origin of *Homo sapiens*. We're passing through a period of transition where we have gained the power to destroy or create at a level we used to attribute only to gods. And that's not slowing down; it's growing. The danger is, obviously, that we'll misuse that power and descend into chaos and collapse. If you look at the recent findings about the evolution of *Homo sapiens*, we didn't progress in a linear fashion from *Homo erectus* to *Homo lapillus* to *Homo Neanderthal* to *Homo sapiens*. There were many, many sub-types of human that actually didn't prevail. But it turned out that we *Homo sapiens sapiens* with self-reflective consciousness emerged between fifty and thirty-five thousand years ago. And what is occurring now is that self-reflective *Homo sapiens sapiens* has gained so much knowledge and has had such an impact on nature—particularly recently with the discoveries of the atomic bomb, the gene, nanotechnology, and biotechnology—that the form of consciousness that brought us to this brink does not have the capacity to take us across it.

WIE: *What capacities are lacking in our current form of consciousness?*

BMH: Self-reflective self-consciousness doesn't have the scope of *whole system* consciousness or the evolutionary understanding necessary to solve the kinds of problems we're facing. You see, we have images of life after death, of paradise, of the New Jerusalem, of other states of being and other worlds, but not of *this world*

Barbara Marx Hubbard is a longtime futurist and author whose renowned dedication to all things evolutionary has inspired many to follow in her footsteps. Cofounder of the Foundation for Conscious Evolution, Hubbard hosted the weekly radio show, *Live from the Peace Room*, which featured interviews with our culture's leading evolutionary thinkers. Her commitment to social transformation has recently inspired the formation of a new evolutionary-educational program on the internet called *Gateway to Conscious Evolution*, fostering a network of communities—now a burgeoning movement in its own right—dedicated to conscious evolution (www.consciousrevolution.net). Her many books include *Conscious Evolution: Awakening the Power of Our Social Potential* and *Emergence: The Shift from Ego to Essence*.

evolved. But generally, we now know that we're in an unprecedented situation at a global scale. A growing number of people are aware that we inhabit a finite planet. One more doubling of the population would give us twelve billion people, and nobody really thinks we can sustain that. Add to that the damage to our basic life-support systems, and then add to that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and terrorists who are willing to use them. It's comic to try to solve these problems in the ways we're going at them.

In evolution, when a situation arises that can't be solved by doing more of the same, and when danger to the whole system is imminent, then from my point of view, this is an evolutionary driver either toward real *devolution*, if we don't respond, or, if we do respond, toward evolution and transformation.

If you look back at other great jumps in the spiral of evolution—from pre-life to life, or single cell to animal, or animal to human—there are recurring patterns. Biologist Elisabet Sahtouris speaks very clearly about this. For example, she shows how, when a species is young, it's rapacious, territorial, and competitive, and then it hits a limit to its own growth. Then, either it



It's natural that an intelligent species would be successful enough to hit the limits of its own growth without knowing it was going to do so. It's natural that through our successes we have overindustrialized, overpopulated, polluted, and used up our environment. It may be that this whole predicament is a natural phenomenon and that this intelligent species is now getting a signal: evolve or die.

learns to negotiate and cooperate with its competitors and unify at a higher level, or it goes extinct.

So the set of global conditions, although they're unprecedented for us, are actually like a fractal of patterns that have occurred in the past. We know that great cataclysms have occurred and could occur again. But of all the species that have ever gone extinct, we're the only ones waking up to the possibility that *we're* doing it. And that waking up is an evolutionary driver toward far greater innovation and transformation: spiritual, social, and technological.

WIE: *So in your view, the crisis that we're in is natural.*

BMH: I'm looking at the crisis on Earth—which we could recount in detail, as many, many people do—as a set of complexities that are, to some degree, natural. It's natural that an intelligent species would be successful enough to hit the limits of its own growth without knowing it was going to do so. It's natural that through our successes we have overindustrialized, overpopulated, polluted, and used up our environment. It may be that this whole predicament is a natural phenomenon and that this intelligent species, which has finally gained an understanding of the atom, the gene, and the brain, is now getting a signal: *evolve or die*.

Among the signals we've been getting, some are extreme crises, and others are incredible new capacities. For example, our scientific understanding of DNA means that *Homo sapiens sapiens* is understanding the design of life and is now making judgments about how we should *redesign* life. Well, if you put that in the context of an earthbound species in a closed system with limited self-consciousness and weapons of mass destruction, you see a bitter end. But if you place that situation in an evolutionary context, you could say that the set of crises could be, by analogy, a crisis of birth toward a species capable of *coevolution* with nature and *cocreation* with spirit. This would mean understanding *how*

nature evolves—not just how to maintain it, but deeply understanding that the *nature* of nature is to evolve.

So what would it mean to respond to this set of crises and opportunities? Would it mean that we would actually learn to manage a planetary ecology? Would it mean that we would actually learn to coexist with other species on this planet? It would mean a lot more than that. It would entirely change the nature of human relationship and the structure of society. We have mechanistic social systems now, which are based on an incorrect understanding of nature and, consequently, are destructive to the people in them and to the biosphere. So we're going to be forced to develop *synergistic* social systems because we're not going to be able to evolve harmoniously with nature unless our social systems reflect a natural design.

WIE: *Have you seen evidence that these kinds of social changes are beginning to take place?*

BMH: I'll never forget when I was staying with a group of nuns in South Bend, Indiana, during a Fourth of July weekend. I was there at the same time that WorldCom and Enron were falling. And there was a Catholic priest there named Diarmuid O'Murchu who wrote a book called *Quantum Theology*. Anyway, he got up and he said, "Evolution was working for billions of years *before* organized religion, and it will be working for billions of years *after* organized religion." And then, as a Catholic priest speaking to a group of nuns, he said, "The Catholic Church will not hold, because not only is the story wrong but the hierarchy is wrong. The structure is wrong. The whole thing is wrong." And the nuns all stood up and cheered! Now, they loved Jesus. It had nothing to do with not loving Jesus. And I suddenly thought, "Maybe this is the way it has to happen. Hierarchical, mechanistic structures are not adequate for an interactive, conscious, evolutionary world." And those structures are going. What we hope is that they don't collapse too fast and lead to complete chaos.

Incidentally, I think that all the major world religions were founded in an earlier phase of human evolution by people whose consciousness clearly was way beyond the ordinary. They left behind teachings that hold within them a profound seed of the truth about the evolution of our species. But the structures that built up around those religions have narrowed them to the point where, now, while we're engaged in this period of massive transition, they are becoming regressive.

WIE: *What is it that you think is actually going to motivate individuals, on a very personal level, to begin to reconfigure these familiar social institutions and organizations?*

BMH: There are many things already motivating us. We are rapidly becoming interconnected through all our media, our economic systems, our defense systems, and our cultural and communication systems. The complexification of the larger system is impacting each individual directly and indirectly in a multitude of ways. The potential of the individual human

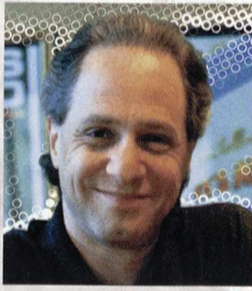
is so great, but it is barely tapped by the kinds of lives most of us lead. However, the force of evolution within us is pressing to come through because the body is complexifying. We're beginning to understand that we are living members of a living planetary body which is itself integrating into a new whole system.

So to go back to what's happening right now: we're either in a crisis of birth toward a new species, or we're heading toward self-destruction. I think the crisis is natural, because it's natural to hit limits and challenges as we increase our knowledge and success. The awakening of our species and our search for solutions is occurring, but it's scattered, and it's certainly not in dominion anywhere. The larger social structures are proving to be inadequate to solve the problems they're creating. New social innovations are emerging everywhere, but they are not sufficiently connected or empowered. So right now, any effort that we can make to connect and create greater synergy and participation in this awakening process is probably the most important thing we can do.

"Nature always creates new bodies for new frontiers; witness the sequence of bodies from fish to amphibians to mammals to humans, and now to universal humans. We are at the threshold of genuine newness. The only difference between us and other creatures who experienced a radical change is that we are entering the process consciously."

Barbara Marx Hubbard, *Conscious Evolution*





Ray Kurzweil is a computer scientist, inventor, successful entrepreneur, author, and one of our nation's foremost futurists. Named Honorary Chairman for Innovation at the White House Conference on Small Business by President Reagan in 1986, his many important inventions include the first reading machine for the blind and, through collaboration with Stevie Wonder, the first music synthesizer capable of creating the sound of a grand piano. He was awarded the 1999 National Medal of Technology—the nation's highest honor in his field—by President Clinton, and has won international acclaim for his book *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence*, which is now published in nine languages.

the technology of universal intelligence ray kurzweil

WIE: *The human species is experiencing unprecedented change at almost every level of its existence—technological, biological, social, and political—and this is all happening on a global scale. From your perspective as a futurist, an inventor, and an entrepreneur, can you describe what changes you're seeing and expect to see in the future?*

RAY KURZWEIL: The most significant change that my investigation as an inventor has uncovered is that the pace of change is itself accelerating. Centuries ago, people didn't even realize that anything was changing at all. They expected their grandchildren to live the same lives that they did, and largely those expectations were borne out. That started to change around the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, two centuries ago. But today, people still understand the rate of change to be a constant. In fact it's not a constant. You see, evolution works by indirection. It creates some capability and it uses that capability to create the next stage. That's why it accelerates. So change is actually growing exponentially, and according to my models, we're roughly doubling the rate of progress every decade.

So that means the twentieth century was like twenty years of change at today's rate of change; in the next twenty years we're going to make five times the progress you saw in the twentieth century; and we'll make twenty thousand years of progress in the twenty-first century, which is almost a thousand times more technical change than we saw in the twentieth century. Exponential change is quite explosive.

WIE: *It certainly is.*

RK: And I can tell you emphatically that very few futurists or scientists, when they think and talk about the future, take this into consideration. It makes a profound difference. Fifty years from now the world is going to be profoundly different. A hundred years from now it's going to be almost *unimaginably* different from today. But when futurists think about fifty years from now, they think, "Well, what kind of changes have we seen over the *last* fifty years?" And that's their guide for the *next* fifty years. But we'll see about thirty times more change over the next fifty years than we did in the last fifty years because of this exponential growth. I can't underscore enough how important this insight is.

For example, when the Human Genome Project was first announced fifteen years ago, mainstream critics said, "There's no way you're going to be able to sequence the human genome in fifteen years. Using our most advanced equipment, we only managed to do one ten-thousandth of the project in the last year." And this was fifteen years ago. But in fact, the speed of DNA sequencing doubled every year and, interestingly, most of the job got done during the last eighteen months of the project.

If you put all these trends together, you come up with some profound implications. And one of the most significant implications is that within twenty-five years we will have completed the reverse engineering of the human brain, which is to say we will understand its principles of operation in quite some detail, and we will be able to mechanically simulate its function. We are actually in the early stages of it now—kind of analogous to where the genome project was about twelve years ago.

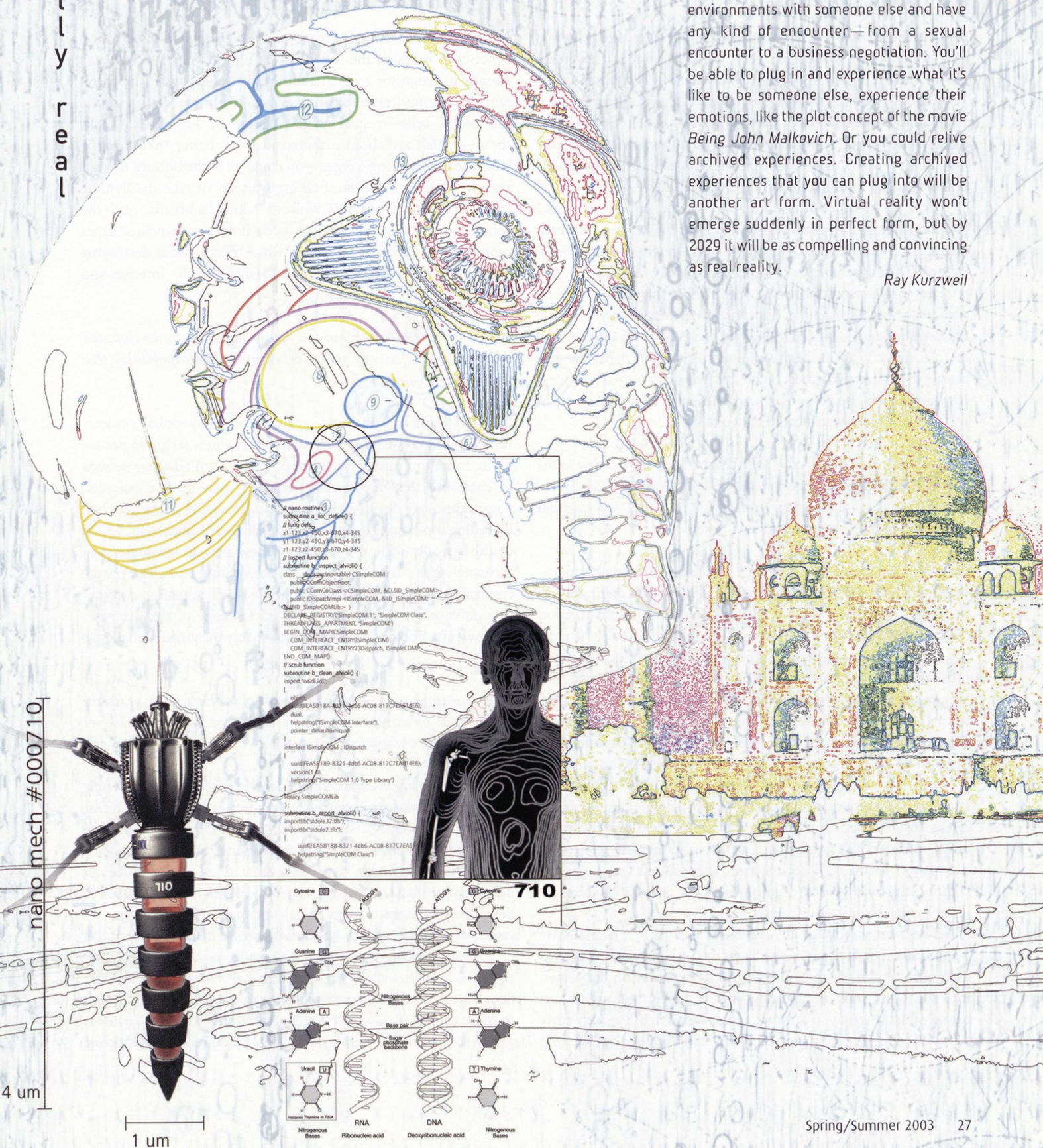
So about twenty-five years from now, we'll have tiny computers that cost only a few dollars that are able to emulate brain-level

Two-way communication between electronics and biological neurons has already been demonstrated, and this new development will open up several interesting scenarios. One would be *full immersion virtual reality*, incorporating all of the senses. If I wanted to go into virtual reality, the nanobots would

set down the signals coming from my real senses and replace them with the signals that my brain would be receiving if I were actually in the virtual environment, and then my brain would feel like it was in that environment. The virtual environment could be a re-creation of an earthly place—like

the Taj Mahal or a Mediterranean beach—and incorporate the sounds, the three-dimensional visual appearance, the feeling of the warm, moist air on your face. It could also be some fantastic place that exists only in virtual reality. The design of these kinds of virtual environments will be a new art form. You will be able to go into these virtual environments with someone else and have any kind of encounter—from a sexual encounter to a business negotiation. You'll be able to plug in and experience what it's like to be someone else, experience their emotions, like the plot concept of the movie *Being John Malkovich*. Or you could relive archived experiences. Creating archived experiences that you can plug into will be another art form. Virtual reality won't emerge suddenly in perfect form, but by 2029 it will be as compelling and convincing as real reality.

Ray Kurzweil



functionality, and we will have mastered ways of putting them in the human body without surgery, noninvasively. For example, today, there are already four conferences on what are called “bioMEMS,” which stands for “biological microelectronic mechanical systems,” which involves putting little robots the size of human blood cells into our bloodstream. One scientist actually cured type 1 diabetes in rats by putting tiny devices in the bloodstream that let out insulin and block antibodies.

So if we project out to the late 2020s when all these trends I just mentioned have matured, we’ll be able to routinely put millions or billions of these cell-sized nanobots in the human bloodstream. They’ll be able to communicate with each other over a wireless local area network and with the internet, which will be very pervasive by that time. But most importantly, they’ll be able to communicate noninvasively with our biological neurons. In fact, communication between electronics and neurons has already been demonstrated. So all this points to the various ways in which we will be able to expand human intelligence—which, to me, is the most significant change to come.

WIE: *What you’ve described so far would seem to suggest that in the future, we will literally reshape and redefine what it means to be human. What are some of the broader philosophical and spiritual questions that these technologies will raise?*

RK: Well, there are a few of what I would call “spiritual implications” of all of this. One very obvious one, which you mentioned, is the question, “What is a human being?” That is a spiritual question today. Thirty years from now, we will encounter *nonbiological* entities, robots, which are based on the reverse engineering of human intelligence, that act human and are as complex as humans. And even when you talk to an ordinary biological human, you’ll be talking to an entity with deeply integrated nonbiological thinking processes, which may exceed the biological ones. Keep in mind that the idea of putting computers in your brain is not just a future concept. For example, the FDA just approved an implant for Parkinson’s disease that replaces the portion of the brain that the disease destroys. And implants used by the deaf are becoming much more sophisticated. These processes require surgery today, but with nanobots we’ll be able to do these things very routinely, without surgery, a quarter century from now. So what is a human? It’s not going to be a simple question.

The most important answer, in my view, is that humans are a species that inherently seeks to expand its horizons. Humans didn’t stay on the ground. Humans didn’t even stay on the planet. And we’re certainly not staying within the limitations of our biology. Just to give you another example, we’re in the very early stages of being able to change our genetic inheritance by changing

our genes, and, eventually, we’re going to go beyond biology and genetics to redesign the human body and brain. In fact, there’s already a design for replacing all the components of our blood with nano-engineered robotic devices. If you had these robotic red blood cells—respirocytes, as scientist Rob Freitas calls them—which are about a thousand times better than our red blood cells at holding oxygen, you could sit at the bottom of your pool for four hours without taking a breath, or take an Olympic sprint for fifteen minutes without taking a breath. And the robotic white blood cells are hundreds, if not thousands, of times more powerful than our ordinary white blood cells at destroying pathogens. They can download software from the internet and destroy any kind of pathogen.

WIE: *Do you think that human beings will have to develop new skills to deal effectively with these outrageous capabilities that technology is going to give us?*

RK: Yes, I think so. You could say that even today we have powerful technologies we struggle to control. The new technologies are going to be immeasurably more powerful than what we’ve seen to date, and they can have tremendous benefit. For example, nanotechnology devices will be able to create any physical entity, including food, from extremely inexpensive raw materials, which could basically wipe out poverty. These new technologies will ultimately help us overcome disease and aging and clean up the environment. But they also create some very frightening destructive potentials. So how do we take advantage of the promises while we control the perils? This is probably the greatest challenge facing us.

WIE: *You emphasized earlier that most of us don’t really grasp the exponential or accelerating nature of change. Do you think we underestimate it at our peril?*

RK: Well, I think it is remarkable that otherwise thoughtful people continually make projections of the future that reflect linear thinking, which gives a very incorrect picture. There are profound future potentials that will be here a lot sooner than we think.

Even ten or fifteen years from now, there’s going to be far more change than most people realize, and given the slow speed of developing consensus on a social and political level, these are issues we need to begin to have more intense dialogues about. We need to understand the exponential nature of change. An exponential is a mathematical function that starts off almost like a flat line. There’s nothing happening that you can notice. Then it starts to move up and it moves up faster and faster, until finally, when it gets to the knee of the curve, it kind of explodes upward with great

— fury. And we're at the early stages now of that knee of the curve. We're at the point where a lot of these technologies are beginning to explode, and we need to understand this concept so we will have a realistic picture of what lies ahead for human civilization.

WIE: *You mentioned earlier that as human beings we naturally seek to expand our horizons, and that in the future we will do so largely through the expansion of our intelligence. Do you see the expansion of human intelligence as an evolutionary end in itself?*

RK: Well, it's a good question. It's like asking, "What is the purpose of life?" In my mind, we will ultimately saturate all of the matter and energy in our area of the universe with our intelligence, and I suppose you could say that's an end in itself. All of this dumb matter and energy around us will wake up and become sublimely intelligent. Then it will spread out to the whole universe at the fastest speed information can flow. And one could make an argument that it's not going to take an infinitely long time because there may be other ways to get to other parts of the universe through shortcuts like wormholes, which physics has postulated. Eventually the whole universe will, essentially, wake up.

But isn't it interesting that you never see cosmologists give any role to intelligence in the future destiny of the universe? Rather, they talk a lot about whether or not the universe will contract back to a big crunch or expand indefinitely, as if these sorts of mindless forces of physics are just going to endlessly grind on like a big dumb machine. Nowhere do they consider, "Now, wait a second, intelligence could spread through the universe and actually make an intelligent decision about what the destiny of the universe is, and even though the gravitational force and other forces might cause the universe to spin apart, the intelligent civilization infusing the whole universe will decide, 'No, we're not going to do that. We're going to do something different.'"

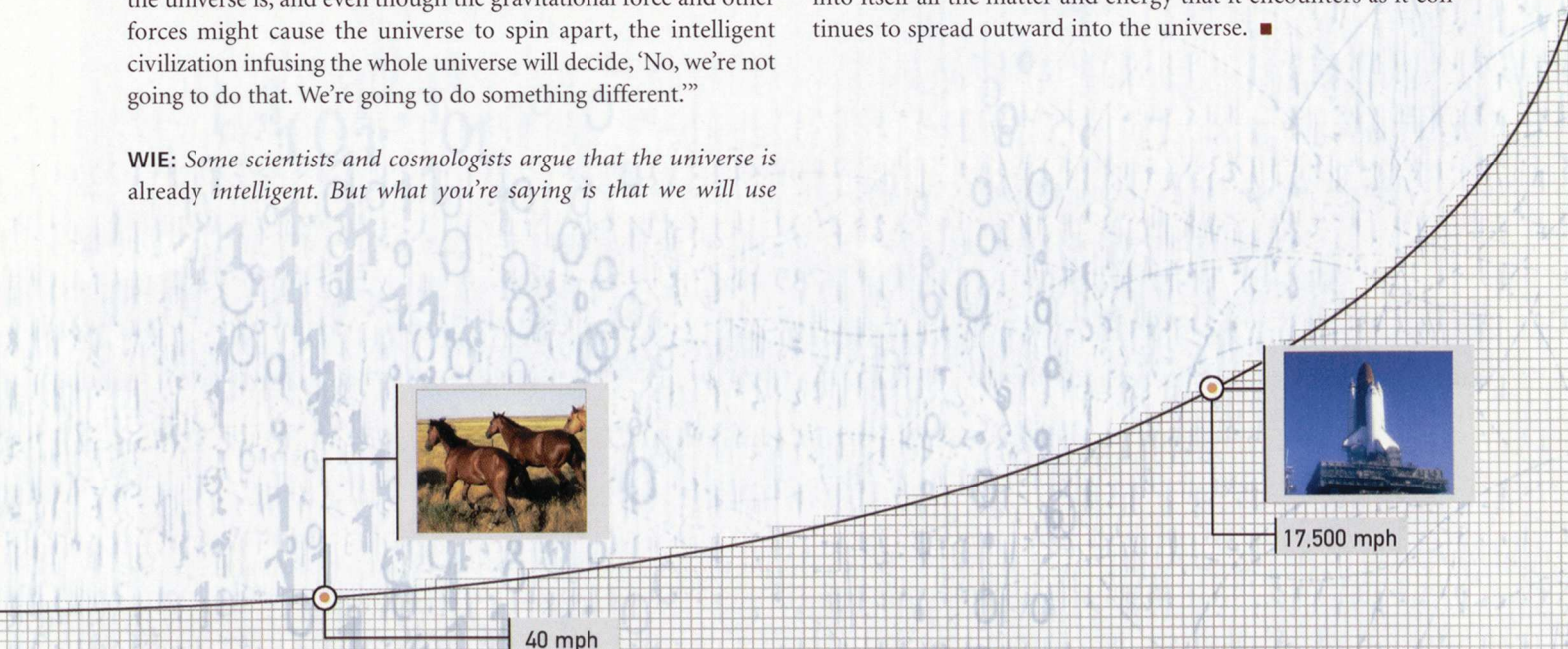
WIE: *Some scientists and cosmologists argue that the universe is already intelligent. But what you're saying is that we will use*

technology to inject our own intelligence into the nonintelligent matter of the universe, that it's a purely physical accomplishment.

RK: Exactly. And that's a form of enlightenment. Because I would say that the whole universe is *not* intelligent at this point. But I think it will become intelligent through the process that I described.

WIE: *How do you see that happening on a practical level? Can you envision it?*

RK: Well, yes. We can state the fact that levels of intelligence far greater than our own are going to evolve within this century. We can't entirely describe what that will be like because it will be, by definition, more intelligent than we are. As we move through three-dimensional molecular computing, we're ultimately going to be organizing matter and energy in a very efficient way, down to the atomic level. In about twelve years, we'll be able to compute very efficiently with these three-dimensional molecular structures, which actually are based on carbon, much like life is, but organized millions of times more powerfully. A one-inch tube of nanotube circuitry built out of carbon atoms would be a million times more powerful than the human brain. Using these incredibly small information-processing systems, which have the ability to reorganize matter, we'll ultimately be able to convert most of the matter and energy in our area of the universe into very efficiently organized processes for running intelligence. And then, this intelligence will expand outward, almost like information, but it will actually be able to essentially convert and absorb into itself all the matter and energy that it encounters as it continues to spread outward into the universe. ■



"In just one long lifetime, a hundred years or so, we've gone from the speed of the horse to space travel."

Dee Hock, "Transformation by Design," W/E Fall/Winter 2002

Visions of the Future

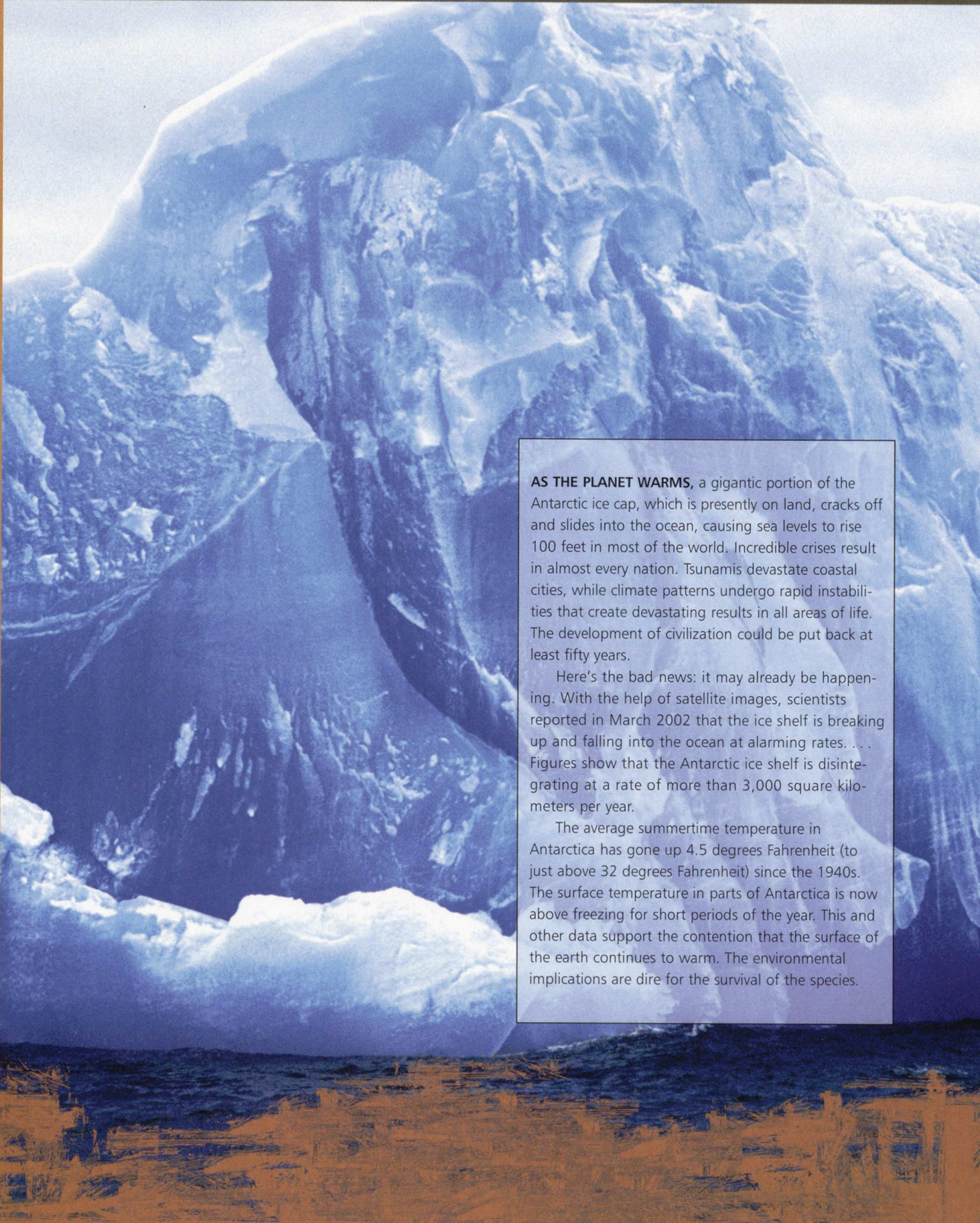
"We are now living in [a] period of significant transition—a fore-shortened span of time, during which our surroundings and experiences will change more than during any era in history.

Humanity has never lived through the convergence—and, in some cases, the collision—of global forces of such magnitude and diversity. . . . One foreseeable outcome might be global instability; another, a planetary renaissance. In any case, during the next two decades, almost every aspect of life will be fundamentally reshaped."

The Arlington Institute

WELCOME TO YOUR FUTURE. . . or at least some possible versions of your future, brought to you by the Arlington Institute, a world-renowned research organization that specializes in anticipating our global destiny. According to the Arlington Institute and its founder, John L. Petersen, the best way to get a sense of what lies ahead is to create "scenarios"—"rigorously designed mental images of the most significant possibilities that might evolve." In the ten scenarios that follow, your imagination will be stirred by visions of the future that fast-forward us into realities in which life as we know it has been drastically, and perhaps irrevocably, altered—realities that are already in the making. As you turn each page, you will encounter two such scenarios, one that stretches the mind with extraordinary possibility, and the other that threatens widespread peril. Our future is tensioned between these two poles—"global instability" and "planetary renaissance"—and if the Arlington Institute is right, that future may in fact be closer than most of us realize.

Ice Cap Breaks Up



AS THE PLANET WARMS, a gigantic portion of the Antarctic ice cap, which is presently on land, cracks off and slides into the ocean, causing sea levels to rise 100 feet in most of the world. Incredible crises result in almost every nation. Tsunamis devastate coastal cities, while climate patterns undergo rapid instabilities that create devastating results in all areas of life. The development of civilization could be put back at least fifty years.

Here's the bad news: it may already be happening. With the help of satellite images, scientists reported in March 2002 that the ice shelf is breaking up and falling into the ocean at alarming rates. . . . Figures show that the Antarctic ice shelf is disintegrating at a rate of more than 3,000 square kilometers per year.

The average summertime temperature in Antarctica has gone up 4.5 degrees Fahrenheit (to just above 32 degrees Fahrenheit) since the 1940s. The surface temperature in parts of Antarctica is now above freezing for short periods of the year. This and other data support the contention that the surface of the earth continues to warm. The environmental implications are dire for the survival of the species.

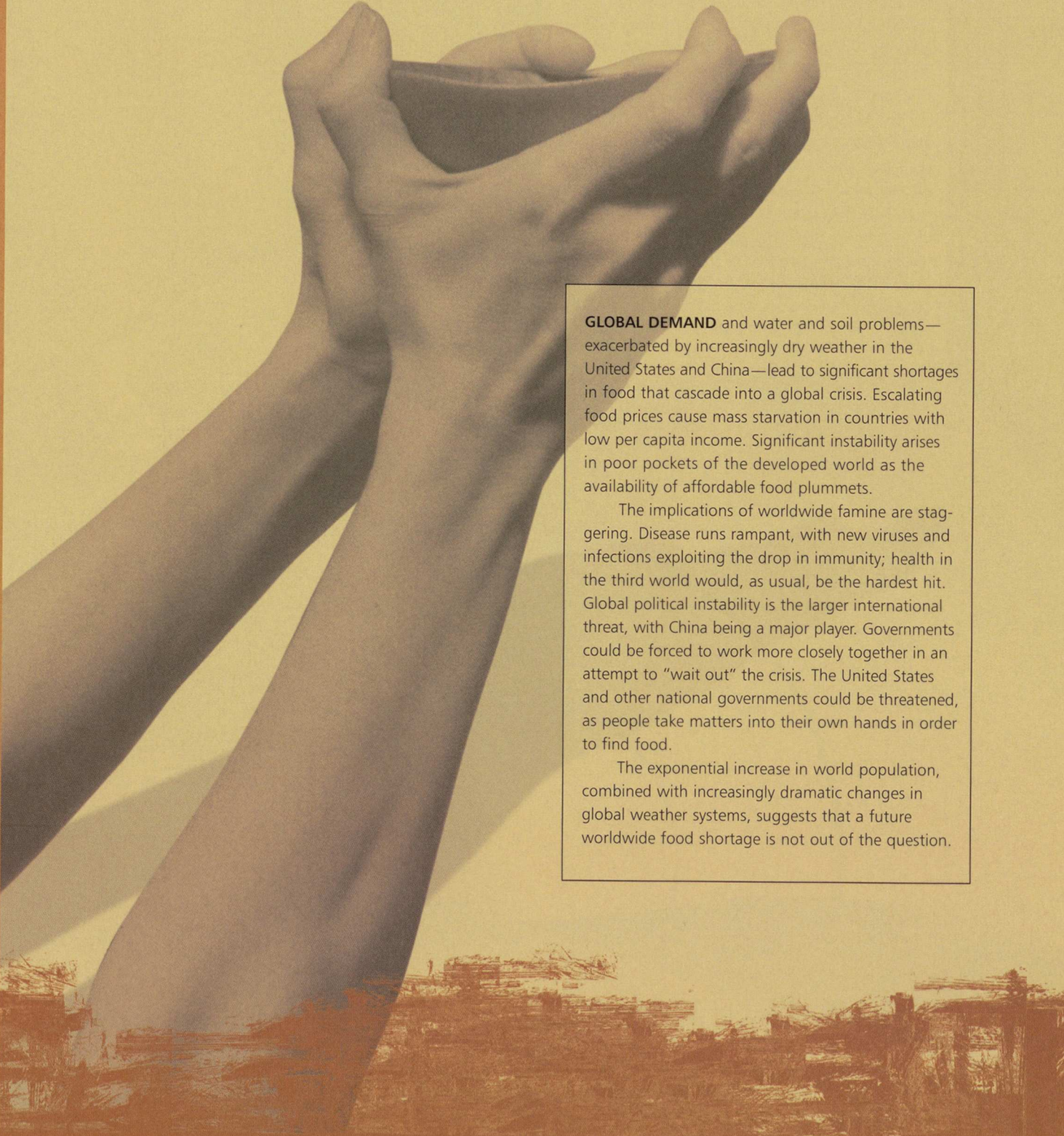
Energy Revolution

A SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGH propels an energy revolution, rendering all of our traditional energy sources, including fossil fuels, obsolete. Cold fusion and zero-point energy—commercial generators that require no “fuel” in order to produce heat and electricity—become a reality. Traditional fusion to create energy like the sun becomes viable, using hydrogen as the fuel.

The result of such a revolution would be vast, and in some cases, cause rapid improvements to ecosystems and the biosphere. Stresses caused by carbon-based energy sources would be drastically reduced. Government control of energy would end or become decentralized. Utilities and energy production companies would be restructured. The geopolitical balance would be upset and regional economies that depend on oil and coal production would suffer, at least in the short term.



Global Food Shortage



GLOBAL DEMAND and water and soil problems—exacerbated by increasingly dry weather in the United States and China—lead to significant shortages in food that cascade into a global crisis. Escalating food prices cause mass starvation in countries with low per capita income. Significant instability arises in poor pockets of the developed world as the availability of affordable food plummets.

The implications of worldwide famine are staggering. Disease runs rampant, with new viruses and infections exploiting the drop in immunity; health in the third world would, as usual, be the hardest hit. Global political instability is the larger international threat, with China being a major player. Governments could be forced to work more closely together in an attempt to “wait out” the crisis. The United States and other national governments could be threatened, as people take matters into their own hands in order to find food.

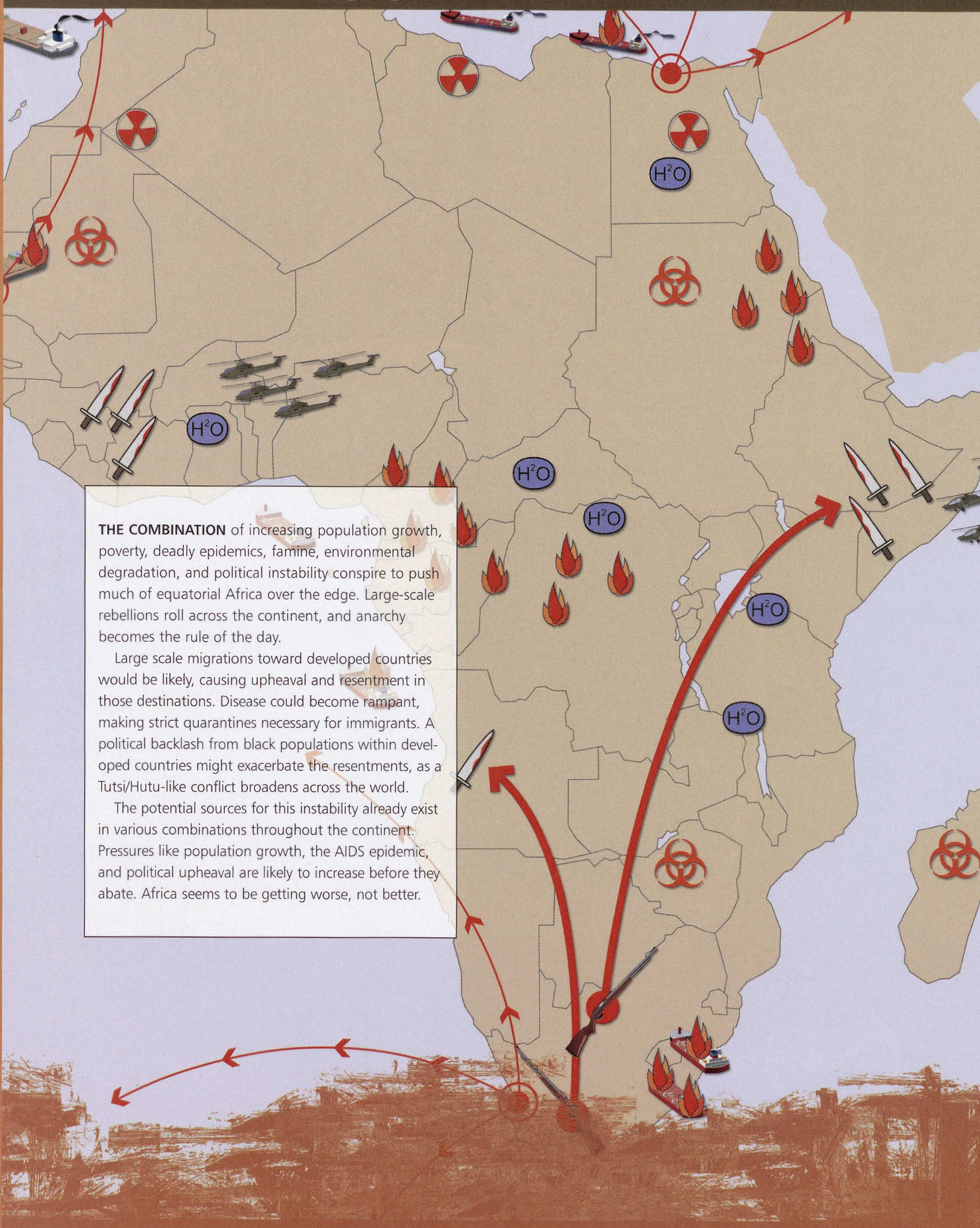
The exponential increase in world population, combined with increasingly dramatic changes in global weather systems, suggests that a future worldwide food shortage is not out of the question.

Nanotechnology Takes Off

NANOTECHNOLOGY—the process of using molecular-sized machines to build usable human-scale products by stacking individual atoms into predetermined configurations—becomes practical. Traditional industrial methods of manufacturing become obsolete. Manufacturing dilemmas that once appeared unsolvable suddenly become trivial in the face of molecular-level solutions.

Radical environmental transformations would occur, as nanotechnology would solve many (if not all) pollution problems. Worldwide food shortages could be remedied; the human life span could drastically increase. Energy problems could be solved. Growing international research into nanotechnology is making the concept a reality; many colleges and universities already offer degrees and research programs in the subject.

Africa Unravels



THE COMBINATION of increasing population growth, poverty, deadly epidemics, famine, environmental degradation, and political instability conspire to push much of equatorial Africa over the edge. Large-scale rebellions roll across the continent, and anarchy becomes the rule of the day.

Large scale migrations toward developed countries would be likely, causing upheaval and resentment in those destinations. Disease could become rampant, making strict quarantines necessary for immigrants. A political backlash from black populations within developed countries might exacerbate the resentments, as a Tutsi/Hutu-like conflict broadens across the world.

The potential sources for this instability already exist in various combinations throughout the continent. Pressures like population growth, the AIDS epidemic, and political upheaval are likely to increase before they abate. Africa seems to be getting worse, not better.

Visions of the Future

THE ARLINGTON INSTITUTE LOOKS AT

Time Travel Invented


H.G. WELLS, EAT YOUR HEART OUT: A fantastic breakthrough in physics allows us to "engineer" and manipulate space and time. It thus becomes possible to travel physically both forward and backward in time.

We would no longer be able to assume "permanence" of any sort. Monumental questions about reality and the significance and nature of time would arise. Contradictions abound, along with important ethical questions: Can the past be changed? Does the future already exist? How will we regulate time travel, and who will do it?

The ability of remote viewers to see the past and future is well established. The U.S. Air Force is already working on faster-than-light travel experiments, which could be applied to time dilation. As our understanding of physics continues to grow exponentially, new breakthroughs are likely to be made.




Bacteria Become Immune to Antibiotics



BACTERIA ARE INHERENTLY RESILIENT; antibiotics work only until the bacteria develop new defenses; then new antibiotics must be found to fight them. If a major disease suddenly redeveloped immunity to the only antibiotics available to treat it, then an AIDS-like epidemic could sweep the country. People would be afraid to go to hospitals and have operations, out of fear that they might get sick there.

Bacteria have developed defenses to all but the most current antibiotics. The deadly staphylococcus aureus bacteria are resistant to most antibiotics. For example, in recent years staphylococcus strains have emerged that can survive even vancomycin, long considered the final weapon against this deadly bacteria. In the United States, it was estimated that 70 percent of the 90,000 fatal hospital infections that occur every year are due to drug-resistant bacteria. We have been fairly lucky so far; but a mutation of a deadly (but currently treatable) disease could happen tomorrow.

Humans Directly Interface with the Net



A SUBDERMALLY IMPLANTED computer chip or some other transducing device allows instantaneous, two-way, thought-based access to the Web. Through specially designed contact lenses or glasses, a direct display of the retrieved information is superimposed on one's field of view. Vast global networks are accessible at any time from any location. This includes unlimited databases and programs, as well as data from other individuals.

Human "reality space" would multiply. Connection to the Net would become an eternal, integral part of life. More people would telecommute, changing real estate dynamics. Learning would increase massively, as would productivity. Some tension between those who have access to the technology and those who don't—a modern haves versus have-nots scenario—would be likely.

Great strides have been made in the last decade in understanding the nature of the mind. Electronic chips have been developed that directly interface with the nerves. Advances in display and observational technology that are linked closely to the human eye are appearing; simple computer games that are controlled by human thoughts have appeared on the market in the past few years.

Technology Gets Out of Hand

WITH THE UNPRECEDENTED acceleration of technological development, an experiment or invention produces a large-scale negative effect that jeopardizes human life or the environment. By the time the effects are actually detected, major, irreversible damage has been done. This would result in a great blow to the mass psyche and would increase distrust of technology (a neo-Luddite philosophy). Technology is already, some argue, growing faster than our ability to understand and plan for it. Much research today, especially that into cloning and other genetic projects, carries unknown implications.



Visions of the Future

THE ARLINGTON INSTITUTE LOOKS AT

Faster-Than-Light Travel

"BEAM ME UP, SCOTTY": scientists discover how to engineer space-time and reduce mass to zero within a given container. This enables them to instantaneously transfer the contents of the container to another location, anywhere in the universe.

The reality of faster-than-light travel would support theories of extraterrestrial "visitors," for it would remove the objection that interstellar travel is impractical. It would no longer be impossible to visit or be visited from a distant solar system or galaxy; it would also make the possibility of time travel more plausible. Space exploration possibilities would explode, as would possible applications here on earth. Militaries would be revolutionized, as forces could be deployed at extraordinarily rapid speeds.

Serious scientists, including those of the United States Air Force, are currently experimenting with ways to engineer space-time. Some experts believe that a breakthrough may come within the next decade. Experiments in the last decade showed a tachyon particle moving at 7.2 times the speed of light.



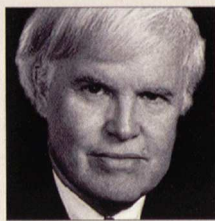
WHEN IT COMES TO PREDICTING THE FUTURE, uncertainty seems to go with the territory. But if there is one thing that all of the futurists and visionaries we spoke with for this issue seem to agree on, it is that whatever course our collective destiny takes, navigating the years ahead is going to be a challenge. As the unpredictable forces of change transform every sector of planetary life and culture—societal, technological, environmental, geopolitical—the terrain of our global village is morphing beneath our feet, bringing with it an increasingly complex, interwoven web of problems requiring our attention, demanding a response. But what sort of response will truly meet the challenges ahead? To whom can we look for a vision all-encompassing enough to embrace the complexity of the conditions that confront us at the dawn of the twenty-first century? If Einstein was correct in his assertion that “problems cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them,” then what sort of new thinking and what sorts of new thinkers are going to take us beyond the existential conundrums of tomorrow?

Now, if you’ve been following the evolutionary trajectory of *What Is Enlightenment?* over the past couple of years, you may have noticed that a new kind of thinking has indeed been finding its way onto more and more of our pages. Call it *integral*, *second tier*, *holistic*, or *systemic*, this new thinking is the hallmark of a growing wave of visionaries with the eyes to look beyond the surface turbulence and grapple with the multilayered complexities undergirding our global dilemmas. Challenging us to face the elaborate interwoven forces that are shaping our destiny for better or worse, these evangelists of higher-order thinking offer what many feel may be the best chance we have at meeting the demands of the years ahead.

So, in attempting to come to terms with our uncertain future, and particularly with the role that religion will play in it, for this issue we decided not just to speak with a number of these leading-edge thinkers but to bring them together and have them speak with each other. As firm believers in Plato’s assertion that the highest form of knowledge is that which emerges in dialogue, we couldn’t imagine what could give us a better chance of seeing the biggest possible picture than a roundtable discussion between some of today’s brightest integral minds, who are each attempting, in their own way, to forge a more evolved course through our present and future world.

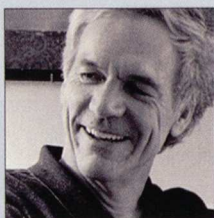
The Challenge of Our Moment

a roundtable discussion
with Don Beck, Brian Swimme,
& Peter Senge
moderated by Andrew Cohen



Those who read our last issue will remember Don Beck as the psychologist and geopolitical wizard behind Spiral Dynamics, a revolutionary model of human values development that is finding its way into the offices and toolkits of an ever-increasing number of global and organizational leaders. Drawing on the pioneering work of psychologist Clare Graves, Beck's theory presents a comprehensive picture of the progressive stages through which individuals, organizations, and cultures evolve, and in so doing provides a key to understanding and untangling large-scale conflicts.

By showing that most major conflicts boil down to a clash between different "memetic codes," or core value systems, Beck has played a key role in such major undertakings as the ending of South African apartheid and the societal restructuring of Singapore. Founder and CEO of the National Values Center, and Spiral Dynamics Group, Inc., Beck has most recently teamed up with integral philosopher Ken Wilber to form Spiral Dynamics Integral (SDi), a joint initiative aimed at "managing large-scale interventions, change, and transformation."



Large-scale transformation, it turns out, is also at the core of Brian Swimme's work, and in his case, *large* is the operative word. A mathematical cosmologist with the heart of a nature mystic, Swimme has spent the past two decades bringing to life the awe-inspiring tale of cosmic evolution that has been unfolding as our universe since it exploded into existence some fifteen billion years ago. Author of *The Universe Is a Green Dragon*, *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos*, and *The Universe Story* (coauthored with his friend and mentor Father Thomas Berry), Swimme has dedicated his life to awakening others to the wonder of

our cosmic heritage and the unique role and responsibility of the human in carrying evolution forward. In his speaking and teaching work, conducted through his Center for the Story of the Universe, he implores people to consider the profound implications of being conscious and to embrace our uniquely human potential to express a "comprehensive compassion" for all of life.



Changing the world means changing institutions, and there are few who have explored the territory of institutional transformation like "management giant" Peter Senge. Widely regarded as "the world's most extraordinary thinker on creating learning organizations," Senge shook the foundations of business thinking with the publication of his 1990 book *The Fifth Discipline*, in which he transformed the abstract ideas of systems theory into practical tools for grappling with the complexities of large-scale organizational change. A senior lecturer at MIT and founding member of the Society for Organizational Learning, Senge speaks extensively

throughout the world, calling leaders in business, education, health care, and government to bring vision, purpose, reflectiveness, and systems thinking into their organizational culture. Today, thirteen years after he burst onto the management scene, Senge is still leading by example, evolving his own ideas, and most recently teaming up with others to explore what the world's corporate leadership might be able to learn from the spiritual wisdom of the East.

So for this issue of *WIE*, we are more than pleased to have an opportunity to bring these three pioneering voices of change together in a roundtable discussion moderated by *WIE* founder Andrew Cohen. A spiritual teacher with a planetary perspective and a passion for evolution, Cohen has spent the last seventeen years engaged in a living investigation of our collective potential that is helping to redefine what it means to be a human being at the dawn of the third millennium. In the pages ahead, this cadre of visionaries grapples with the extraordinary challenge our moment in history presents, providing a real-time demonstration of what it means to bring the future into the present and a testament to the kind of shared exploration that may truly reveal the way ahead.

—C.H.

ANDREW COHEN: Gentlemen, the question that we are looking into for this issue of *WIE* is very simple: *What is a truly relevant spiritual path for our times?* But the issues it raises are multifaceted. For example, will the religious traditions, in their current forms, be able to meet the needs of the awakening human in the twenty-first century? Will they be able to serve as catalysts for the much-needed response to the emerging multidimensional crisis we find ourselves in the midst of? Or do we need a new (or improved) approach to this whole topic? So this is the direction of our discussion. But before we go into these questions, I think it's important to speak a little bit about what our current crisis actually is. Many feel that we may be on the verge of a civilizational war, that the growing stress on our natural environment is creating a worldwide emergency where the very survival of life as we have known it is at stake, and simultaneously, many of our institutions seem to be failing dramatically to meet the demands of these changing life conditions. So to begin, could you each please describe simply and clearly for our readers from your own vantage point what this crisis is?

DON BECK: I think we're in what could be called the "Age of Fragmentation"—fragmentation as a result of the end of the Cold War and the breakdown of the simpler bipolar world it represented. With the melting of that metaphorical ice sheet that covered the planet, the deeper value systems and cultural forces that have been bubbling and boiling for generations are suddenly revealed. And now we're seeing tribes, empires, holy "ism" orders, crusades, *jihads*—we are subjected to *unbelievable* change because there are billions of people who are passing through different levels of development simultaneously. Many people are now moving into zones of societal development that we, in the Western world, vacated three hundred years ago. So, instead of our species moving in a singular advance along a horizontal line, there are multiple changes happening up and down the developmental spiral. Which means that all the ancient wars, conflicts, revenges, and grudges that have characterized human history from the very beginning, are now reappearing—*all at the same time*. And simultaneously, we are witnessing new versions of the historic continental drift as our economic, political, technological, and social worlds are, indeed, being pulled closer together. So we are presented with a world of complexity like we've never had before. Unhappily, none of our institutional forms or coping systems can match this complexity. We are searching frantically for organizing systems that can handle these new conditions; we are searching for cohesion in this Age of Fragmentation.

BRIAN SWIMME: Yes, exactly. To describe the nature of the crisis, I guess I would put it this way: We have given birth to these powerful forms of institutions—by which I mean corporations and large organizations, as well as nation-states, and even, to a certain degree, whole civilizations—and we have shaped these with our various different worldviews or mentalities. So we've given birth to all of these institutions, and we happen to be in a moment when the limitation of the mind that gave birth to these has become apparent. In my thinking, that limitation is a very specific one: the form of mind that shaped these institutions was what I would call *microphase*—which means it was only dealing with the dynamics of a *part* in relationship to a whole. This form of mind has its roots very deep in our evolutionary past. It has come to us from a long history of learning how to survive.

Now, that mentality was fine *as long as the human species was just one species among many*. But over the last several decades, we have actually become something far more. In terms of our impact on the planet, we've become something comparable to the atmosphere or the hydrosphere. We have become *planetary*. We've become a planetary partner to the atmosphere and the

biosphere. But we don't live in institutions that were designed to carry out that larger role. These institutions were designed to deal with problems that are smaller than the entire planet. So our challenge is to give birth to institutions that are shaped by a mind that is planetary, or a mind that is holistic. So this is how I'd sum up the situation: We've given birth to a planetary power but we've shaped it with a microphase wisdom. So the challenge right now is to give birth to what I would call a *macrophase* wisdom, a wisdom that is responsible to the *entire* planet.

BECK: That's true, Brian. Let me add a couple of points here. We might ask: Why don't we just sit back and let the process continue? After all, so far, we humans have survived and landed on our feet. But what makes it extremely dangerous today is that we have billions of people who are poised to experience a quality of life in the so-called first world—materialism—at a time when many of us are realizing how limited that is and that we need to live more lightly on the land. How do we persuade almost a billion Chinese that they can't have two motor cars, indoor plumbing, and a popcorn popper all at the same time? They're ready to enjoy the "good life" that they've seen on CNN and in American movies. They're demanding their place in the sun. So this is one of the serious problems.

Another problem is that because of advances in technology, we have people with less complex thinking capacities, that is, with neither guilt nor shame, who can now access weaponry (like nuclear-tipped bombs or various forms of biological weapons) created by people with more complex capacities. In fact, they can make these at home as they read the recipe on the internet. So our technology has outstripped our capacity to handle that technology. I'm sure that's happened in the past, but not, as Brian says, at this level of being lethal and being *global*. What is under threat today is not just one tribe, or one belief system, or even one nation. What is under threat today is life as we know it on the planet. And that should be a very serious wakeup call for all of us.

COHEN: Yes, this is all so true. Terrifyingly true. And from what I've observed, most people just don't seem to be awake to this crisis. I mean, it's not that we haven't heard about it, but maybe we're choosing to avoid facing the truth about all this because the implications are just so overwhelming!

PETER SENGE: Yes. I think that the degree to which people perceive that there's a crisis varies a great deal depending on where they stand in the world today. I think the sense that "there really is no big crisis" is probably strongest in the United States—even after 9/11. You know, it's a pretty understandable human reaction to put our heads back in the sand and just assume that the war on terrorism will get taken care of by somebody, somewhere. There's clearly a lot of dis-ease under the surface, but on the surface there's an "eat, drink, and be merry" kind of mindset, which we work hard to maintain. I think there are two reasons for this. One reason is the traditional isolation and insulation of American culture. Relative to most of the world's "advanced" or industrialized countries, we're probably the most isolated. Perhaps Japan is the only other one that's close—and that kind of highlights the point: we're as isolated as an island.

The second reason is that we're the world's biggest perpetrator of a lot of the problems. There was an old cartoon ecologists used to use, where a person goes to a zoo and looks at all the animals, and finally he gets to the last cage where it says, "The Most Dangerous Animal in the World," and there's a mirror. That kind of says a lot about the U.S. Clearly, the U.S. is the world's largest consumer of raw materials, and the world's largest believer in the mainstream globalization of capitalism. But it's very hard for us to look in the mirror and imagine that we might be the most dangerous country in the world, which I think, without question, we are. And therefore, it's very hard to name these crises in ways

that people will agree to because the perceptions are so different around the world. Even in Europe, there are different perceptions from here. And certainly the rest of the world, by and large, has a very different take on the challenges that we face, which do, in my opinion, revolve around the ecological and social imbalances that are getting worse and worse.

There is, of course, plenty of data on both of these issues, but with any data there is always a question as to how to make sense of it. And right now, our media and political mainstream do not want to make sense of the data. Probably the simplest, most tangible example you can look at—and it's not comprehensive, but it's illustrative—is the data on global warming. The level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has been growing dramatically for 150 years. If we just accept the fact that carbon dioxide is in fact a greenhouse gas—and I don't know anybody in scientific circles who thinks it isn't—and the fact that, so to speak, the rate at which the bathtub is filling up is a lot greater than the rate at which it is draining out, then any kid could tell you what that's going to mean. Yet it befuddles our politicians, who say, "Well, we don't know if global warming is really occurring or not." Most people in the world don't even ask that question. They ask the question, "What are we going to do about it?"

So that, to me, really summarizes the essence of the crisis, which is a crisis of perception. Somehow we can't look at the most basic evidence and come up with a consensus as to what it means.

COHEN: So the second question I'd like to go into is this: What are the different capacities and kinds of responses that will be required from us in order to be able to meet these life conditions?

SWIMME: I'd say, as I was suggesting before, that the nature of our moment is that humans have become this planetary power. Yet we're operating with an understanding that is microphase, or partial, or fragmented. So in terms of the practical capacity we need, it would be something like *learning how to think like a planet*. The practical challenge is to become a *mode* of a complex planetary community.

I like an idea of Peter's that I've heard: that these institutions we've created, these large corporations, are something like a new species. I think that's a great way to think about them. They are very new and very young. So the capacity we need right now is like a new form of natural selection. We need to develop the skills of understanding complex systems so that we can hone, reinvent, and reshape these institutions so that they build an integral Earth community.

BECK: And if we start from the premise that we have a fragmented, divided world, then I think the issue is, How do we address the gaps? "Haves" and "have-nots," first, second, and third worlds, developed and developing countries—all these are euphemisms for the fact that the planet is cursed by differing levels of access to "the good life"! So where are the integral, cohesive principles and processes that can bridge these great global divides?

I've been to all kinds of conferences on themes like globalization and redistribution, but I think what's been missing is the understanding that we have to redistribute not just the resources but the coping mechanisms to handle more complex issues. External approaches designed to improve the human condition are faulted unless they also include, as parallel and simultaneous tracks, the essential steps and stages in interior social development. Economic, political, and technological efforts must correlate with the levels of complexity of thinking within individuals and entire cultures—otherwise they will make things worse, not better. If we just pour money on problems, it ends up in Swiss bank accounts. We've tried the egalitarian approach, assuming that everyone is at the same level of thinking and therefore will act in a responsible fashion, and it doesn't work. So because people are at different levels of development, we have to think in terms of constructing the *habitats*. If we can think in those terms, I believe there's a real possibility that we can stitch together this wounded world.

SWIMME: Could you say a bit more about what you mean by “constructing the habitats”?

BECK: Well, when I talk about habitats, I mean the social, political, and economic habitats or *life conditions* that will facilitate new levels of psychological emergence in individuals and cultures. The system of Spiral Dynamics uses the image of a spiral to describe the underlying developmental process through which individuals and cultures progress, with each upward turn representing a *mem*e—the worldviews or value systems within us that form in response to changing life conditions. [See page 55 for a quick reference model explaining the system of Spiral Dynamics.] My late colleague Clare Graves identified eight memes or levels of development through which both individuals and whole societies pass, and we use colors to differentiate these stages in the Spiral Dynamics model. These fundamental core patterns, although expressed in different ways in various cultures and subcultures, are common themes across humanity, all over the planet. And only by understanding these deeper value-system currents does it become possible to develop more realistic big-picture views and craft practical and appropriate solutions to real problems.

The idea would be that we gently, if possible, and sometimes with tough love when necessary, *assist* humans to emerge through these layers and levels. A good example of how this can work would be Singapore, where they built a pretty rigid authoritarian system (blue), which most of us would see as unnecessarily punitive. But that’s how those folks are dealing with their life conditions, which include five volatile ethnic groups (purple-red) that need that structure. And now they need to move to the next level and create a more scientific, rational system (orange)—in other words, create “Singapore, Inc.” and begin to compete more openly in the global economy. So you can begin to see how, as the life conditions problems are solved at one level, the next political/social/economic package becomes necessary, which then makes possible a movement to the next level. And because different cultures are at different levels on the spiral, there are different futures for different folks. What’s next for Singapore would be something that’s history for us. And the future of the third world will have to be second world Singapore-type authority before either first world autonomy or postmodern sensitivity become an option.

SENGE: I agree strongly with what both Don and Brian have said. And I think what I would focus on is that we have to recognize the crisis as *collective*. For example, there’s not a single individual on the planet who could eliminate a species, if he or she tried. And yet, *collectively*, we do a splendid job of that, without even making the slightest effort. The collective is how our actions are mediated through the network of institutions that has come to span the globe. It’s very important to keep remembering that this crisis is not the result of individual action; it’s the result of collective action. So the very first step in thinking about what sort of responses are commensurate with the nature of the crisis is to see that the responses must also be collective.

COHEN: And what form would you see those collective responses taking?

SENGE: Well, while I don’t think it’s sufficient to say that big corporations are the key, I do think that they are an important element, and perhaps the highest leverage element. The reason I say that is twofold. Firstly, they span boundaries in ways that nations don’t. The nation-state is becoming increasingly anachronistic in the world today. I mean, even crime is global, let alone the more important dynamics at work in the world. And the institution that comes the closest to spanning boundaries is the large multinational corporation. Secondly, it’s still growing, as a totality, and is, in some sense, less constrained than states or governmental institutions. The problem is, of course, that the traditional, formal role of the multinational corporation is to make money—that’s all it has been held accountable for officially. It has no history of having to have any responsibility at this scale, commensurate with its impact. But

what multinational corporations can do is *set standards*. The quality management revolution has had a huge impact on business around the world, but it's really because a small number of companies said, "This is the standard that we're going to meet, and everyone else has to meet it." I could easily imagine developing the capacity to consciously set standards on the social and environmental impact of probably twenty major multinational corporations, and it would be very hard for smaller organizations to ignore those standards.

So once again, I don't think multinationals are sufficient in and of themselves — please don't mishear me. But in terms of responding to our crisis, the key elements are *awareness* and *capacity*. I really believe we all, *individually*, have an *intrinsic* sense of responsibility. For example, we all feel a natural sense of responsibility for kids, even if they're not our own—that's biological. But we don't have that same sense of responsibility at the *level* on which our actions are having an effect. So I think if we're looking at building our capacity to respond to this crisis, we need to access the *collective* institutional capacity to be aware, and then access our *natural* intrinsic sense of responsibility.

COHEN: Now I'd like to go into some of the questions I mentioned earlier. In light of everything you've all just laid out, it's obvious that in order to meet this crisis, human beings will have to evolve to a higher level of consciousness and a deeper level of maturity. Do you think that the religious traditions in their current forms are equipped to help us recognize, come to terms with, and respond to the dramatic nature of the changing life conditions that we're in the midst of?

SWIMME: Well, firstly, I think that the religious traditions were, generally speaking, set up to accomplish things that were different than what this crisis is demanding. So for the most part, they are not focused on this, and most of them don't recognize the crisis even now, in the terms in which one would want it to be recognized. But they just were not designed for that; they weren't *about* this crisis. This is new; it's never happened in the history of the world.

At the same time, there are *resources* within all of the religious traditions that are, I think, essential for our moment. It's not as if we can just throw them over. I think they do provide crucial insights and practices. But they have to be, in a certain sense, shaped and transformed to be appropriate.

BECK: I agree, and I think the question is: What *level* of religious system are we talking about? I think this is also what Brian was implying. Because when you say "religion," I tend to think in terms of the levels of development or *memes* out of which those religions arose. For example, many of the great traditions arose out of a mythic, absolutist, authoritarian meme (blue). And maybe, because of very conservative elements, some of them will never be able to see this big picture and therefore will not be able to change. Yet, they *are* very important because they *help people and cultures to make a particular developmental shift*, out of a lower level (egocentric or red) into a higher level (absolutist or blue). They understand that transition better than anybody, but they are not going to understand anything beyond that. So for example, some of these conservative religious systems are clearly addressing the needs of a lot of people, even Americans, especially many coming out of so-called minority communities. And if we can see the value of that, and at the same time say to those in these traditions, "Beware of becoming a closed system," then we've done ourselves a great favor. So how we understand the *verticality* or developmental importance of these *expressions* of religion, or spirituality, is the key element.

SENGE: What's the word you're using, Don, "verticality"?

BECK: Yes. When I say "understand the verticality," I mean, see the importance of different spiritual forms at different stages of development, rather than what many people do, which is to discredit earlier forms. The shift that we need to bring about is from embracing a single expression of religion and spirituality to *recognizing the evolutionary flow of religious experiences*. If we can do this, I think the whole spiritual community can play a major role in the kind of transformation that is needed.

SWIMME: Right. If we can bring forth the central ideas from each tradition that are helpful, it would really be an amazing contribution to the transformation we're in. I love the way Don put it, that some of these traditions are absolute experts at various aspects of the developmental transitions that are required. If we can bring those into play in our current context, it could be very powerful.

COHEN: Yes. And it is indeed enlightening when one recognizes that human emotional, psychological, and *spiritual* evolution is part of a vast, complex *developmental* process—a process that we are all, individually and collectively, participating in. The fact that the religious traditions have played such a pivotal role in that process is foundational in looking into the question of how the past and present are going to meet the future.

Peter, I'm curious what your response to this question would be because with regard to what you were saying earlier, it occurred to me that the religious institutions span even greater boundaries than a lot of the multinational institutions that you were speaking about.


SENGE: That's absolutely right.

COHEN: So, they are potentially, I suppose, in a position to galvanize an enormous percentage of humanity to respond to this crisis, *if* they were predisposed to do so.

SENGE: That's a very good point. But I think it's going to be very difficult. Institutions are very much bound up in their history. And at least the major traditions we probably all think of when we say "boundary-spanning major global religious institutions," with maybe to some degree the exception of Buddhism, historically were certainly not global in their thinking.

Their roots are, to a high degree, tribal. Islam is probably the most compelling example of this. Muhammad, for instance, did a great deal to teach women, and bringing women in as teachers was one of his major agendas. But within a hundred years of his death, the *tribal* leaders, who inherited his teachings, had made sure to eliminate that practice in no uncertain terms. And that's pretty much the case with most contemporary religions: they have very strong tribal and ethnic identities.

So for me, the more relevant issue today is the deinstitutionalizing of religion. In all kinds of different settings, people are having what you would call "religious experience"—connections, deep connections with one another, deep connections with life, deep connections with the transcendent—but not in a religious context! And I think that's really important. I think there's going to be a *new* religious sensibility that develops in the world—just as I believe that there will be a new science—and it will escape the limitations of religious institutions.



I think there is immense innate knowledge in the human that we would all consider to be spiritual knowledge, but the problem is that we don't know how to access it and cultivate it in the present global context. We don't have any spirituality for the modern context.

Peter Senge

COHEN: Speaking of a new religious sensibility, that is what my last question is about: What kind of new moral, ethical, and spiritual framework would each of you advocate that would enable more and more of us to meet the great challenges of our life conditions?

SENGE: Well, I don't know if I have a concept of a new framework. I think we know plenty about spirituality, morality, and ethics. But what has shifted totally is the *context* because, as we've been saying, the context now is *global*, and therefore it can't be anything less than a global spirituality. I think there is immense innate knowledge in the human, and probably in quite a few other species, that we would all consider to be spiritual knowledge, but the problem is that we don't know how to access it and cultivate it in the present global context. Most of the spiritual "golden ages" in human history, in China and Greece and places like that, were long ago. They were not really able to take root and make it through the last couple of thousand years. We don't have any spirituality for the modern context. The only thing that we can probably say with some confidence is that a modern spirituality would need to be really different from the spiritual practices and institutions that worked in those other contexts.

The one place that I think we *can* look, to some degree, is science. I think the spirituality of the next millennium will be very tied to science. Because, for all its shortcomings, the development of Western science in the last four or five hundred years is undoubtedly an important development in human society, and many people have pointed to science as kind of the religion of this epoch. I think that's probably a pretty good analogy. Today we look to scientists as people traditionally looked to religious leaders, to tell us how reality *really* works. And good scientists always cringe at this, firstly, because they know their knowledge is very narrow, and secondly, because they know that science does not produce absolute truths.

The fundamental challenge, though, is that science has been trapped in this fragmentation of the inner world and the outer world. This actually kind of crept into science for political/social reasons. The scientists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had to get the Church off their backs, so they said, "You deal with the inner world; we'll deal with the outer world." And now we've all paid the price, with this great power and influence in the outer world and a total estrangement from the inner world. So I think the spirituality of the next millennium will be one that somehow reintegrates what we would call "science" today, which at its best is about skepticism and an absolutely rigorous belief in experience. I think that is the core of empirical science—in fact, that is what the word empirical means—but it gradually got distorted, and then progressively, that commitment to experience got completely lost. So science is a tricky word to use, and I mean it only in the sense that, as Buckminster Fuller always used to say, "Every human being is born a scientist." So that would be my take on the new spirituality.

COHEN: Don, what kind of new moral, ethical, and spiritual framework would you advocate to enable more and more of us to meet the great challenges of our changing life conditions?

BECK: Well, I think part of it, as I've been saying, will be a recognition that different people at different stages have to embrace different versions of spirituality. And rather than their being the target of our scorn and ridicule, our task is to help them through these healthy, positive expressions of spirituality because these expressions are necessary at different stages of the spiral. So the framework that I'm talking about contains these elements of pilgrimage, of trial and error, of gaining new systems, of leaving ego behind, of doing whatever is necessary to increase the capacity for more complex thinking. We need to build the essential steps and stages into our school systems, into our religious life, into the whole community, so that we create, as Ken Wilber puts it, "the greatest depth for the greatest span."

If we can do this, then maybe what will become part of the spirituality in the twenty-first century is a respect for and a focus on the awesome nature of how life itself is evolving. I think it will be a redefinition of spirit, much along the lines of what you and Ken have been talking about. It has much more of a cosmic respect for the force of life itself, and for the fact that some *other kind of intelligence* seems to be behind it. Think about it—humans could not have just evolved *biologically* simply with 35,000 genes—there would not have been time for the random choice process to work. Bacteria, viruses, genes, and memes respond to *nonlinear dynamics*, which means that when their external worlds threaten their internal capacities, they recalibrate their codes. So there is, in all life-forms, a genius, or adaptive intelligence. And I think that this understanding of what life itself is could be part of the basis for the new theology, or the new expression of religion. That's why so many physicists and philosophers now are beginning to talk about God again—not the same kind of God of the Old Testament, but a whole different concept of what is spiritual.

COHEN: Brian, what kind of new moral, ethical, and spiritual framework would you advocate?


SWIMME: Framework is a perfect word because we find ourselves in this moment, at least in the West, of having broken apart all the frameworks. There's nothing we can really agree on, in terms of value. What we're left with is lowest-common-denominator consumerism. That's our world! So what would be a new framework?

As we've touched on in this conversation already, it seems to me that we're in the moment of discovering this new framework of the universe in *development itself*. As you've mentioned, Andrew, and Peter and Don, it is a vast new historical revelation of life, of spirit, or of the universe. I liked what Peter said—it will be a new science. And I guess I would describe it in two ways. One would be the discovery of evolution, cosmic evolution. We have this amazing vision of the universe, coming from this numinous seed and then expanding out to where we are now. So from this empirically based approach to reality, it's just so *evident* that we are connected and involved with everything. We're all coming from the same seed point.

So that would be the large-scale discovery. And then to deepen it, in terms of the micro nature of reality, we have the quantum discovery of the inseparability of the inner and the outer. And this goes with what Peter was talking about. Now we realize that this division between inner and outer simply is not viable; it was an illusion that worked for Newton and Descartes, but the deeper understanding is *seamlessness*. And so we have the discovery of a developing universe that is, from the beginning, seamless. We are everywhere involved with the whole thing.


In this framework, then, our fundamental challenge is this notion of individuality, or we could say discontinuity. We have this illusion that we're not connected, we're not part of, we're *separate from*, and our entire economic and political systems are based on that premise: the separation between the human and the rest of the world. So one of the great challenges is breaking out of that illusion. And that's why, Andrew, I love your work and your emphasis on the way in which we have to learn how to disappear into the evolutionary process so that we break out of that fragmented ego.

COHEN: That's a great description of it. That's the essence of what I would call "Evolutionary Enlightenment"—transcending ego so that we can literally disappear into and become one with the evolutionary process itself.



We have this power that no other species has had—human self-consciousness. But it's not for humans. And when that power is put in service of the whole, we become a way in which the whole evolutionary process moves into another phase of its beauty.

Brian Swimme



SWIMME: So I think that is the framework—we recognize then that we aren't these isolated individuals, but we really *are* the whole thing; we're a *mode* of the whole thing. And so we develop the capacity to flow into the whole thing—and I like the way Don puts it—in the service of life. We have this power that no other species has had—*human self-consciousness*. But it's not *for* humans. And when that power is put in service of the whole, we become a way in which the whole evolutionary process moves into another phase of its beauty.

So in terms of spiritual development, I would say that our challenge right now is to become what Teilhard de Chardin would have called the “hominized” form of the evolutionary process. Teilhard used the word “hominization” to describe the way in which humans transform previously existing practices and functions of the earth. The earth makes decisions all the time. It makes choices—in a broad sense, this is called natural selection. But when you throw human choice in there, it explodes—look at the impact of all of the decisions we're making all over the planet. Human decision has “hominized” the natural selection process—for good and ill. *Natural selection has been surpassed by humans*. So in this new framework, we would need to understand *ourselves* as *the way* in which the universe is making fundamental decisions about the quality of life that it wants to blossom forth. And these decisions aren't just made for humans or for a particular society but for the whole dynamic, pulsating, throbbing planetary community.

COHEN: That's profound. And so, therefore, this new framework would *have* to illuminate the fact that it indeed is *we* who have created the past and who will create the future. It would have to emphasize not only the *global* context of human incarnation in the twenty-first century but also the *evolutionary* context. As you so beautifully described, we are all playing a crucial role in a developmental process that, for the most part, we remain unconscious of. So the significant task of a new spirituality would be to oblige us to become *conscious* of that fact. And most importantly, in this context, the task of a new spirituality would be a perennial one—to awaken as many of us as possible to the ultimate truth that there is only One and that we *are* all that One. Obviously we have come to a point where the divisions in the way that we think about life and the way we live life need to be urgently questioned. Our very survival depends on it. Indeed, what it means to be a human being in the twenty-first century is one issue at this point! That's what has become loud and clear in this conversation. Thank you all very much. ■

SPIRAL DYNAMICS: the evolution of consciousness and culture

The incisive and far-reaching theory of Spiral Dynamics, originating with the work of Clare Graves in the 1960s, and developed and applied by Dr. Don Beck and others, charts the evolution of human culture and consciousness beginning 100,000 years ago, through eight color-coded *value memes*, or levels of development, with a ninth on the horizon. These memes are systems of values that apply as much to the mindsets of individuals as to the worldviews of entire societies. In the world today all the meme levels are manifesting—from survival clans (beige) to social democracies (green), with hints of higher levels of human development (yellow, turquoise, and to a very minimal extent, coral) just beginning to emerge.



TURQUOISE MEME

Holistic meme – starting 30 years ago

Worldview: An elegantly balanced system of interlocking forces

Mindset: Experience the wholeness of existence through mind & spirit

Manifestations: Holonic, intuitive thinking; global networks for global results

YELLOW MEME

Integrative meme – starting 50 years ago

Worldview: The world is a chaotic organism forged by differences and change

Mindset: Flexibility, functionality, responsibility, and spontaneity have highest priority

Manifestations: Integrative structures, systems thinking, "Third Way" politics

GREEN MEME

Communitarian/Egalitarian meme – starting 150 years ago

Worldview: A human habitat in which we share life's experiences, freed from dogma

Mindset: Seek peace in the inner self and explore the caring dimensions of community

Manifestations: Human rights movements, communes, Woodstock, multiculturalism

ORANGE MEME

Achievist/Strategic meme – starting 300 years ago

Worldview: A marketplace full of possibilities and opportunities

Mindset: Play the game to win; cultivate optimistic, risk-taking self-reliance

Manifestations: The Enlightenment, Silicon Valley, Fortune magazine, corporate states

BLUE MEME

Purposeful/Authoritarian meme – starting 5,000 years ago

Worldview: An ordered existence under the control of the ultimate truth

Mindset: Life has meaning, direction and purpose; enforce principles of rightful living

Manifestations: Puritan America, codes of honor, the Moral Majority

RED MEME

Impulsive/Egocentric meme – starting 10,000 years ago

Worldview: A jungle where the strongest and most cunning survive

Mindset: Avoid shame, get respect, and do what you want

Manifestations: Feudal kingdoms, rebellious youth, epic heroes, "terrible twos"

PURPLE MEME

Magical/Animistic meme – starting 50,000 years ago

Worldview: A magical place alive with spirit beings and mystical signs

Mindset: Keep the tribe's nest safe and warm; observe tribal customs, seasonal cycles

Manifestations: Family rituals, shamans, blood oaths, magical New Age beliefs

BEIGE MEME

Instinctive/Survivalistic meme – starting 100,000 years ago

Worldview: A natural milieu where humans rely on instincts to survive

Mindset: Do what you must to stay alive. Food, warmth, sex, and safety have priority

Manifestations: First human societies, starving masses, African Bushmen, street people

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION on Spiral Dynamics, see *Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership and Change* by Don E. Beck and Christopher Cowan, (Malden MA: Blackwell, Inc. 1996); "The Never Ending Upward Quest," in *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine, Fall/Winter 2002, read online at: www.wie.org/spiraldynamics; www.spiraldynamics.net; www.globalvaluesnetwork.com



Traditions on the edge

can the past meet the future?

by Jessica Roemischer

Sunday, March 16, 2003 It's years since you've been to church. But after a restless night, for some reason you find yourself suddenly awakened by memories of the last time you attended a Sunday service. You were sixteen, and your parents cajoled you to go "for their sake." You recall the pastor's seemingly interminable readings, the choral interludes, the hard straight pew, the smell of old wood and burning candles, the yellowed pages of the hymnal, the archaic but familiar words you learned to recite and sing. And you also remember the sense of something immediate, close, and present, yet ineffable. The intervening years flash before you, religion fading into the background of your increasingly fast-paced life—college, work, relationships, travel, friends. And yet, that ungraspable presence has remained, as a quiet steadiness and yearning.

You rise and go outside to find that it's a beautiful day. Taking a slow walk toward the center of town, you hear the church bells begin to ring in the distance. And as you follow their sound, you find that your neighbors and many others from the community are arriving for the morning service. You're curious: What would it be like to be in church again? Why not join them? you ask yourself. You approach the church and someone hurries out to announce that elderly Pastor Shaw won't be up to giving his usual sermon today. (He's a little under the weather.) But, they continue, his son Kyle just happens to be making a rare family visit for the weekend and will be filling in. Yes, they continue, you all have probably heard that Kyle has become a pastor himself, and quite a controversial one. "I've heard he's really shaking things up in church circles," someone says. "I'm not surprised," another adds. "He was always quite a renegade! I can't imagine what his sermons are like." Your curiosity is piqued, and as you ascend the wide stone steps and glance up at the church marquee, you see that the title of the sermon for the day is being changed from "The Healing Balm of God's Love" to "Are You Ready to Create the Future, NOW?"

Everyone takes their seats, getting the kids settled in, glancing around furtively to appraise the situation for tidbits of gossip. That old and familiar feeling of suffocation suddenly grips you, and just as you're starting to seriously question what on earth you're doing here, the young pastor, bearded and with a long ponytail, suddenly enters from the street. Striding confidently to the pulpit, he closes the Bible and, in what seems like an interminable moment, looks into the eyes of every person in the congregation. You immediately think: He certainly is a far cry from the clergy I remember from my youth! And as the pastor slowly begins, he does so not by quoting scripture but by carefully describing, in one detailed example after another, the many ways in which we are wreaking havoc and destruction all over the planet—the rivers and oceans, the earth's species, the atmosphere itself. People sit in stunned silence. With each word, this shocking indictment of human beings reveals more and more your own unquestioned apathy.

"Can you find anything in any of the world scriptures that speaks of DNA destruction?"

The entire congregation squirms with uneasy irritation. "I'd heard he was unconventional, but this certainly isn't what I expected," someone says angrily. Pastor Kyle continues undaunted:

"No, ladies and gentlemen, you're not going to find it in any of the scriptures because it never occurred to the early Church Fathers that we'd ever have the power to destroy the DNA. It never even dawned on them that we could have that kind of power. And I'm not just talking about destroying a single individual; I'm talking about inflicting suffering on the very essence of an infinite number of individuals throughout future times!"

You find his words alarming, yet his passion is strangely inspiring.

"The DNA is loaded with information intelligence; unfurling from that is the organism. It's the numinous Word at the root of the being! But we humans have created chemicals that go into the body and go right into the center of the cell and go after the DNA, latch on to the DNA, and disrupt its elegance. . . . It's in the very center of each cell of that person, and it will be carried by the human race forever. . . ."

A wave of anxiety washes over the congregation, as a few people abruptly stand up, grab hold of their children, and leave.

"But our own great traditions seem unprepared to deal with this. And let me point out, ladies and gentlemen, that without the DNA there is no spirituality whatsoever. None. Because if the world's scriptures stay around and our DNA is gnarled, none of their insights will matter anyway."

There is a collective rumble of disapproval. The scriptures rendered irrelevant?!

"That's right, everyone, because their sanctity, their holiness, will never be able to be awakened in genetically defective humans. When you damage the genes, all future offspring are damaged. All future offspring come into the world suffering! We don't have any sense of that. We can't feel it! Because nothing in the great traditions has prepared us for the level of damage that we are now able to inflict."

Mothers and fathers, fearful, instinctively turn toward their children. “Why are you bringing this up?” someone shouts.

“Because we can discover a tremendous energy when we begin to confront the effects that we are having,” he replies, unflustered. “Try to block it out and our energy is going to be entirely used to hide from it. But if we face it critically, there’s an enormous energy that will come into our lives: the energy of commitment, the energy of conviction, the energy of creativity, of moving ahead. We need a new mind. We need a new society. But what are we doing? That’s my question. We have to know what we are doing!”

Pastor Kyle’s sermon comes to an end, and he slowly walks out of the church, acknowledging the congregation as he leaves. People gradually file out, some appearing sobered, some confused, some skeptical. More than a few are angry; some seem quietly inspired. You sit dazed, unable to move, for what seems like an eternity, absorbed in deep contemplation. The pastor’s words ring in your mind, and you can’t stop thinking that life *has* changed: it is we humans who are now creating the future. We have the power to change life itself, not just for one or two generations ahead but *forever*. Like it or not, our influence has become absolute! So where does that leave God, *the Absolute*, and where does that leave the religious traditions?

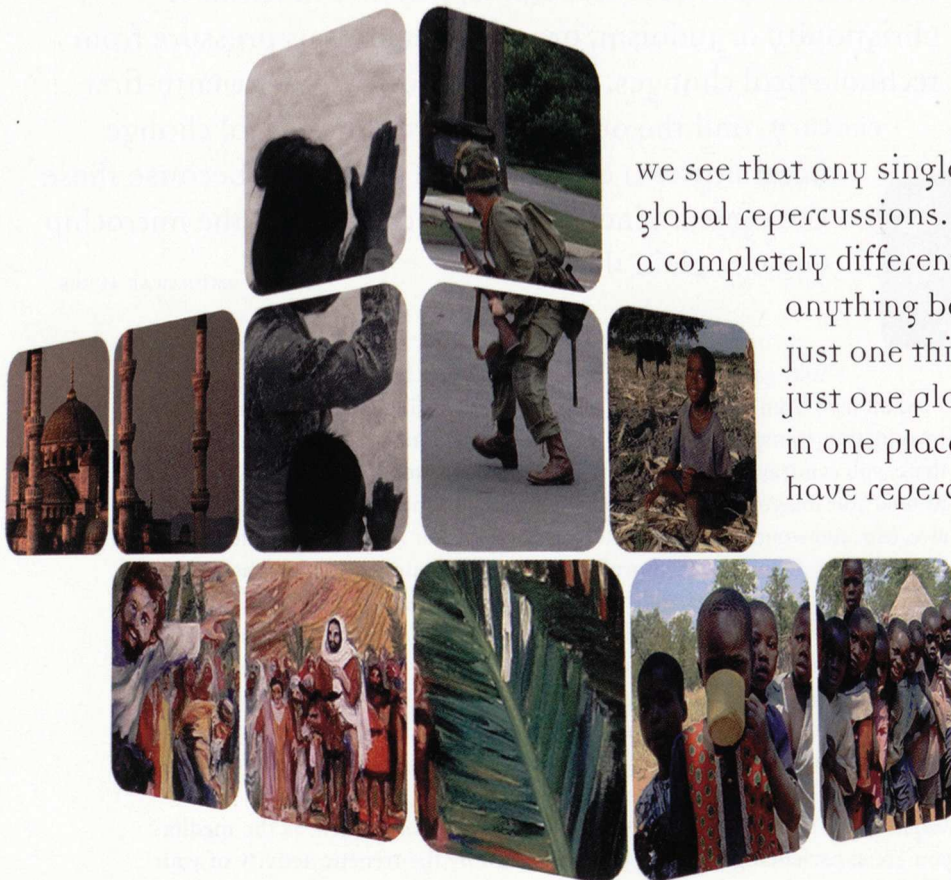
According to Pastor Kyle, nothing in our past has prepared us for what we are now capable of. And the great religions were born in the past. You ask yourself what that means about the future of religion. And what that means about the future of your own spiritual life and the inner yearning that has haunted you since your youth. Can religion help us? Or have the world’s religious traditions been rendered obsolete by the sheer magnitude of our influence and our newfound capacities? So stimulated and confounded are you by the pastor’s shock tactics and the questions he raised that time literally disappears. When you finally rise and walk outside, you are immersed in the brilliant sunlight of mid-afternoon. Just before crossing the street, you turn back to face the church’s majestic spire, a confident icon of august tradition, and you know that you must find the answers.

Where Are We?

Back home, you begin making phone calls. Surfing the web, you traverse space and time, entering an ever-expanding global arena to access the internet’s six billion web pages—the largest repository of public information ever available. With passionate interest, you find out who you can consult—and speak with a dozen noted authorities across the country and around the world: religious leaders, scholars, futurists, scientists. Your thoughts are pulled to our supreme technological capability, the worldwide ecological crisis, the reality of war, the future of our DNA script, and the fact that humans now have the ability to change the course of life itself. “Where are we?”

Futurist Ervin Laszlo answers, “We are now at the planetary dimension—a species inhabiting a planet where all distances have shrunk. Time has shrunk. Information moves almost instantly from any part of the globe to any other part. We see that any single event like, God forbid, a war now has global repercussions. And this calls for a completely different comportment than anything before. You can’t do just one thing. You can’t act in just one place. Whatever you do in one place, at one time, will have repercussions to all other times and all other places.” An email petition you receive protests war in Iraq, having been forwarded to you by a friend, having been forwarded to her by a friend, and so on and so on, linking five hundred people, most of whom have never heard of one another, into an international fraternity of like minds. The fact is, the term “global village” is no longer a metaphor—we are intimately connected by virtue of the inherent finitude of our planet and the fact that we now, as humans, have the power to preserve or destroy it.

“In the past a whole civilization could collapse in some other part of the world and life went on as if nothing had happened,” says Dr. David Brazier, a Western Buddhist author and



we see that any single event ... now has global repercussions. And this calls for a completely different comportment than anything before. you can't do just one thing. you can't act in just one place. whatever you do in one place, at one time, will have repercussions to all other times and all other places.

ERVIN LASZLO

teacher at the Amida Trust in England. "But this is no longer possible. We are increasingly in a position where we've got all our eggs in one basket, and we simply cannot go on as we have done for the past few millennia." Indeed, the news is filled with the tension of impending war in Iraq. As troops amass in Kuwait, the whole world feels it, psychologically, emotionally, as if one body, and there is the passionate call of millions who dissent. You click on another headline and see that a young girl, kidnapped months ago, has been found alive and well, and as you look intently at the small color photographs that accompany her online news story, you are there in her family's living room, a part of the joyous reunion. Another link takes you to *Time* magazine's devastating online portrayal of the AIDS crisis in Africa, which tells us that an African person is infected with AIDS every twenty-five seconds. Twenty percent of adults in South Africa are stricken with the virus, and in that country alone, a quarter of a million people will die this year from the disease.

Dr. Ismar Schorsch, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, reflects on this burgeoning global consciousness, illuminating its spiritual and humanistic significance: "I do think that as a global village we are given a vivid picture of the divine spark in all of humanity because the enormous diversity of human life is now in our backyard. It's no longer something that we read about in books—we see it every night on television and on our computers. So we are confronting the proposition that all humans are created equal. *That's* no longer an abstraction."

You ponder how strange it is that, as we come closer together, connected in an ever-thickening web of relationship and an ever-expanding global consciousness, there is simultaneously unprecedented complexity, division, and discord. And you ask yourself again: Can the religious traditions help us make sense of this—traditions that were born in a time when life was much simpler and people were geographically isolated from one another?



the traditional value structures, whether in Islam or Christianity or Judaism, are under enormous pressure from technological changes. But here we are, in the twenty-first century, and the acceptance of technological change necessitates a change in the worldview because these changes are inevitable. You cannot put the microchip genie back in the bottle.

MUNAWAR ANEES

Your gaze drifts away from the computer as you contemplate: What *would* it have been like to live two millennia ago, during the time of Jesus? Your imagination transposes your life back in time to first-century Galilee. Living there, you can travel no faster than by horse or donkey, if you even have access to one. You imagine the experience of night, and the night sky, which evokes awe, fear, and wonder, the stars undiminished in their numbers and intensity by smog or streetlights. Each morning you wake at sunrise to thoughts of the weather, your olive groves, and the health of your sheep. You fear weather and disease because you have witnessed firsthand their often inexplicable, unpredictable, and life-threatening manifestations. You rarely venture any farther than the familiar paths and alleys of your small village, where you know everyone intimately. You learn from the traveling merchant about people who inhabit a village twenty miles away, far beyond the surrounding fields and farms. And having the rare opportunity to visit them, you discover that they have customs and habits curiously different from your own.

As your thoughts turn back toward the present, time seems to quicken, as the meditative simplicity you are experiencing becomes overshadowed by the frenetic activity of your technology-rich and fast-paced existence. Which leads you to ask yourself: Is my modern life lacking something fundamental and important? Am I sacrificing something of deeper meaning to live this way? The words of Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an Islamicist and highly regarded scholar of the Traditionalist school, cause you to consider more seriously the spiritual implications of your contemporary lifestyle with all its technological conveniences: "I do not believe that all of these things are necessarily opportunities from a spiritual point of view. In fact, they are more often causes for the eclipse of the inner life, of contemplation, of tranquility, and of more profound communication. Yes, you can receive emails all the time. And there are cell phones that allow you to speak with everybody all the time. But what is the consequence of this? The consequence of all this is a kind of agitated soul that jumps from moment to moment, event to event, does not want to rest upon itself, does not want to contemplate, does not want to think."

Indeed, the agitation that Dr. Nasr speaks of is all too familiar, and starkly contrasts with the experiences you have sometimes in nature, or in deep meditation, or in profound human interchange, where time drops away and a different dimension is revealed. In those moments, you realize an ineffable sense of depth and the inherent sacredness of life. "Does information technology make an orientation toward the Absolute easier or more difficult?" asks Charles Upton, also a Traditionalist, as well as an author and a practicing Sufi. "I would say that in many ways it makes it more difficult. In the Koran," Upton continues, citing a scripture that he considers significant for our time, "according to one of the *sūras* [Koranic scriptures], 'men will become like moths, like fluttering moths,' which seems to me a very good picture of how the human soul loses substance and becomes volatilized. And actually, electronic media is one of the forces that produce this kind of shallowness and volatility in the human soul."

You wonder to what extent you have lost touch with the sacred, to what extent your own soul has become "volatilized" by the technological innovation that has become so much a part of your everyday existence. But you can't seem to negate technology as devoid of spiritual value when it is allowing you, in your research, to connect with people all over the world, none of whom you previously knew but with all of whom there is now a measure of familiarity. In fact,

the internet was your portal to the work of Dr. Nasr and Mr. Upton, whose incisive views are leading you to think more deeply about your own lifestyle. And you fully agree with post-modern theologian and author Dr. Tom Beaudoin when he says, "You can't ask people to start living a life for which their culture no longer prepares them. And you also can't look back at the past mythologically or romantically."

The simplicity and awe and the sense of reprieve induced by your daydream haunt you. But a greater challenge seems to beckon you, a deeper yearning to find out what it means to live fully *now*. So once again, can the religious traditions help us? According to an online dictionary the word *religion*, is derived from *religio*, which means "respect for what is sacred," and *religare*, "to bind fast," as in the bond between humans and God or cosmic consciousness or the great void. "It is that which binds [us] to the truth," writes Dr. Nasr, that which distinguishes and mediates between the Absolute and the relative. And while the Absolute is by definition unchanging, our relative world has changed *dramatically* over the last few thousand years. Which means that the Absolute—the sacred—must now somehow meet the relative world of today, a world defined by our present and fast-unfolding new realities, realities that profoundly distinguish our time from those in which the great religions first emerged. There's no going back and there's no time to lose. Dr. Munawar Anees, an Islamicist, writer, and Nobel Peace Prize nominee, explains, "The traditional value structures, whether in Islam or Christianity or Judaism, whether they are religious structures or cultural structures, are under enormous pressure from these technological changes. But here we are, in the twenty-first century, and the acceptance of technological change necessitates a change in the worldview because these changes are inevitable. You cannot put the microchip genie back in the bottle."

What Are We Doing?

Days later, you are still absorbed in your research. Connected to the web, you view *National Geographic's* online multimedia presentation that includes images from satellites, which "circle the earth's upper limits in silence, keeping watchful eyes on the great drama unfolding below." From the data they provide, scientists are able to estimate that forests four times the size of Switzerland are lost each year because of clearing and degradation. Other images depict how different forms of pollution in local areas migrate across boundaries and become global problems. A satellite image shows a massive dust cloud forming from East Asia's thick blanket of smog, blowing eastward across six thousand miles of ocean to the United States in only four to ten days—too little time for the air to be cleansed over the sea. Indeed, through media, travel, and all manner of information technologies, you are becoming aware of the problems besetting our planet, and our species.

But the "microchip genie" holds a double-edged sword: As you sit at your computer, horrified by the extent of our effect on our own world, you also become aware that these problems, at least in part, are being created by the very technologies that are allowing us to become conscious of our global predicament. Researching the environmental impact of technology, you find out that although the chips in your computer weigh far less than a pound, the waste generated in manufacturing them amounts to approximately 89 pounds, 7 of which are considered hazardous. About 700 different chemicals and materials, including lead, which is extremely toxic to all life-forms, go into manufacturing a typical computer. The 36.7 million personal computers that were manufactured for the U.S. market in 1998 amounted to almost 7,700 metric tons of lead. In 2002, approximately 136 million personal computers were sold worldwide.

You are confronted with the stark realization that simply by virtue of living a modern life in the West with your technology, luxuries, and ongoing consumption, your capacities for destruction are amplified tremendously. And this brings home the question even more powerfully: What am I doing? You suddenly see your own life objectively: you are embedded in a situation that preceded you, the effects of which have become magnified during your lifetime, and you are, in turn, continuing to perpetuate. You are complicit in the destruction of life.

Dr. Beaudoin explains, "One way to understand original sin, in a Christian sense, is that you're simply born into a sinful situation that the humans before you created and that you have no way of escaping because you're a social being. So, this is a situation that, by and large, we have created." You find there is no dissent about the dire realities and profound implications of our global crisis. It's simple—everyone you speak with acknowledges that the essence of our planetary predicament is inherently spiritual. According to the world traditions—whether Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, or Jewish—our human dilemma, regardless of the fact that its current magnitude far surpasses that of past millennia, is rooted in the perennial problem of human nature. Christian theologian Dr. Langdon Gilkey describes it to you as "human greed, human ego, human self-love, from original sin." For all their differences, the religious traditions concur about ego, the essential element of the human condition that renders us a destructive force in the universe.

Buddhist teacher Dr. Brazier tells you that "what's critical in the change of consciousness that we need is a greater humility about ourselves. We need to be more realistic about just how destructive we are. All of us, as it says in Buddhism, are 'beings of heavenless blind passion.'" Dr. H.R. Nagendra, Director of the Vivekananda Kendra Research Institute in Bangalore, India, elaborates: "What are the signs that I am progressing in the spiritual world? They are that my anguish, my anger, my greed, my infatuation, my slavery to the senses should be reduced, my limitedness, and my selfishness. This is how the Hindu scriptures give us the milestones of progress." And Hinduism also says that we need to see that we have become so lost in a human-centered relationship to life that we deny the truth of our inherent oneness with the universe. Hindu scholar Dr. David Frawley explains that "we need once more to recognize the sacred nature of the world in which we live. The entire universe is a conscious being. Consciousness dwells everywhere in nature. It pervades the entire universe. The soul does not just live in human beings."

The notion of being an inherent part of a cosmos infused with consciousness gives you tremendous spiritual inspiration. At the same time, the real-life and real-time effects of our anthropocentrism, of using life for our own purposes, are horrifying. We human beings are destroying as many as fifty thousand species annually, causing a rate of species extinction almost one thousand times greater than has occurred during any other period over the last sixty-five million years. Father Thomas Berry, a self-titled "geologian," or theologian for the earth, explains that we need to see that "the natural world is not there primarily to be used, no matter how delicately we use it; it's there to nourish us both physically and psychically. Wonder for the mind. Beauty for the imagination. Intimacy for the emotions. Without this, humans can't be humans."

Obviously, the religions do collectively acknowledge that ego is the root of the problem. But today, the effect of the human ego in each of us is so much greater. Bhante Gunaratana, a revered Buddhist abbot from Sri Lanka, conveys this fact with the steady equanimity and gentle warmth that come from a lifetime of spiritual practice. He tells you, "Whether it is Buddha's time or now, greed is greed. Hatred is hatred. But the *way* we express greed and hatred, the *means* are more sophisticated. Now, we even have the power to wipe out the whole human race."

So, given the extent and the scale of our effects on life, how do the religions address this fundamental problem? Dr. Nasr explains how Islam places an emphasis on ritual in order to purify the individual ego. "The most important rite of Islam is the daily prayers. The daily prayers break the flow of time, systematically, five times a day. We take ourselves out of the ordinary current of time, whether we are riding on a donkey or on a train, or have a cell phone or have no cell phone; in every instance this act takes place as a ritual purification, which also purifies the soul. And on a sanctified ground, which gives a qualitative direction toward Mecca, we bring ourselves out of the stream of so-called everyday life and face God straight, one by

What's Really Needed?

You return to your online research. Trying to assess our global situation, you discover that, at the threshold of the third millennium, the unprecedented complexity of the world is due, at least in part, to the fact that much of the world is divided between adherents to the many great religious traditions, traditions which began with a handful of followers but which now encompass the globe. There are 2 billion Christians, 1.2 billion Muslims, 1 billion Hindus, 325 million Buddhists, and 14 million Jews. And given the global proportions of our increasingly dire circumstances, Dr. Anees says, "The question of interdependence comes very much alive in this context. We used to think of interdependence in terms of only economic or environmental interdependence. I think we have gone much further than that. If something goes wrong somewhere, it's going to affect everybody else. So I think now we should be talking of theological interdependence and ideological interdependence."

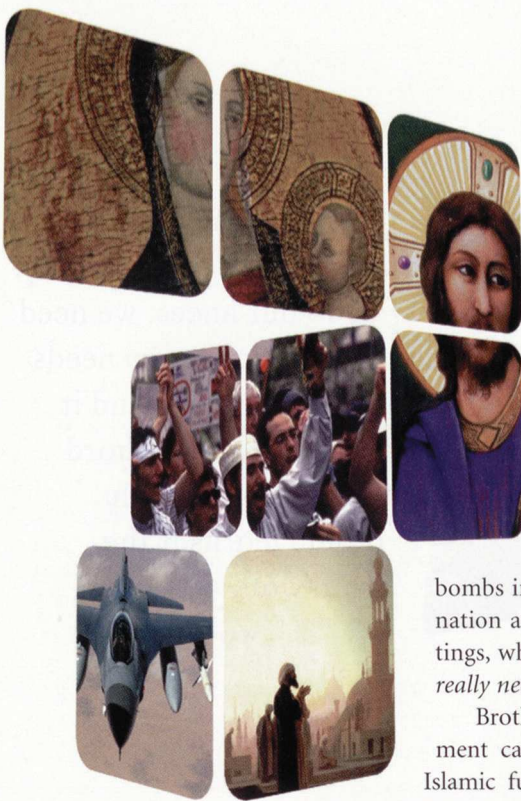
You find that the move toward "theological interdependence" is expressed in the relatively recent phenomenon of interfaith or interreligious dialogue that attempts to bring the traditions together to respond to the challenges we now share in common. But while the religious traditions are supposed to help us overcome our individual egos, can the religions overcome their "religious egos," in the words of Matthew Fox, to make possible a collective and enlightened response to the possibilities and perils of our age? You reflect on your reasons for leaving the church behind and realize, in retrospect, that it was, at least in part, because of the church's underlying conviction that it had the *only* answer, the only right way. Dr. Gilkey's comments align with your experience when he says, "The most important thing for any religious tradition in the modern age, and this is especially true because the stakes are so high now, is not to take its own righteousness too seriously—not to universalize its own standpoint, claim to represent God unequivocally. The Absolute has to be something other than *my* absolute."

Indeed, religious righteousness has expressed itself in all of the traditions throughout history, for better and worse. Catholicism in medieval Europe inspired Chartres Cathedral, one of the architectural wonders of the world, but later gave rise, in conflict with emerging Protestantism, to the Thirty Years' War, which, you discover, was among the most brutal confrontations in history (and just one example of religious conflict over the millennia). The population of Europe was reduced from about 21 million to 13.5 million between 1618 and 1648, largely as a result of the intense and violent antagonism ignited by the Reformation.

Four hundred years later, you are getting a sense of the enormous dilemma of religious righteousness when you find online the *Proclamation from the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue*, where interfaith dialogue is cast in the light of the underlying conviction that the Catholic Church is the only true path. In the Proclamation you read:

The Church has been willed by God and instituted by Christ to be, in the fullness of time, the sign and instrument of the divine plan of salvation. . . . Against this background it becomes easier to see why and in what sense inter-religious dialogue is an integral element of the Church's evangelizing mission.

The Catholic Church's proclamation leaves you astonished that it could so blatantly state its evangelizing intention in the context of interfaith dialogue. Brother Wayne Teasdale, an ardent proponent of interfaith dialogue, confirms that "it's still very much a view that the Church has, that the Catholic tradition has the primary means of salvation. And in terms of the present grave situation the world is in, I would say that it is immoral, it's absolutely immoral, on a basic level, for any religious tradition to teach that they have the ultimate superior claim on truth." That "superior claim on truth," taken to its extreme, is violence driven by righteous fundamentalism. You are haunted by images of the most recent suicide bombing of a bus in Haifa. And that suffering would be multiplied manifold if Islamic fundamentalists were to detonate a "dirty bomb" in a populated area. Indeed, you just read that the United States and Russia are both testing these



bombs in remote sites in order to determine the extent of the contamination and potential panic they would cause, particularly in urban settings, which could be rendered uninhabitable for years to come. *What's really needed?*

Brother Wayne gives you some hope that perhaps the interfaith movement can address the real threat of fundamentalism, and specifically Islamic fundamentalism: "The Board of the Parliament of the World's

Religions will invite some of the spiritual leaders of the Islamic extremists, the Wahhabi Imams, to the Parliament to educate them in the experience of a much larger reality that they know nothing about, so they can begin to think in terms of this new universal civilization, this culture of compassion, this civilization of love, if you will, to create a new institution for Islam, a global assembly that would speak authoritatively to the masses of Muslims about what is Koranic and what isn't, particularly in terms of violence."

However, despite the fact that the stakes are rising, you find that there is hardly consensus about the value of interfaith dialogue. While many strongly support it in the belief that it will make real change possible, others see it as lacking in influence. Dr. Nasr says, "One of the problems we have today is that these dialogues are carried out by people who stand on a limb so far removed from their own religious tradition that what they say doesn't affect the rest of the religious tradition." Others see it as "political accommodation" that dilutes the potency of the traditions, the spiritual depth, nuance and uniqueness of each of the religions. "It has to be a great deal more than the lowest common denominator of what's already around," says Dr. Brazier. Dr. Frawley agrees that "the purpose is not to make every organized religion in the world feel comfortable but to find the higher truth in which we can go beyond the divisions that have plagued humanity for so long. We need to go beyond just the dialogue between vested interests or outer organizations. It has to be communication at the level of the heart, the spiritual heart. It has to be communication at the level of the soul and of the conscious being within us."

It is March 22. A war with Iraq has just begun. And who knows what the next months will bring on top of the overwhelming complexity, discord, and division that already confront us. You imagine what it could be like for the religions to meet in a unifying vision, having asked themselves, *Where are we? And what are we doing?* and having agreed together upon an answer that reveals, as Dr. Beaudoin says, "a new understanding of what it means to be a human being that will apply as fully in North Korea as it will in North Dakota."

But renowned religious scholar Dr. Huston Smith says that he "sees no likelihood that the traditions will—or perhaps even can—unite in responding collaboratively to our global crises. Yes, there are attempts," he acknowledges, "but I'm afraid that these are only gestures. They are only a drop in the bucket." And given Dr. Beaudoin's statement that "at least in the Christian tradition, a lot of our churches are spiritually moribund and liturgically flatlining," you don't find much cause for hope. So, if we cannot pull ourselves out of this mess with the help of the religions, what then? *Where are we, then?* You are left feeling empty-handed and overwhelmed,

saris; Catholic nuns in dark blue habits approach the church from the parking lot; a Muslim family from a neighboring county walk from their car and ascend the wide stone steps; a few Orthodox Jews arrive together, wearing their prayer shawls and *yarmulkes*. The Buddhist monks, in saffron robes, drive up in a minivan. And beyond those who are obviously from other denominations and cultures, dozens of people are making their appearance who you suspect are either members of other local congregations or are not even churchgoers at all. You can hardly believe your eyes.

Everyone takes their seats and quietly waits. The church is packed, alive with color and diversity. You're tempted to pinch yourself to make certain you're not dreaming. Many of those who you recognize from the congregation are expressing one of two emotions: sheer joy or thinly veiled disapproval. Pastor Kyle enters from the street and steadily walks to the pulpit. He pauses for a few moments, and then raises his eyes to meet the multitudes who have come to see him. An unshakable conviction seems to overtake him as he begins:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am very happy to be here with you. I cannot begin to express my joy at seeing so many new faces from across the traditions and the world. It gives me hope, hope for the future and for the new era that's upon us. Because, ladies and gentlemen, I want to begin my sermon this morning by telling you that we are, indeed, at the end of an era—the Cenozoic era. The Cenozoic era began sixty-five million years ago, when eighty-five percent of all species on Earth, including the dinosaurs, became extinct due to an asteroid colliding with Earth. Since that time, life forms have flourished including mammals, birds, insects, and flowering plants—and now this era is coming to an end. And it is we human beings who are bringing it to a close because we are creating the greatest mass extinction since that asteroid collision sixty-five million years ago."

Many of those present spontaneously lean forward, as if one body, to meet his words. Others stir with irritated disconcertion.

"We're also at the end of a particular form of humanity. The modern human comes to an end now. So we're in a situation that requires tremendous creativity. And we have to engage that creativity together."

Hearing Pastor Kyle's words again fuels your passion for what is possible. And witnessing the multitudes that have come to see him, you feel for the first time a glimmer of hope about humanity's future. He continues:

"So, everyone, we need some thinking! We need new ideas! We need new directions! Let's talk about this. Please let me hear what you can offer."

Immediately a young Hindu woman speaks from the back of the church.

"Pastor Kyle, it's overwhelming to think that it is we humans who are bringing an entire era to a close."

"Yes, it IS overwhelming. But as I've said, if we face this critically, there's an enormous energy that will come into our lives—the energy of creativity, of conviction, of moving ahead. So let's keep going. Don't hold back—there's too much at stake. Let me hear from more of you."

Some of the people sitting near you begin to stir, as if awakening from a long stupor. Others immediately raise their hands in response. An elderly Orthodox Jewish man sitting in the first pew says, "Pastor, you seem to be pointing to new and very important opportunities and possibilities that reach far beyond the familiar rituals of our religious traditions."

"Sir, you are right—we must go beyond our old forms and customs, because what's called for is nothing less than the necessity to create a new society, a new planet. Ladies and gentlemen, new scriptures can be written!"

You feel yourself gripped simultaneously by excitement and fear, knowing that you must speak, that you must dare to respond, to voice the passion that Pastor Kyle has ignited in you, that has driven your relentless investigation.

A young man who you recognize from the congregation speaks first, "Pastor, if we are to embrace these opportunities—"

at the threshold of a new era, god needs us,
because the future of humanity and of the
entire planet now comes down to our choice.
we humans are the ones who are going to
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to the occasion!

"These are more than just opportunities. These are dire necessities, responsibilities. I'm speaking this strongly because I want you to reflect on where we are now as humans. All of this requires our deep and immediate response."

Taking his words to heart, you swallow your fear and begin: "Pastor Kyle, this past week has been the most important week of my life, and I have you to thank for it. After hearing your sermon last Sunday, I devoted nearly every waking hour to finding out where we human beings really are, what we are really doing, what is really needed—and if the religions can help us." Pastor Kyle inquires:

"And what did you discover?"

"What I discovered is that everything you are saying is absolutely true: we are confronted with horrendous destruction and untold possibility. And whether we consciously realize it or not, we are all being swept up in a turbulent river of human life rushing headlong toward an uncertain future, a future that will be of *our* making."

"Yes, you are completely right. And as I've said, nothing in the great traditions has prepared us for where we now find ourselves. Because the fact that we could have the power to preserve or destroy the very essence of life itself—forever—never occurred to the early Church Fathers."

"Or to the early Muslim clerics . . ."

"Or to the Buddhist priests . . ."

"Or the Jewish forefathers . . ."

"Or to the Hindu sages . . ."

You hear from the guests scattered throughout the congregation.

"And Pastor Kyle," you continue, "while the traditional religious forms may not be equipped to help us chart a new course, if we human beings can rise to the occasion, we *will* be fulfilling our divine purpose here on earth."

Spontaneously, and almost miraculously, numerous voices shout in unison:

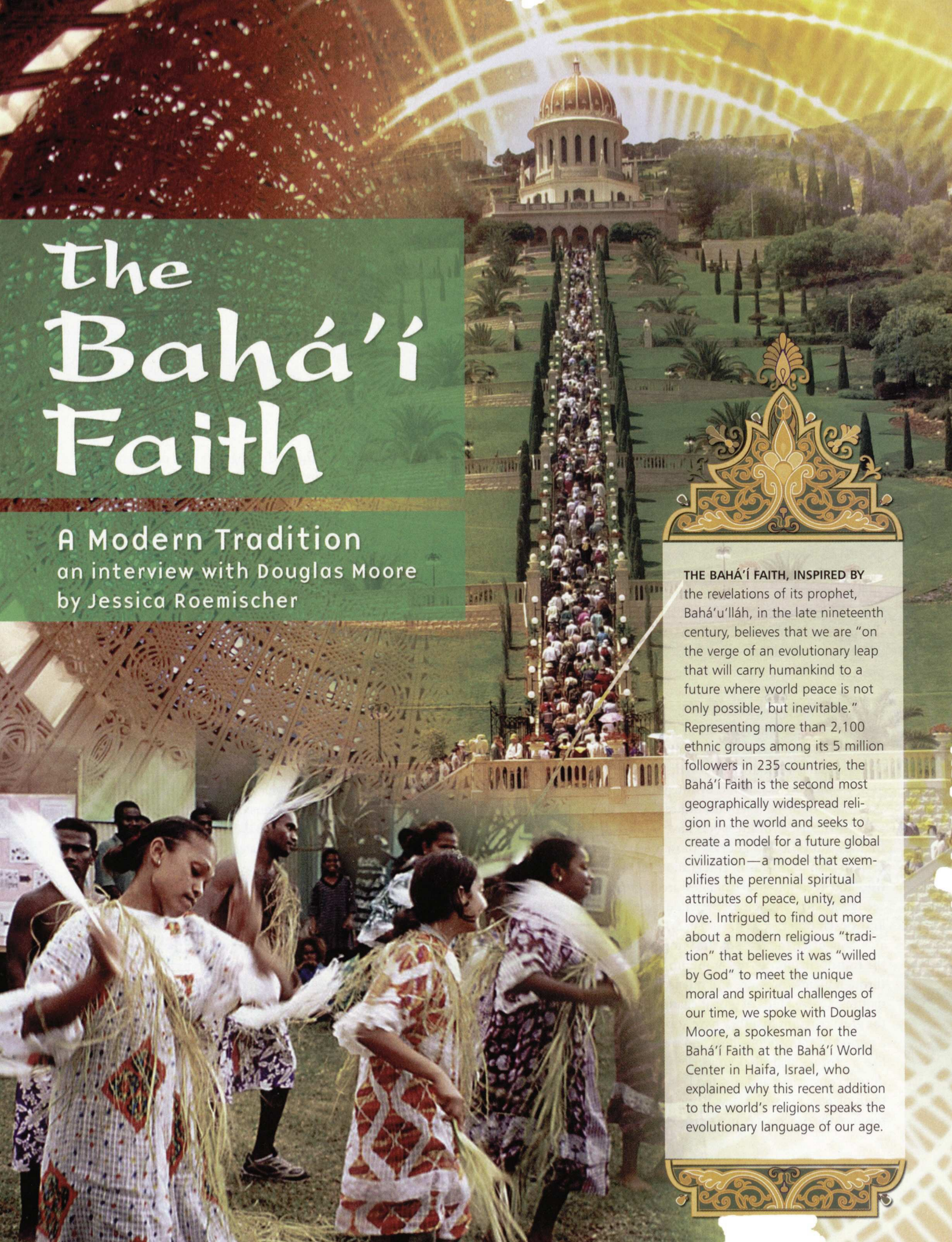
"Because God needs humans!"

Pastor Kyle pauses for what seems like an eternity, contemplating these words and the hundreds of expectant faces anticipating his response. Then he slowly and resolutely concludes:

"So, everyone, what's required is a very deep revivification, a very deep regeneration. And, we have to keep asking the biggest questions: Where are we? What are we really doing? And what is really needed? We have to ask the biggest questions because here we are together at the end of an era. And what happens from now on is, indeed, up to us. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, at the threshold of a new era, God needs us because the future of humanity and of the entire planet now comes down to our choice. We humans are the ones who are going to create the future—and together we must rise to the occasion!" ■

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Brian Swimme for permission to adapt material for the pastor's "sermons" from *Canticle to the Cosmos* (A New Prosperity, Part 12 of a 12-part video series, 1990); Dr. Barry Gittlen and Rabbi Barry Freundel of Baltimore Hebrew University for their assistance conveying the life conditions of first-century Galilee.

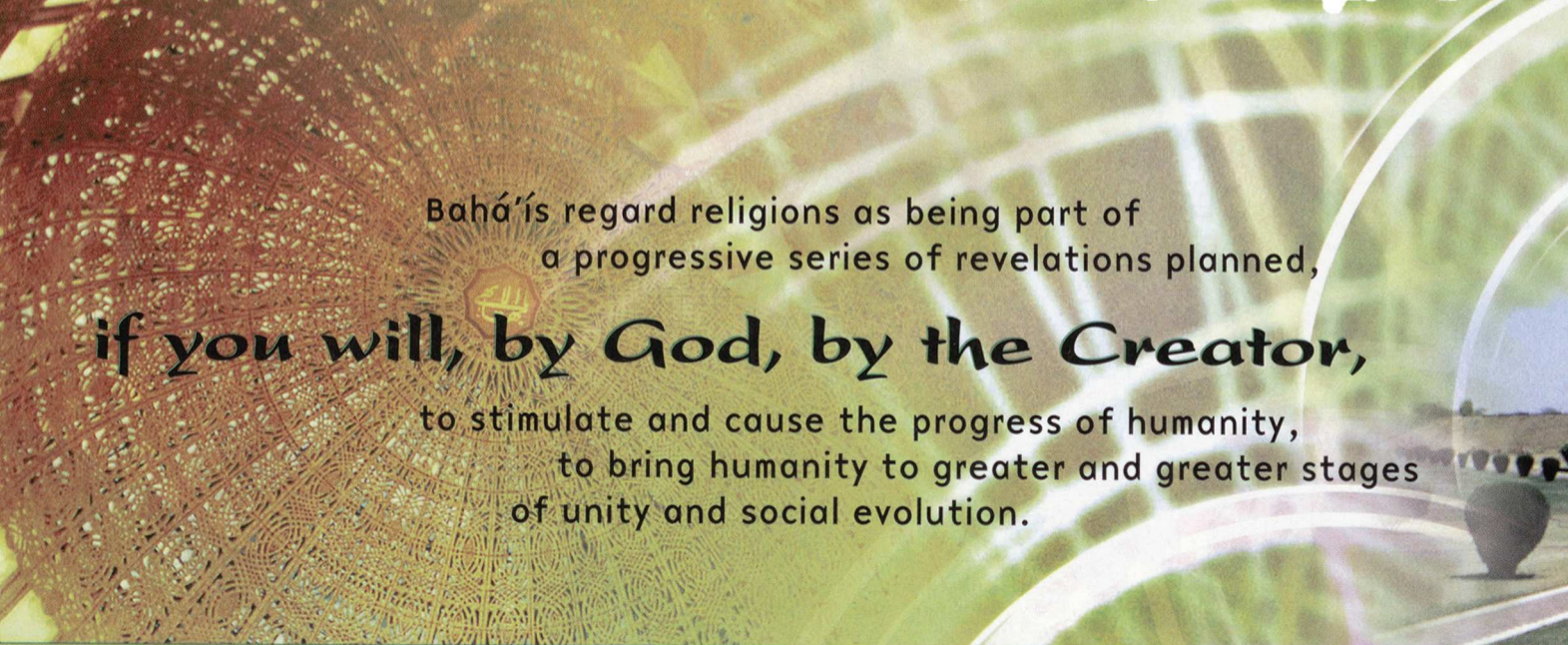
Huston Smith quote on p. 65, from "Are you Religious or Spiritual? Letters from the Heart," *Spirituality and Health* (Spring, 2001); Seyyed Hossein Nasr quote on p. 61, from *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1996), p.15; statistics for computer production and sales on p. 61, from *IDC Quarterly PC Tracker* (2003), and Gartner Research, Stamford, CT; statistics for waste generated in computer production, p. 61, from T. S. Perry, 2000, J.C. Ryan and A.T. Durning, 1997, as quoted on the website: <http://erserver.uwaterloo.ca> (2003); AIDS statistics on p. 59, from www.time.com, an online presentation of AIDS in Africa (2003).



The Bahá'í Faith

A Modern Tradition
an interview with Douglas Moore
by Jessica Roemischer

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH, INSPIRED BY the revelations of its prophet, Bahá'u'lláh, in the late nineteenth century, believes that we are "on the verge of an evolutionary leap that will carry humankind to a future where world peace is not only possible, but inevitable." Representing more than 2,100 ethnic groups among its 5 million followers in 235 countries, the Bahá'í Faith is the second most geographically widespread religion in the world and seeks to create a model for a future global civilization—a model that exemplifies the perennial spiritual attributes of peace, unity, and love. Intrigued to find out more about a modern religious "tradition" that believes it was "willed by God" to meet the unique moral and spiritual challenges of our time, we spoke with Douglas Moore, a spokesman for the Bahá'í Faith at the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel, who explained why this recent addition to the world's religions speaks the evolutionary language of our age.



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a progressive series of revelations planned,
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to stimulate and cause the progress of humanity,
to bring humanity to greater and greater stages
of unity and social evolution.

WIE: *It seems that the Bahá'í Faith, unlike the traditional religions, is founded on the recognition that evolution and increasing change, which particularly define our time, are universal principles that should be embraced rather than resisted.*

DOUGLAS MOORE: The Bahá'í Faith and Bahá'í teachings were articulated by Bahá'u'lláh as fundamental principles that should animate social change. And in fact, Bahá'ís regard religions as being organic and evolutionary, like everything else in life. So if the principles of growth are articulated and understood, then adaptability, flexibility, growth, development, and change take place as required to meet the challenges of time and circumstance.

Shoghi Effendi (the grandson of the prophet Bahá'u'lláh and an appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith), writes about a twofold process that the world is undergoing at the present time. On the one hand, we are seeing a process of disintegration. The world has been thrown into disequilibrium, thrown off balance in the process of the disintegration of social institutions that have outlived their usefulness. And this is taking place because the needs of the world have outstripped the institutions that are supposed to address those needs. On the other hand, there is also a process of integration taking place, where scientific and technological changes are increasing the amount of contact that is possible between cultures that previously didn't know each other existed.

Shoghi Effendi calls it the “Iron Age” because, symbolically, the transformation of raw iron into usable steel is brought about through intense pressure and intense heat. And it seems to be the nature of these kinds of global changes introduced or inspired by the great religions that they have also been brought about through a period of tremendous heat and tremendous pressure. It's really like a process of birth. Outwardly it is painful and it is tremendously consuming and not the least bit a pretty process. But the birth of new life and a new being is ultimately what comes as a result of the process. So, in a sense, we're seeing the death pangs of

an old order passing and the birth pangs of a new order emerging, and we're experiencing its infancy and its toddler stage, and its childhood and now on to its adolescence, perhaps. And adolescence is marked by all kinds of changes and mood swings.

WIE: *I recently came across one of the teachings of the prophet Bahá'u'lláh, which seems to address the critical nature of where we are as a global community. He said, “The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divides and afflicts the human race is daily increasing. The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appears to be lamentably defective.” Indeed, one aspect of the “prevailing order” he describes seems to be the world's great religious traditions themselves, which are struggling to meet existential circumstances profoundly different from those in which they first emerged millennia ago.*

DM: That's right. And in fact, Bahá'ís regard religions as being part of a progressive series of revelations planned, if you will, by God, by the Creator, to stimulate and cause the progress of humanity, to bring humanity to greater and greater stages of unity and social evolution. Each religion, at its outset, was typically viewed as a threat to the existing social order. But over time, despite persecution and resistance, that religion gives rise to a new civilization. And the religion itself experiences its own season of springtime, where it breaks through the encrusted winter of the time, and then comes into its own summer, and then it yields its harvest and produces its fruits, and then it goes into its own stage of decline. Religion is subject to the same kind of cycle that everything else in life is subject to. So Bahá'ís see there being a progression or series of religions, including Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Islam, with the Bahá'í Faith being the latest in this series of revelations from God—not nearly the last, but the latest, whose teachings deal with the needs of humanity at this time and the many global challenges we face. And



Bahá'í Temple in New Delhi, India

that's not to say that Bahá'ís themselves are not swept up into the maelstrom of the difficulties of this period of transition.

WIE: *In what ways is the Bahá'í Faith responding to our unique and increasingly global predicament?*

DM: We are trying to address these things by bringing forth new models, new ways of doing things, and by identifying principles on which action can be taken in order to forge the integrative change that has to take place. So there are principles like the equality of men and women, like access to good education. There is also the principle that addresses the responsibility and capability of each person to search for truth and reality and to discover for him- or herself the oneness and wholeness of the human race, and all that that implies beyond just a kind of sentimental longing for brotherhood. And there is the studied and deliberate ethic of service to the greater good, both individually and collectively. The operative principle in the Bahá'í Faith, for social relations and political relations, is that the human race is one family. Here the principle of justice comes into play, but not just in terms of a sentimental outpouring of goodwill.

So this is not just a vision of a peaceful world. This is a vision of a world where ethics matter, where morals matter, where principle matters, a vision of a just global order that does not only exist in the abstract. The Bahá'ís really believe that they have a model in all of their communities where this principle of unity and diversity truly exists, where Bahá'ís come together from backgrounds that would otherwise be warring with one another. And the coming together is not of tolerance but is rather a matter of love and of fellowship. This is not just a utopian kind of vision—people live and work in many hundreds of ethnic groups and in tens of thousands of locations scattered across the globe. This is truly a universal community seeking to put into practice these principles that, for a long time, have existed only in the realm of poets and prophets.

And Bahá'ís sincerely believe that an awareness of these principles that animate Bahá'í communities and animate the Bahá'ís' personal lives can have a revolutionary effect, as a model for humanity. Because if people are to have any hope that the world can be a different place, they have to see some example, some reality that gives them cause for hope. Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that the world can be transformed by a handful of people." So Bahá'u'lláh talks about his followers—"his loved ones" as he refers to them, he's very poetic—as "leaven." And the metaphor here is that although the leaven in bread is actually a very, very small amount, it has a tremendous influence and causes a transformation to take place, so that a lump of flour and water can become a loaf of bread that is of benefit.

WIE: *The Bahá'í Faith believes that a "happy ending" is not only possible but inevitable. Could you speak about the fundamental conviction that heaven on earth will, in fact, eventuate?*

DM: This has been the promise of all of the world's religions, and this is the promise of the Bahá'í Faith as well. However, it's not going to come for free. In other words, it's not something that is just going to descend upon us. Either it will come about as a result of the horrific consequences of our own carelessness and our own inability to grapple with the fundamental questions of the hour and we can eventually build a new civilization in the aftermath, or it will come about as a result of our active, conscious role. And this articulates our choice: either we can just let things go to hell, so to speak, and pick up the pieces afterwards and go on, or those of us who are in a position of awareness, with a sense of responsibility for the welfare of the human race and planet Earth, can, through acts of conscience, *help* bring this promise to fulfillment. In this, our active, conscious role is about the struggle within oneself and overcoming oneself and becoming closer to God through that struggle—and that's an endless progression through all the worlds of God. ■

Can Religion Save Us?

Huston Smith

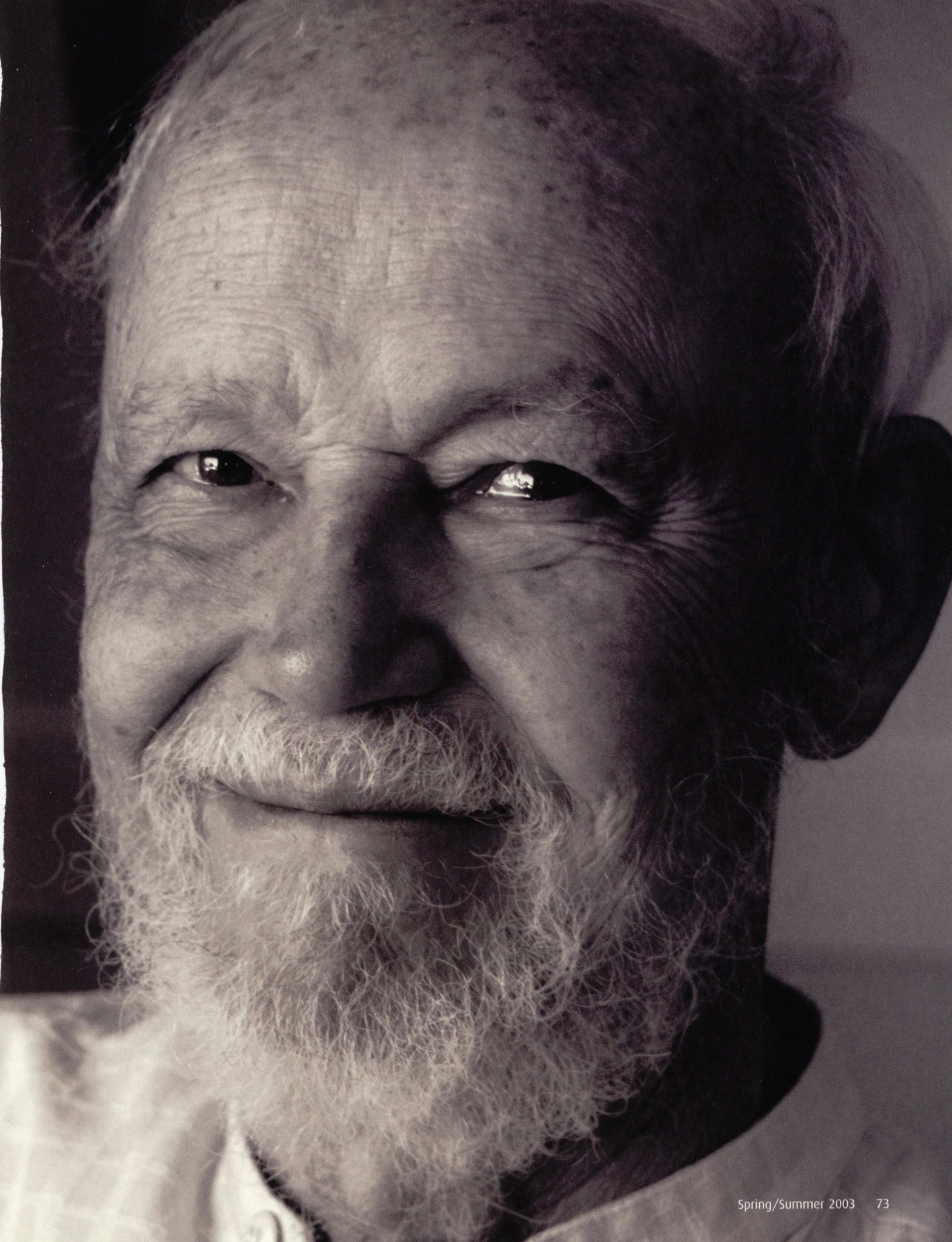
on Tradition, Transcendence, and Ultimate Reality

Interview by Jessica Roemischer

HUSTON SMITH, ARGUABLY TODAY'S FOREMOST AUTHORITY on the world's great religions, has, for over half a century, dedicated himself to transmitting the wisdom of the traditions through books, television, and film and in the classroom. His best-known volume, *The World's Religions*, has been the standard introductory textbook in college religion courses for thirty years and has sold several million copies. Dr. Smith has produced three PBS television series and was the focus of Bill Moyers' five-part PBS special, "The Wisdom of Faith with Huston Smith." His documentaries on Tibetan Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sufism have received international acclaim. Having devoted a lifetime to the study of the august traditions of the world, Huston Smith was our preeminent choice to answer the question: Are the religions equipped to navigate the myriad challenges of the third millennium?

Initially, Huston Smith responded to our interview request with a letter saying, "I am hesitant to take part in your projected article for fear of sounding like a spoilsport. I gather that you want to come down hard on the perils that threaten our planet while giving your readers grounds for hope. My personal judgment is that my perspective differs so markedly from the mind-set of your readers that you would do better to bypass me on this one . . ." We were hooked. What would the dean of comparative religious scholarship have to say in response to perhaps the most important spiritual question of our time, and why did he feel that our readers would not want to hear it? Could there indeed be *no* cause for hope?

In his innovative and incisive critique of postmodernity, *Why Religion Matters*, Smith writes, "The sandwich man between placards announcing that the end is near is telling us something important. . . . He is not just protesting our reigning culture. However falteringly, he is gesturing toward a heavenly city that offers an alternative to this earthly one, which is always deeply flawed." Indeed, that man could be Huston Smith himself. And, visiting with this wise and generous octogenarian in his modest Berkeley home, for the interview that he did eventually agree to, we found why he believes that, in the face of apocalyptic times, the traditions may help us *hope* for a good outcome, but they may not be equipped to actually help us manifest it—at least not here on Earth!



WIE: *Our existential circumstances at the outset of the twenty-first century distinguish our era significantly from those in which the world's great religious traditions first emerged. Do you feel that the religious traditions need to reshape themselves in any way at this juncture in history to respond to unprecedented change and the challenges of our current life conditions?*

HUSTON SMITH: They need to reshape themselves in one respect only. All of them come down with one voice on advocating charity and compassion over selfishness and egocentricity. And that's the right foundation. But in the times when the great sacred texts were revealed, people were isolated, living by themselves, and they did not realize that institutional structures are man-made. Their social and institutional structures, like slavery, for example, were the way they conceived of natural law. "We can't change them. We didn't make these institutions." And, therefore, their love, compassion, and charity had to do with face-to-face relationships—the cup of water given in my name to the thirsty person there. But it never occurred to them that they ought to work on changing institutions, injustices, slavery, and so on.

Now, when the cultures and civilizations began to merge and rub shoulders, producing multiculturalism, *then* people discovered: "Look! *They've* got different institutions from *ours*! One allows for multiple wives; another one doesn't." And so on. This occurred emphatically in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and with that came the discovery that social structures are *human constructs*. So that introduced a change in religion because suddenly we were responsible not just for our neighbor but also for these social and institutional structures. For example, today, there are economic structures and class structures in which those of us who are more well-off, who have savings and stocks and bonds, can prosper just by doing nothing. We reap the benefits of our consumerism, while at the same time, no family receiving the minimum wage—the marginal people—can live on what they make. But are we compassionate enough to change that? No.

For me, the most important theological text in twentieth-century Christianity is Reinhold Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, where he points out that individuals are able to sacrifice themselves, a parent for a child, for example, but collectively, governments and societies are constitutionally incapable of sacrificing themselves. I mean, what chances would President Bush have for reelection if he said, "We have to lower our standard of living in order to increase foreign aid." He wouldn't survive. What faction of society would voluntarily lower its income to raise the income of the destitute? Now, that bears very practically on the issues we're considering. So now the religious traditions need to reshape themselves in one respect—to cross over into justice, and then into love.

WIE: *That certainly makes sense. The economic injustice you describe and its most extreme expression—rampant worldwide poverty—is just one of the multiple crises we face, which include overwhelming depletion of natural resources, epidemics, and the population explosion. In response to this situation, Father Thomas Berry has written:*

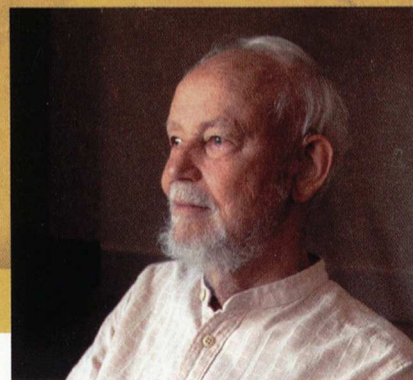
The devastation taking place cannot be critiqued effectively from within the traditional religions or humanist ethics. We find ourselves ethically destitute just when, for the first time, we are faced with ultimacy, the irreversible closing down of the earth's functioning in its major life systems. Our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

What do you think of Father Berry's assertion that, given the scope of our escalating crisis, the traditions are ultimately incapable of addressing the challenges that confront us?

HS: Back when the scriptures were revealed, the biosphere was just assumed, taken for granted, and so human beings did not see themselves as responsible for it. The movement toward justice means that we now have become aware that we affect the biosphere, and therefore the principle of "choose life" must also move over into that. I agree completely with Father Berry as to the dangerousness of our situation. But I don't think we need something other than the religious traditions. I don't see anything better. In the foundation of all the traditions, compassion is the bottom line. But, as I was saying, we do need for them to move that compassion over into the social and ecological spheres. If they do not make this move from face-to-face charity and compassion to concern for justice—and in that justice I'm talking about social relations, as well as our effect on the biosphere—then I agree with my friend Father Berry (we've been friends for almost a lifetime). If the religious traditions do not respond to what our new situation requires, then they will be inadequate.

WIE: *It seems that a significant aspect of the response that is required would have to be the willingness of the religions to cooperate, to come*

All of the sacred traditions make a strong point of the fact that we are flawed beings. And if we get right down to the source, it is that, the basic problem of our egocentricity, which keeps us from doing what desperately needs to be done. If the traditions could succeed in changing, redeeming human nature, that would be the neatest trick in human history.



together as never before, across all cultural and ideological divides. What is your perspective on the ability of the religions to collaboratively address the situation?

HS: You would probably like for me to assure your readers that it will be possible to address these unprecedented issues if the religious traditions unite in responding collaboratively to our global crisis. But I see no likelihood that they will—or perhaps even can—do this, at this stage of history. Yes, there are attempts. The United Religious Initiative, founded and presided over by Bishop Swing in San Francisco, is large and flourishing, meeting, doing practical things. So that's a wonderful response. The Parliament of the World's Religions has had three important meetings and a fourth is already in the works. Those are good. But I'm afraid these are only gestures. They are only a drop in the bucket.

WIE: Are there other reasons that you think there is no likelihood that the religions can come together to address our human predicament? Is there something fundamental that is impeding them?

HS: Yes. Religion, though I believe deeply in its contribution to civilization and the past, as well as its potential for today—and I would identify myself as a religious person—is, nevertheless, obviously a mixed bag. For example, it lends itself to being co-opted for political ends, and that's going on all over the world. Politicians use for political ends the fervor that religion can generate.

And of course, every religion, to serve millions of people over centuries and millennia, has had to say many things to many people, and when the sacred texts were written, they were bringing in the circumstances of their time. What I'm saying is, everybody, including the people who think of themselves as fundamentalists, has to *interpret* the Bible or the Koran or any of these revealed texts. And if you let me interpret the Bible, I

would say that my interpretation is on the right track. But every text and every tradition is multivalent. We love to quote, "Beat your swords into plows and your spears into plowshares." But in Joel, a couple of books later, it says exactly the opposite: "Beat your plows into swords." Now, which one are you going to pick up on? I think that, on balance, the traditions do come through on the side of charity and peace and goodwill, but both views are expressed there.

Now, there's another thing: all of the sacred traditions make a strong point of the fact that we are flawed beings. In Christianity, they call it original sin. In Islam, they call it *ghafla*, forgetfulness of our real nature. In Asia, they call it *avidya*. I think they're right in saying the fault isn't God. God didn't make us that way. It's a mistake that *we* made somewhere along the line. And if we get right down to the source, it is *that*, the basic problem of our egocentricity, which keeps us from doing what desperately needs to be done.

WIE: But in light of the necessity for individuals and institutions to respond to our increasingly dire situation, don't the religious traditions have a responsibility to try to shift people's consciousness about this very thing, to take on the "basic problem of our egocentricity?"

HS: Oh, of course. They have a responsibility—but good luck. The *New Yorker* magazine used to have a little quip in every issue, "Neatest trick of the week." Well, if the traditions could succeed, *that* would be the neatest trick in human history—changing, redeeming human nature—because that's too tall an order for any institution or combination thereof.

WIE: But if, in fact, the religions are inadequate to "change and redeem human nature," where does that leave us, given the extent of our increasing global predicament?

To hope is to see our efforts expended in the right direction as being meaningful, despite what the outcome will be. Does the care doctors give to patients require that they think that they are thereby ridding the world of disease? The fulfillment comes through doing what one can, not in wasting time predicting outcomes.

HS: That introduces, I think, a point that's been important to me. I picked it up from Czech president Vaclav Havel. When he was asked, "Are you optimistic?" he said, "No." But then he added, "I am hopeful." Now that's profound. What's the difference? Optimism is the belief that the affairs of our society will come out well and we've been given ample reasons to doubt that that is going to happen. Hope is quite different. To hope is to see our efforts expended in the right direction as being meaningful, despite what the outcome will be. Does the care doctors give to patients require that they think that they are thereby ridding the world of disease? The fulfillment comes through doing what one can, not in wasting time predicting outcomes. So yes, we *should* do everything we can, but if that fails, that doesn't close the doors to a meaningful and, in that sense, hopeful existence—the hope, in this case, deriving from the meaning we find in just putting our efforts in the right direction.

WIE: So, will the "happy ending" or final salvation that the traditions prophesy actually manifest? And, if so, do you believe that will eventuate—as the traditions predict, through divine intervention—in the "second coming"?

HS: For my part, I do say unequivocally that one of the strengths of the great religions is that they promise a happy ending that burgeons after horrendous problems are faced and overcome. But here's the decisive thing that our culture is not ready to hear: they want to see the second coming as changing human history, the course of human history on *this* planet, which we may annihilate like a supernova. Now, there are phrases in the Bible that point toward it manifesting here—"Thy kingdom come on earth." Or, as in the basic Hindu view, the material world and its history are like an accordion that comes out and it goes back through the four *yugas* (ages), ending with the Kali Yuga, the worst one, which goes to the dogs completely. But then a new cycle begins. Whatever the metaphors and the analogies, it's our obligation to try to see it happen; we should do our very best to see that it happens on our planet. And, in fact, none of the traditions claim that that happy ending is realizable on our planet; they say that individuals will experience that happy ending in the afterlife, and collectively it will be realized by the coming of the Messiah when time as we know it closes down (the wording differs from religion to religion). So, if it

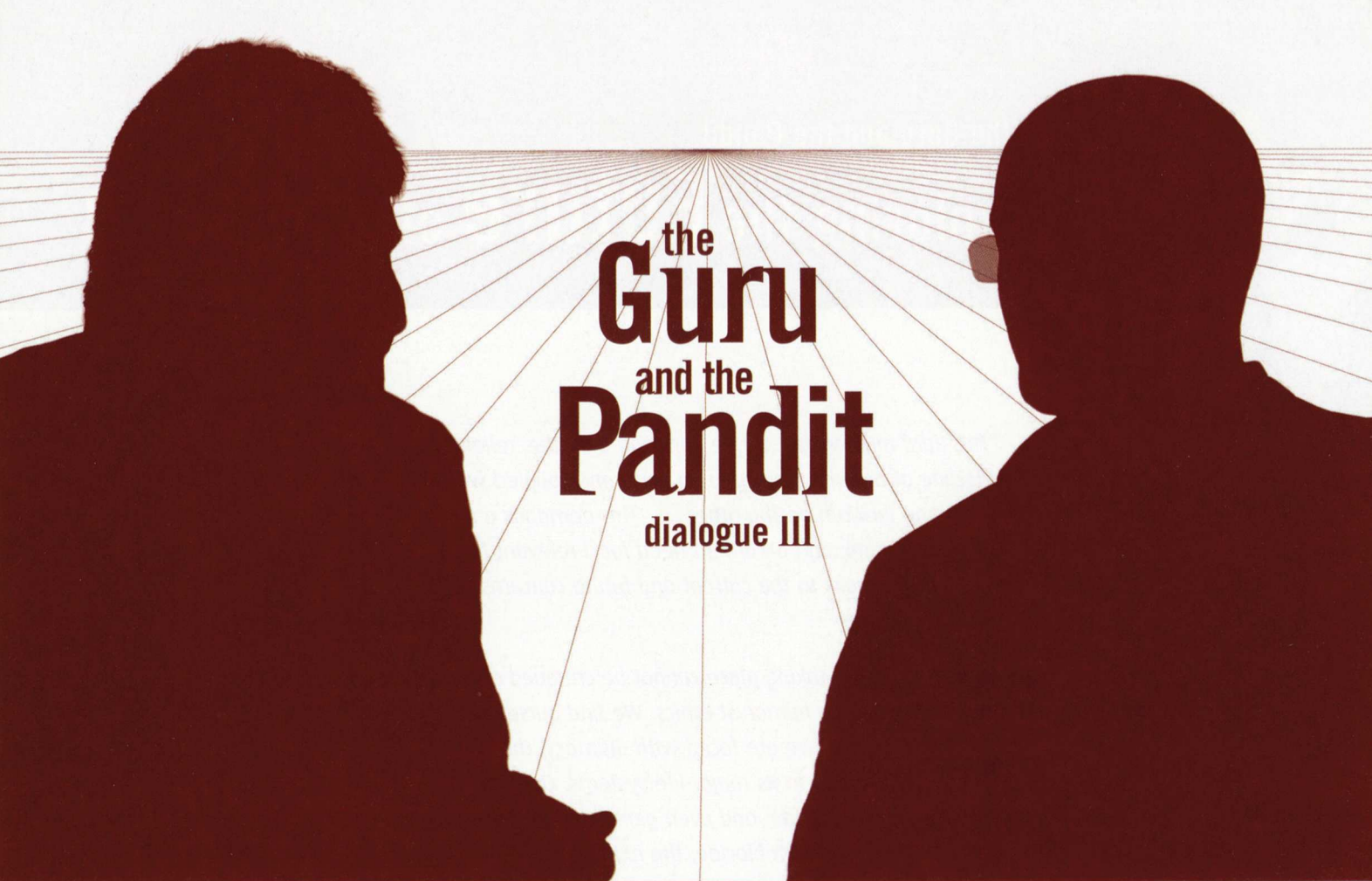
doesn't happen here, that doesn't mean that it's not going to happen, as the Tibetans would say, on some other *bardo* or some other plane.

WIE: Another plane? Can you expound on that?

HS: Oh, I would be delighted! Science gives us such a perfect analogy for this. And this is a recent realization for me because, although it can tell us nothing directly about God, science is wonderful for analogies for the Divine. In the last century, it has brought out three domains: the microworld, the macroworld, and the megaworld. We're in the macroworld. The microworld is quantum mechanics and the megaworld is relativity theory—and neither of those can be mapped onto our ordinary language because our language has been devised to deal with our macroworld. Now, if those don't fit into ordinary language, are we to think that God and transcendence and ultimate reality can be literally described in our mundane, everyday language? That would be like thinking that a three-dimensional globe could be accurately depicted on the pages of a geography book. It doesn't work. I mean, just as this planet is scarcely a dot in the megaverse, so ultimate reality or the transcendent dimension is as much beyond our present human experience as fifteen billion light years of space. So trying to imagine these mind-boggling metaphysical planes is like trying to imagine with my finite mind what different orders of reality would be like. All I can do is to come back to generalizations. It would be *absolutely mind-boggling!* And it would be exciting beyond words. One of the best human attempts to provide a metaphor is the image of Plato's cave. Imagine if we had been prisoners in a cave and thought the world was black and white and had only two dimensions, like shadows, and then we were suddenly swung around to light and taken out into this technicolor world, vast beyond the confines we were in. To me, that conveys the spirit. We can't describe that world outside, but just to know that there is such a world can be very heartening.

WIE: Can you say anything more about what the experience of that "metaphysical plane" would be like?

HS: Eternal bliss. Try to imagine that in any way you wish and as far as your imagination can carry you. ■



the Guru and the Pandit dialogue III

exploring the **Future** of Religion

EVOLUTION IS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL BUSINESS—its movements painted in the broadest strokes across the contours of the cosmos, yet mirrored in the subtleties of each human soul. And indeed, a growing number of people—from scientists to mystics, from futurists to psychologists—are telling us that it is in the human soul that the responsibility for the next step in life's unfolding lies. Understanding this biggest of pictures, and our place in it, has never seemed more crucial—or more spiritually relevant.

In our last few issues, the spiritual implications of this greater context have been echoed and amplified by many different voices, and nowhere more so than in the ongoing series of dialogues between integral philosopher Ken Wilber and *WIE* founder Andrew Cohen. Bringing together a pandit's breadth of wisdom with a guru's hands-on experience of the inner dynamics of transformation, these dialogues simultaneously expand and deepen to encompass dimensions that rarely meet on one page. The result is far more than an exchange of ideas. When the ever-expanding integrity of Wilber's "theory of everything" meets the living passion of Cohen's uncompromising vision, new vistas of inquiry seem to emerge, calling on all of us to question more deeply and make more room in our hearts for unimagined potentials. Now, as *WIE* explores the challenges of our future, the guru and the pandit offer the third in their series of dialogues, boldly questioning the timeless truths of tradition and seeking to discern the deeper currents in consciousness today that will give form to the world of tomorrow.

—E.D.

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



the Guru and the Pandit

exploring the Future of Religion

"The third millennium will be dominated by the 'religion/spirituality paradox': the decline of organized religion on one hand coupled with a growing interest in spirituality and wisdom on the other. . . . This demands a reordering of priorities in terms of the spiritual, and an urgent need for a relevant faith. . . . By relevant, I mean a faith that speaks to the current and future concerns of our time."

Caleb Rosado, "What Is Spirituality?"

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

Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*

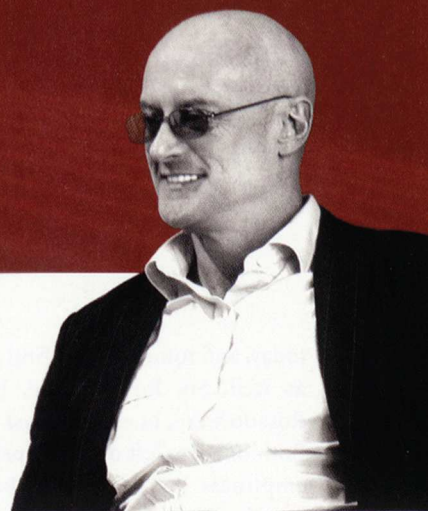
ANDREW COHEN: It seems that the unprecedented complexity of the time we are living in demands from many of us a profound reevaluation of the spiritual context and direction of our lives. The world is changing faster than it ever has, and this rapid pace of change is simultaneously thrilling, frightening, bewildering, and overwhelming. It is increasingly difficult to sustain perspectives, worldviews, and spiritual and philosophical beliefs that are not broad enough to embrace the enormity of our circumstances. I can definitely tell that many of the people that I come in contact with are searching for new answers. It suddenly seems that for many of those who are, as you would say, at the leading edge, satisfying answers are no longer being found in the great traditions. It really seems that a new spirituality with a higher reach and a deeper embrace is necessary at this time, one that will enable us to discover our true identity, the timeless source of our being, while simultaneously compelling us to face the actuality of the world context that we're living in. Indeed, it would seem that now, the spiritual path must free the individual in a very specific way, a way that would cultivate enough strength and maturity to bear the incredible

emotional and psychological urgency of the life conditions we're in the midst of. We need a path that will free the awakening human in the face of fear, despair, and self-doubt, a path that will make it possible for him or her to respond with a worldcentric passion and God-centered devotion to the evolutionary needs of the life process at this point in time.

So I thought it would be great if we could speak together about what this new spirituality might be like. To begin, maybe you could briefly describe what an integral perspective on spirituality would be.

KEN WILBER: First, it would be good to talk about what the meaning of "spirituality" is because it can get very confusing. An integral spirituality, I believe, would be a conception that would take into account, and attempt to honor, all of the different meanings of spirituality, and also draw some conclusions about what happens when you stop using a merely *partial* approach to spiritual potential. I'll give you three of the main ways that people use the word *spiritual*. I'm not saying any of these uses are right

andrew cohen & ken wilber in dialogue



or wrong—actually, I’m saying they’re all correct. But it’s important that we know what we’re talking about.

One very common definition of spirituality is a “peak experience.” Somebody actually *has* a spiritual experience. It can be a *satori*, it can be an experience of nature mysticism, it can be a revelation from the Divine, it can be luminosity or light. It’s some sort of a peak experience that has a beginning in time, confers a great deal of meaning and value, and sometimes includes overwhelming emotion—bliss, love, gratitude, humility, compassion. These things tend to be so overwhelming that the separate self is blasted to smithereens in the moment of the experience and has some deep and profound understanding or realization about the world and his or her place in it. If you look at a lot of the world’s great religious traditions, they all *started* when their founder had one of those experiences. So that’s one definition of spirituality—a direct, immediate realization or experience.

Another way people use the word spirituality, and this can be a little more scholarly, is to mean the highest *levels* of development in any *line* of development. There are about a dozen major lines of development—cognitive, emotional, moral, interpersonal, psychosexual, and so on. So, for example, people tend to call the highest type of cognition spiritual. Lower types of cognition, like a word or an image or a logical concept, people don’t generally call spiritual. But if you have a transrational awareness or a higher intuition or something that’s transversal, people will tend to call that spiritual. Or in the emotional line, for example, if you have low levels of emotion like hatred, anger, or greed, people don’t generally call that spiritual. But highly developed emotions, like universal compassion or love or bliss, people tend to call spiritual. Higher levels of moral development are called spiritual. Higher levels of interpersonal development are called spiritual. This definition is very common. And you can start to see how there’s tension between these definitions as well.

AC: Definitely.

KW: Because that second meaning is based on a *developmental* process, so only someone who is highly developed would have those kinds of spiritual experiences. Whereas, in terms of the first definition, anybody can have a spiritual experience—a two-year-old, a five-year-old, a ten-year-old, an elderly person, and so on. People in the field argue about which definition is right, but I think they’re all right.

The third common definition is that spirituality is neither a state nor the highest level in a line, but is its *own* developmental line. And therefore, you can be at a low level of development in the spiritual line, you can be at a medium level of development in the spiritual line, or you can be at a high level of development in the spiritual line. There has actually been some very respectable scholarly work using that definition. So there we have three major definitions, and there are others that I’ve outlined in some of my writings.

If we look at spirituality as a line of development, as a series of unfolding levels—for example, archaic, magic, mythic, rational, and integral, then you could say there’s archaic religion, there’s magical religion, there’s mythic religion, there’s rational religion, and there’s integral religion. A lot of people are implicitly using that third definition—including both Thomas Berry and Caleb Rosado, whom you quoted. And what they’re both saying is that magic and mythic religion no longer protects the earth, so therefore, we need an integral or higher spirituality. And I agree. But what they’re saying is also very partial. It has to be balanced with these other types of understanding.

I also think that in addition to looking at those three different definitions, we also need to understand a kind of broad orienting generalization, which is that a lot of the traditions, past and present, and a lot of the realized teachers, past and present, make an important distinction between the manifest world of form, the unmanifest world of emptiness, and then their nonduality—the union of emptiness and form. I think that we have to be careful, when we talk about spirituality yesterday,

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today, and tomorrow, to find a balance in those three domains as well. So, for example, both Thomas Berry and Caleb Rosado were, in essence, just talking about the world of form. Both of them left out an experience of the unborn, or the pure emptiness before the big bang. And unless you have that emptiness as your fundamental background, then you're basically just talking about the manifest world itself and playing in finite forms. Then your idea of spirituality is merely saving that finite form: "We don't want the earth to croak." Well, that's fine. But who were you before the earth was born? Who were you before the big bang? What is this emptiness that never enters the stream of time? Spirituality, integral spirituality, certainly has to include a profound realization of the unborn, the unmanifest, the timeless, the spaceless, combined with a reverence for the world of form—all of it, ecological, personal, global, and so on. My experience is that people tend to err on one side or the other. Either they get into this transcendental purity that doesn't care about the earth and Gaia, or they merely identify with Gaia and they forget the unborn. What we want to try to do, of course, is include both. So that's my overview on some of the essentials that we would want to include in an integral approach to the topic.

A Reassessment of Our Faith

AC: *So I think we agree that the religious traditions, because they emerged at a very different time in history, generally do not appear to be equipped to appropriately deal with and respond to the fast-changing life conditions that we find ourselves in the midst of. Therefore, it would seem that this extraordinary time we're living in demands a radical reassessment of our faith.*

KW: I think that's exactly right. Most of what we call the world's great religions were born in the magic and mythic eras. They were born about fifty thousand years ago, all the way up to about two thousand years ago. And it's not that the great shamans, saints, and sages of those periods weren't realized. They could, all of them, be plunged into that vast emptiness—because emptiness doesn't change. So a great saint, like Gautama Buddha, for example, could plunge into nirvana and be just as in touch with that emptiness as anybody can be today. But the world of form, the actual manifest world, is *evolving*. So they didn't fall short of the mark in terms of their own realization of emptiness. It's just that the world of form has so dramatically changed that they *are* short of the mark on that side of the street, so to speak. So that's where they definitely need updating. And both of those two people whom you quoted are

quite right, in my opinion, that the rules of the manifest domain that were developed in the magic and mythic eras are really inadequate for today's world. So in that sense, the great traditions are woefully inadequate.

AC: *And because the world of form is constantly evolving, without that half of the story being taken into consideration—and always being updated—it's inevitable that our responses are going to miss the mark.*

KW: Right. It's also important to take into consideration that in today's world, *less than two percent of the population are at integral waves of development*. Seventy percent of the world's population is at mythic or lower, which are ethnocentric levels of development. You know, there were a lot of people, particularly us boomers, who felt we had the new paradigm that was going to be the greatest transformation in the history of the world—this holistic, "everything is one, Gaia great Goddess" kind of thing. And that *can* be a wonderful turquoise belief (to use Spiral Dynamics terminology*). But unfortunately only a half of a percent of the population is at a cognitive level that can actually comprehend that turquoise conception. The rest of the world is at red (egocentric) and blue (absolutist) and orange (scientific/rational) and is just nowhere near that kind of thing. So we're not going to get some future spiritual orientation that's going to save this planet. The chances of that happening are virtually nil. So an enlightened society wouldn't just be one that had its governance systems coming from an integral level of development. It would also need to include sane ways that people could be at these earlier stages of development—ways that didn't harm the planet.

AC: *Right.*

KW: It's a very delicate, difficult topic to talk about. If you read someone like Thomas Berry, you get the sense that if we just adopted this nice holistic worldview, then everybody would be happy. But that's not going to change the fact that people are still at earlier stages of development, and simply learning a new worldview is not going to help them. That's just an *exhortation*. It's a goal without a path. You really have to have an understanding of the development of consciousness. Otherwise, just exhorting people to adopt new paradigms is pretty worthless. People can

*For a quick reference model explaining the basic stages of Spiral Dynamics, see page 55. This comprehensive developmental model of human value systems is explored in detail in the Fall/Winter 2002 issue of *WIE*. (read online at www.wie.org/spiraldynamics)

You really have to have an understanding of the development of consciousness. Otherwise, just exhorting people to adopt new paradigms is pretty worthless. It's a goal without a path. People can sound the alarm—everybody's been doing that for decades. But what we're short on are actual paths for interior development that would deliver that goal.

Ken Wilber

sound the alarm—everybody's been doing that for decades. But what we're short on are actual paths for interior development that would deliver that goal.

AC: Yes, we certainly are. And especially now, we need paths for interior development that are appropriate, as I was saying earlier, for the unprecedented complexity of the times we're living in. And, as you were saying, we need paths that will take into account the entire spectrum of human development. But those at the leading edge, those who will be in a position to recognize and appreciate the developmental perspective, especially need a path that will challenge them to meet the demands of today's dramatic life conditions. They need a path that not only will facilitate the experience of transcendence or personal release but, more significantly, will catalyze a leap beyond relativism that compels the individual to engage the life process at a level of deeper authenticity and maturity—a maturity that would, by its nature, recognize and freely embrace a greater responsibility for the future of life itself. If the impulse to awaken, the desire for enlightenment, is going to ultimately be able to elevate the consciousness of this world, then that urge is going to have to occur within a context that is informed by the fact that for better or worse the world is in a state of rapid change—change that desperately needs our conscious cooperation and participation. The spiritual impulse, the urge for transcendence, becomes evolutionary only when it becomes a duty—

KW: —an obligation.

AC: Yes! A duty, obligation, and commitment. A commitment to completely give oneself over to what we could ultimately call our

spiritual obligation: the total transformation of the manifest world, using whatever our God-given capacity is. Along the lines of everything we've been speaking about, and as we've previously discussed, I think that we may also need to redefine what the meaning of enlightenment itself is for the time we're living in. We may need, as Caleb Rosado mentioned, a more "relevant" definition. Traditionally, the emphasis has been on transcendence or the discovery of and abidance in the empty ground of being beyond the world and beyond time. But at the beginning of the twenty-first century, I question whether this kind of orientation is really relevant or appropriate. In fact, I feel that the whole purpose of enlightenment or going beyond ego, in our own time is to enable us to finally be truly available to participate in the transformation of the manifest world from a position of higher consciousness or development. Right now, this is truly what is needed more than ever. Indeed, and this is what's so important to understand, as long as there remains in the seeker of enlightenment any clinging to a posture of transcendence, even if it's a subtle one, the effect will be that one will still, to some degree, be divided. And that division will inhibit one's ability to act because one will still be holding on. And so this is why there is such a great need at this time to give the evolutionary context more and more precedence in the way the path to enlightenment is presented.

KW: As part of that comprehensive vision, yes. I mentioned before the simple notion that there is the world of form and the world of the formless, and then their union, their nondual *one taste*, their coming together (which is, in fact, what they already are). There's a plus and a minus to each of those domains, if you will, and there is always a pitfall if one emphasizes only one of them. So what I try to do when we're talking about integral spirituality is to look at the

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pitfalls of all of those domains if we don't embrace all of them together. And you're describing beautifully the pitfall of continuing to get into merely the transcendental component, which, in fact, is the subtlest block to nondual realization.

AC: Right. As long as we're divided, even subtly, in our passion, i.e., more attached to the position of transcendence than to total, unrestricted, unselfconscious, full-hearted, full-bodied, ecstatic, and fully committed engagement with the life process, inevitably, on gross and subtle levels, we will be resisting, not abiding as that total release and complete engagement with the life process.

KW: I agree. In the experiential introduction that I've had to some of this, it's almost a tension around the heart that excludes manifestation. Does that make sense to you?

AC: Yes.

KW: It seems like a transcendental freedom or purity, and certainly at the beginning it has more freedom than a mere immersion in passing finite domains. But when you get in and sort of look around, there's very subtle tension that actually represents a contraction and that holds *samsara*, the manifest world, at bay, as if it's some sort of disease—very subtly. But that is the final barrier to radical love or radical release or radical embrace—an embrace that then finds itself both prior to the manifest world but not other than the manifest world in any way whatsoever. It really is a sort of radical embrace of evolutionary form as its own body, its substance, its own vitality, its own manifestation.

AC: And that impulse, the liberated impulse for that radical embrace, is freedom itself already. That's why nothing needs to be held on to.

KW: Exactly. And it's an exuberant embrace that's both joyful and a sense of duty, as you say.

AC: Yes, a sense of duty that commits us to a task that will never end. So the whole point is to be able to embrace manifestation with an ever-widening reach while ever remaining rooted in the unborn, unmanifest ground that always is and always was.

KW: Yes, that's true. Because, of course, the other pitfall, which I think is much more common in today's culture, is the mere immersion in the manifest realm, the merely pagan orientation. The pitfall there, of course, is that you have no transcendence.

You have no freedom from the finite realm. You have no unborn. And you don't know your original face, the face you had before the big bang. And then that's celebrated *as if* it's integral spirituality! And all of the transcendental impulses are condemned. But unfortunately, you can't really embrace Gaia until you transcend Gaia. Otherwise, you have a mere addiction to the finite realm. You're not embracing it with love; you're embracing it with basically the same addiction you would heroin or any sort of sensory indulgence. Of course, because as a spiritual teacher you are dealing with students who are being brought along a path of awakening, the pitfall you would run into most often is people still clinging to that transcendental escapism, so to speak. But, as you know, out there in the world at large, most people are addicted to the manifest finite domain.

A New Religion?

AC: Now, a direction I'd really like to explore with you, one I've been thinking about quite a lot lately, is: What would an evolved theism, appropriate for our times, look like? In other words, how would a new religion, founded upon authentic, radical, nondual realization, emerge in a postmodern cultural context?

Part of the background to this line of inquiry is that I've noticed that many of the people at the leading edge today, specifically those who are interested in spiritual development and the evolution of consciousness, seem to have outgrown many of the traditional religious paths, simply because those individuals have evolved to a higher stage of development than the one out of which the traditions originally emerged, in some cases, thousands of years ago. Many of the traditions are felt to be inherently limiting because of their often outmoded responses to the individual and collective needs of human beings who are at the leading edge as we move into the twenty-first century. Indeed, the traditions are no longer seen to represent a relevant path to freedom and unrestricted evolution, and therefore, many individuals have become interested in alternative approaches. But what often happens, for many of those people, is that the overarching context becomes blurred, and then being on the path almost always becomes a strictly personal matter.

What's very compelling is that I think we're coming to a point where, sooner or later, the higher potentials realized in the steps and leaps that these individuals are taking are going to require some kind of structure—a spiritual or religious structure, if we want to use that kind of language—to actually be able to embrace and organize the higher-level experiences they are having. It's possible we may need to give birth to a new tradition. In other words, we need to create a framework or context in which we can come together to

four quadrants

In Ken Wilber's integral philosophy, our multidimensional Kosmos consists entirely of sentient beings, or "holons," spanning atoms to amoebas to astronauts. All holons can be perceived from at least four fundamental perspectives. In the Four Quadrants diagram, the Upper Left quadrant represents an individual holon viewed from the interior (as an "I" or subjective mind), and the Upper Right represents the view of that holon from the exterior (as an "It" or objective body). Because no holon exists in isolation, the Lower Left quadrant represents the view from within a collective of holons (as a "We" or intersubjective culture), and the Lower Right represents a collective viewed from the outside (as an "Its" or interobjective society). All four dimensions of this matrix, Wilber believes, are essential components of any truly integral pursuit.



make sense out of these experiences so that we can really use them as a foundation from which to restructure our whole relationship to the human experience.

KW: Yes, I think so. I think what you're talking about is a very important point. It's pretty common nowadays, and understandable, for people to say that there is a difference between being "religious" and being "spiritual." They say, "I am spiritual, but I'm not religious." And what they mean by that, of course, is that "spirituality" is not dogmatic or based on traditions—it's based on personal experience and personal understanding, and so on. But if that spirituality survives *them*, and other people can take up that spiritual approach, then it becomes a religion. Because all "religion" means is established, organized spirituality. So when people say, "Well, I don't like religion, but I *am* spiritual," all they mean is that they don't like organized forms of spirituality. But what they're *really* saying is that their *own* personal experience is all that counts. But what happens if they have a spiritual realization that's important, or they're part of a practicing *sangha* or community that has a realization that's important? If that's going to be passed on to subsequent generations, then it's going to be

organized spirituality—and that's religion. They're going to have to create a religion, a structure in which to carry it on, to institutionalize it—

AC: *God forbid!*

KW: Most people don't like religion—they just have their own spiritual experience in this moment, and they don't think beyond that. But if that spiritual experience is going to have meaning to *anybody* other than their own ego, it's going to *have* to be carried forward. And that means it would be what I call a four-quadrant affair. [See diagram above.] That means it has to be anchored in the lower right quadrant (collective exterior) in terms of social institutions—structures that can actually carry it on. It has to have a lower left (collective interior) intersubjective worldview—a set of beliefs, interpretations, and understandings that indicate how you orient yourself toward these higher potential experiences that you're having. And of course, it also has to have the upper left (individual interior) and upper right (individual exterior) domains.

So when you say we may need a new religion, I'd say that it's happening right now, but it's happening in very small groups or

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If the impulse to awaken, the desire for enlightenment, is going to ultimately be able to elevate the consciousness of this world, then that urge is going to have to occur within a context that is informed by the fact that for better or worse the world is in a state of rapid change—change that desperately needs our conscious cooperation and participation.

Andrew Cohen

practicing communities that are having these higher, what I would call third-tier spiritual experiences. But they have to bring them down, so to speak, and start to give them structure. They have to embody them, they have to institutionalize them, they have to find some way to reproduce them and carry them forward. However, that's only going to be happening in very small pockets of practice for the time being, in practicing *sanghas*—yours is an example, and there are also some terrific Buddhist communities and Taoist communities and Christian contemplative communities that all, in their own way, are attempting to embody higher potential states and trying to bring them down and give them structure so that they carry on. And that means creating a new religion.

Beyond Individuality

AC: To take this further, it seems to me that this next step that we're speaking about points beyond individual enlightenment. It points way beyond the personal domain of the individual to the emergence of some kind of collective or intersubjective higher mind. I'm talking about a kind of emergence that would release an awakened consciousness whose source of power comes directly and miraculously from the merging of minds beyond individual and collective ego.

Of course, this is a challenging concept for us to grasp because those of us who come from the privileged classes all over the world, and especially in the West, have been brought up in a cultural climate where a kind of inauthentic ego-based autonomy is nurtured. And also, because the concept of enlightenment itself, up until very recently, has generally been very much about an individual journey. But this cult of individuality, I feel, is what we may all be called to transcend for the sake of the emergence of our own higher potentials. Obviously this would begin to occur in those focused contexts that we've been speaking about, but the implications for all of us are

enormous. In terms of the evolution of consciousness, it seems to me that a higher level of development does point toward the emergence of a capacity of mind that literally transcends individuality.

KW: Oh, I think so. My own opinion, of course, is that every holon has four quadrants, so every awareness has an intersubjective component. But what happens in the higher waves, levels, or stages of development is that all of the quadrants, in a sense, become more vivid and vibrant, so you tend to notice them more. I mean, on the one hand, it's true that higher stages involve a sort of intensification of intersubjective consciousness. But on the other hand, paradoxically, the people experiencing that also become more autonomous.

AC: That's absolutely true.

KW: So it's not that autonomy is decreasing and intersubjectivity is increasing. I think they *both* just become much more vibrant, more noticeable. And in that sense, intersubjectivity does stand out in a way that it doesn't at earlier stages.

AC: Definitely, because in these higher stages, there would be a much greater degree of egolessness. And contrary to what most people may imagine, the natural result of a decrease in ego is always a greater and more authentic autonomy. And if this greater autonomy beyond ego begins to manifest in a number of individuals simultaneously, then the liberated mind of enlightenment itself automatically emerges through an awakened intersubjective context in a way that simply would not be possible through a singular individual.

KW: Yes, and also, that wouldn't be possible in earlier stages of development. Another way to put this is that, as you well

know, what happens when you're getting into these more evolved spiritual states, the One Self becomes more and more obvious in others. So you can be sitting there looking at another person, and all of a sudden you experience an intimate oneness with *their* interior. And simultaneously they're looking back at you experiencing an intimate oneness with *your* interior because you're both resonating to the only Self there is in the entire universe. So intersubjectivity, so to speak, becomes a kind of harmonic resonance that just jumps out.

AC: *And what if the kind of event that you just described became the foundation for the emergence of our own higher potentials? In other words, don't you think that in our future—assuming we survive and we're able to carry on with all this—there is going to be a level of development where the distinction between autonomous individuality and higher unity is going to become thinner and thinner?*

KW: Definitely.

AC: *And that through this greater nondual intimacy, unimaginable potentials—many of which you're beginning to have access to yourself, I think, through your own work—are going to begin to emerge—*

KW: Yes. I think that's right. And I think that at a sort of rarified level, so to speak, even though a lot of the distinctions in the finite domain, the manifest domain, become clearer and simpler and more obvious, paradoxically, *those distinctions all start to fade*. They become kind of pale—and not just the distinction between self and others. You get this intersubjectivity that is constantly vibrating and vivid. For example, the traditional distinctions between masculine and feminine fade away as well. Agency and communion—it's hard to tell the difference. It's like you have both more communion *and* more agency at the same time.

AC: *Right! Because when gender begins to identify more with the authentic self and less with ego, that singularity begins to emerge.*

KW: But it's *not* a meltdown. That's what's interesting. In other words, you become both more masculine and more feminine—

AC: *Exactly.*

KW: And more autonomous *and* more group or intersubjectively oriented—transcending opposites in this very paradoxical way. I think that clearly happens. And it happens across the board.

AC: *Yes. And what's so significant about this, I believe, is that what begins to emerge in this awakened context of nondual intersubjectivity is a completely new possibility—a different order of human potential altogether. I mean, it's literally like a new world emerges in this one, with new rules, because now the context has completely changed. It's the future, experienced now. It's a world or state of consciousness beyond ego, where together, as one, we can begin to consciously participate in the evolution of consciousness itself.*

Creative Evolution

AC: You know, I've been intuiting for many years these kinds of higher evolutionary potentials that I had no objective evidence for. I simply saw them in the eye of my own intuition and found myself mysteriously compelled to do whatever I could to enable them to become manifest within my body of students. This was often disconcerting because when you see something that you're sure can exist, and indeed will if you try hard enough, but you continue to have no evidence to prove it, it can make you feel a little crazy. But finally, as a result of not giving up and continuing to exert tremendous pressure, these very potentials have actually begun to emerge.

I have found the things you've written about what you call a “post-metaphysical spirituality” to confirm my own experiences and also to enlighten my understanding of them. According to what I've understood, what I was seeing in the eye of my own intuition did not yet exist—not in the metaphysical sense of the perennial philosophy,* which holds that all higher levels are preexisting ontological structures. In fact, what I was seeing was only a potential, not yet an actual preexisting level that simply needed to be reached. Indeed, my own experience confirms your declaration that those newly emerging levels of consciousness/being have not yet appeared with enough consistency to become self-existing levels, or what you have called “Kosmic habits.” But, and this is the most thrilling part of it, they do in fact become existing levels or Kosmic habits to the degree that we ourselves co-participate with consciousness to mutually develop that very capacity in ourselves.

KW: That's exactly right. I really do believe that is the case. And it's mutually supportive, in a sense, to have people's own inner realization and experience confirm that. Because it's certainly my own realization, but it's also obviously the product of a kind of philosophical orientation. And now we're thinking through

*Term used to refer to the common core of the world's great wisdom traditions.

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"Unlike the perennial philosophy, the details of which I mostly reject, I believe that the levels of consciousness are largely plastic . . . a vast . . . field of potentials and not a predetermined set of levels through which humanity must rigidly march on the way to its own realization. However, once a level of consciousness emerges in enough people, then that level becomes a Kosmic pattern for future development, and thus it becomes something of a fixed level, not in a Platonic sense, but in the sense [of] . . . a set of Kosmic habits, habits that are consequently repeated in stages of subsequent development (just as atoms and molecules are part of all subsequent evolution). This approach overcomes and rejects a metaphysical viewpoint and replaces it with an empirical, phenomenological, experiential, and evidential approach."

Ken Wilber

"On the Nature of a
Post-Metaphysical Spirituality"

what some of these things mean in conjunction with your own spiritual practice and spiritual awareness.

AC: Before I'd become familiar with your ideas on this topic, I had assumed that these levels and potentials I was intuiting already existed. And then I realized, "No, they exist as potentials and therefore don't yet actually exist because not enough individuals have reached that level of development."

KW: That's just how I see it. And this understanding allows us to get rid of an enormous amount of metaphysical and ontological baggage that not only is not needed but that completely prejudices the spiritual orientation in the eyes of the modern and postmodern world. You see, the modern and postmodern world has developed very powerful arguments for why those merely ontological and metaphysical structures don't exist. And they don't. But you can still derive every single thing you need for a fully integral spirituality without using that baggage.

So using the levels defined by Spiral Dynamics as examples, we can say that once the lower levels emerge—beige and purple and red and blue and orange and green—once they emerge and take on structure and become Kosmic habits, then they exist

independent of individuals. So in today's world, the structures of those lower levels are so old that every infant has to go through those stages. There is no getting around them—they are just there. So they become real, and that means in a very concrete, *not* metaphysical, way, as *actual* levels of development among real human beings in a real world. And so these levels or structures, right up to around turquoise, are, in fact, fairly fixed. And the older they are, the more they're a Kosmic habit, and the harder it is to break them.

But when you get up around turquoise and coral,* those levels are just now lightly getting formed. So that's where evolution's edge is right now—at turquoise and coral—and it's frothy and it's creative and it's emergent. And everything we do *right now* is going to contribute to how those levels are laid down as Kosmic habits.

AC: Right.

KW: So that's very interesting. And then there are even *higher* levels, but those are just vast potentials in the subtle and causal and nondual domains.

*The highest levels of development yet identified by the Spiral Dynamics system (see p. 55).

AC: *That's what is so thrilling about this and what makes it infinitely more satisfying than the traditional take on all this—the shocking recognition that we are actually creating these levels of consciousness, and of course, in an evolutionary context, we are desperately needed to do it. It ain't going to happen by itself because they don't yet exist!*

KW: Absolutely.

AC: *And what could make the meaning of the spiritual impulse more clear than the recognition of the necessity for our own conscious participation in the evolution of consciousness itself? What could make more sense and be more compelling for the awakening human on an emotional, intellectual, philosophical, and spiritual level than this? If we assume that these levels already exist, we are completely leaving out of the picture the all-important role that we have to play in the actual creation of these levels. And that's the most thrilling part of all this—because the purpose of human incarnation is revealed in the most obvious way when one realizes, "It is up to me."*

KW: Yes, it really is co-creation because right at that frothy, foaming, chaotic, emerging edge of spirit's unfolding is where *leela*, the creative play, is. And all that's required, of course, is that whatever emerges has to transcend and include its past because those are past forms of spirit. Molecules emerge, they transcend and include atoms, atoms include quarks, and so on. So we have to embrace the past, and that's called love. But looking at it the other way, you're bringing down that creative edge every time you have these kinds of experiences.

AC: *Exactly. Speaking of bringing down the creative edge, there's something profound I've noticed, and also that some of my students have experienced, that I'd like to tell you about. When one is actually engaging with the evolution of consciousness in the way we've been discussing, there is literally the sense that—God, I don't know what metaphor to use to describe this, but—it's almost as if a thing (if we can call consciousness a thing) is being "cooked" by the individuals who are consciously realizing it. In fact, as those individuals would move in and out of this state of conscious realization, it seemed like it was informing them and they were informing it. And then at a later point in time, when they awakened to it again, it literally seemed as if the thing—consciousness itself—had moved forward, evolved.*

KW: I believe that's exactly how it happens.

AC: *I've had this kind of experience for a long time, but recently, many of my students have described having the same recognition collectively. They realize that when they give attention to this thing, it begins to inform them and they evolve as a result, and when they return to it, they find that a mysterious moving forward has occurred in the thing itself. So in this one can actually intuit—you can't quite say see because it's on a more subtle level than that—but whatever consciousness is, you can almost see that it is evolving in just the way that we've been speaking about.*

KW: That's exactly right. You can do a thought experiment where you think back fifty thousand years, where everybody's at a much earlier stage of development, sort of beige and purple. Purple is the leading edge at that time, and yet there are small groups of people that start to have an experience of the next level, which would be red. And red at that moment is not fully formed, so there are still a lot of different ways that red can go. And all it has to do is transcend and include purple and beige—it's fixed in that sense because its past has to be carried along to some degree. But at that creative edge, large parts of red could have gone in any number of different directions. And I'm sure that as the first pioneers in consciousness pushed into red, they were having just the kinds of experiences you described. They would sort of touch into it and then come back, and go, "Wow, what was that?" And then they'd go and touch it again and come back. And then eventually it starts to flow, it comes out, it sediments down. And the more people have that experience, the more it becomes a Kosmic habit available to other human beings, who then begin to move into that domain. And then ten thousand years later, it's become such a Kosmic habit that people have no choice at that point. They automatically evolve through red on the way to the next level, blue—that's just the way it is. Later on, at the leading edge of creative evolution, people at blue are starting to have experiences of orange. That was a very exciting time—it was called the Western Enlightenment (with previews of that emergence in early Greece when the bright boys down there pushed into orange and higher). So I think that's exactly what happens. You know, a thousand years from now, they'll be looking back on all this as "that kindergarten stuff" that we were pushing into back then. ■

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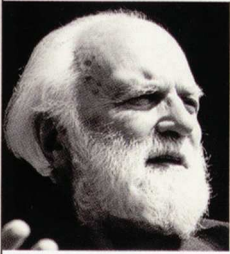
Question:

As humanity heads into the third millennium, the world is changing in ways that would have seemed like good science fiction only decades ago. From biotechnology to nanotechnology, from the information revolution to the deterioration of the biosphere, from globalization to global warming, life in the twenty-first century is becoming increasingly complex, chaotic, and unpredictable. The challenge of keeping up with the speed of life has never been greater and, according to most futurists, we haven't seen the half of it. They tell us that the rate of change itself is increasing exponentially, and shows no sign of slowing down any time soon. This recognition has led many of the most forward-looking thinkers of our time to the conclusion that in order to meet the increasing demands of life in our evolving world, new capacities are going to be required from all of us—not the least of which will be an unprecedented willingness to change and keep changing in order to respond to new life conditions as they emerge.

You are a teacher of what has traditionally been called Enlightenment—the life-transforming realization of our ultimate nature, which is widely considered to be not only the summit of all spiritual seeking but the greatest and final aim of human existence. This profound spiritual awakening has often been described as the realization of the changeless, the timeless, the unborn, the uncreated—that absolute reality which remains forever untouched by anything that happens in the world of time, evolution, and becoming. What I would like to ask you is this: What does the discovery of this timeless dimension of being have to tell us about how to respond to the challenges of a world in which time itself seems to be accelerating out of control? How can the realization of the changeless help us to navigate a future in which constant change may well be the only constant?

Interviews by Craig Hamilton

Douglas Harding



Having been raised within the confines of "one of the most extremely bigoted, fanatical, exclusive religious sects in the world," Douglas Harding is a spiritual teacher with little tolerance for religious form. In fact, ever since a spontaneous spiritual experience in 1943

thrust him into the recognition that he "had no head," he has been traveling the world sharing "The Headless Way"—a deceptively simple set of practical "experiments" he devised to give others the direct experience of the empty awareness that is their true nature. Author of *On Having No Head*, *Head Off Stress*, and other books, at age ninety-four Harding remains a hurricane of passionate intensity, firmly committed to catalyzing in others "the rediscovery of the obvious."

"The only hope for this crazy world is the realization of the timeless, the unchanging, the unborn, at our very center. The only hope is that a large but not necessarily overwhelming proportion of humanity shall realize the unborn, the timeless—shall realize it, and live it."

Q: How can the realization of the changeless, timeless ultimate reality help us to navigate a future in which constant change may well be the only constant? (full question on page 101)

A: Well, my position is that the only hope for this crazy world is the realization of the timeless, the unchanging, the unborn, at our very center. The only hope is that a large but not necessarily overwhelming proportion of humanity shall realize the unborn, the timeless—shall realize it, and live it.

It's easy to be impressed by this rate of change and feel that one should adjust one's life to it. There is a tendency to say, "The world is powerful and I have to compromise, I have to adjust my life to this descent into chaos." But I think that is quite wrong. It should be the other way around. You see, ultimately, there's only one power and that is the power of the one we really are. The world is only a byproduct of the real power. It's only a widely distributed peripheral deterioration of that power. And to give power to the world, to adjust to that, is to give it too much weight, to put the cart before the horse. Damn the world. There is no world as a separate issue. The world is fiction if you regard it as self-supporting or valid in its own right. So to adjust to the world is to be a victim of this craziness, this descent into hell.

To say "I have to adjust to this descent into hell" is to underrate the power that you pack. Every individual who can say "I am"—which only God can really say—is superior to the world. The one who can say "I am" has identified with *being*, with God—and rightly so. The world is powerless for one who realizes that, at center, he packs the only power that really is. There's only one power and that needs trusting. If you trust it, then you find the world has to adjust to that power rather than vice versa. If only I could trust the power I pack, as the one I really, really am, all would come out right. So realize the power you pack. Trust it and don't be bemused by the seeming power of the world. It's sham power. It's not real power.

The bottom line for me is that the one I adore, the one I really, really am, the power behind the world, does the "impossible" thing to create itself without any help, to pop up from nothing to something. Now that is quite something. There was nothing and then the One Being created itself from nothing and creates itself every minute from nothing. This is the great wonder. After the "impossible" achievement of self-origination out of nothingness, a billion created universes are chickenfeed.

Everything changes all the time, and the chaos and the mayhem and the threats become more and more severe as time goes on, it seems. But this is only one of billions and billions of universes. Humanity, on Earth, is only a dust grain in the universe by comparison. So I trust the one who performs, moment to moment, the staggering miracle of self-origination. I trust this one. And this one doesn't give me what I want, but it certainly gives me what I need. And the world needs to be mediated to it through me.

Lama Ole Nydahl

Q: How can the realization of the changeless, timeless ultimate reality help us to navigate a future in which constant change may well be the only constant? (full question on page 101)

A: We have to learn to be in our centers. As soon as we're in our centers, in the here and now, in the moment, then we will also be able to do what's useful, at the right time. The less ego that's there, the less stiffness, the less hope and fear, the less expectation and diversion, the more organically and naturally we will be able to react.

From a healthy middle, from a central strong, relaxed condition, everybody will react in the right way. If we are in the here and now and we are at home, at rest with ourselves, then we will not make mistakes. We will see not just the picture but the whole frame. We will not be like politicians looking one, two, three years into the future. We'll be like statesmen looking fifty or a hundred years into the future. And with this kind of motivation, we'll be able to do a lot of good. Then the rapid change in the world around us will just be met with an attitude of, "Oh, are they doing that now? Let's see how we can use that." And, "Wow! A new idea. I didn't know that could be done."

The whole trick is actually to *see that which is seeing*, to look for one's mind. The things happening in the mind appear, change, come and go, all the time. They have no lasting nature. But that which is aware, that which is knowing, that which understands and is conscious, is something else completely. And if we look for the essence of what's looking through our eyes and listening through our ears, the essence of our mind, the first thing we experience is actually space—that mind is, in its essence, space. Buddha said it was empty of size, weight, color, smell, and form. Understanding that mind is, in essence, space—that it hasn't been made and born and created and that it cannot get old, die, disappear, and fall away—is the greatest support of mental health and happiness that can exist. Knowing that we are not our bodies that get old, sick, and die, that we are not our thoughts and feelings, which appear, change, and disappear again, but that we are essentially indestructible space which is aware and knows and understands, is very important.

I mean, with that kind of awareness, I can tell you, great things come out. One is always in one's center. One is never being pressed. One has a very wide view from which to look and experience and respond. It's a wonderful thing. And with it comes a fearlessness because we know, of course, that bodies die and thoughts come and go, but this essential awareness

cannot be destroyed or harmed. This is the basis for all things. Out of that comes joy. Because you are looking now from a fearless place at all the potential of mind, and all the things that can happen, and this is essentially joyful. And then one sees that there are countless other sentient beings, and we ourselves are just one, and so naturally we will be kind. We will understand that others are simply more important than we are because they all want happiness, and we may be able to give them that or do something for them. And love comes out of that.

If we can understand that, then we will act with fluidity in the moment as it is. We will not be in a state of fear and anxiety, and we will be able to give a lot to others spontaneously. Because we will not feel separation from others. We will not think "me here and them there." We will think *us*. And from this *us* and this open understanding of situations, we'll be able to do a lot for others.



Born in Copenhagen in 1941, Lama Ole Nydahl was one of the first Westerners to be fully qualified as a lama and meditation teacher in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. While on his honeymoon in Katmandu in 1968, Nydahl and his wife met the Sixteenth

Karmapa, head of the Kagyu lineage. After spending the next three years in the Himalayas as the revered yogi's personal students, they were asked by the Karmapa to "bring Tibetan Buddhism to the West." Over the last thirty years, he has done just that. Traveling and teaching almost continuously, he has founded more than 270 meditation and study centers around the world from Vladivostok to Valencia.



Vernon Kitabu Turner, Roshi



The life of this Zen Baptist Bushido warrior reads like it was written in Hollywood. Born in 1948 in Portsmouth, Virginia, at a time when racial discrimination was still rampant, he vowed, at age nine, to become a “protector of the weak” and devoted all his energies

to teaching himself martial arts from a library book. By age seventeen, he had transformed himself into a sort of vigilante ninja who was feared even by the violent gangs that infested the New York neighborhood he had moved to. After a life-changing meeting with Zen Master Nomura Roshi in a city park, he started meditating under the roshi’s guidance, and in a moment of insight, discovered “the secret of self-defense from the inside out.” As legend tells it, the point was proven when, in a single afternoon, he publicly defeated every serious martial artist in his metropolitan region within a matter of seconds—using only one finger. A Baptist minister, skillful writer, and talented poet, Turner was also recognized as a spiritual teacher by the Indian guru Sant Keshavadas, who bestowed on him the mission of “healing the African-American soul.”

Q: How can the realization of the changeless, timeless ultimate reality help us to navigate a future in which constant change may well be the only constant? (full question on page 101)

A: We are not what we see in the mirror. The world we cannot see, which is the *real* world in truth, is the world that we are. But the world of multiplicity, the world of sight, the world of images, of matter—those things are constantly before our eyes and we become attached to them. We believe that they should stay the way they are. But change is the nature of life. It is our *mind* that becomes fixed on certain conditions, and once we become comfortable with certain conditions, we become uncomfortable when they shift. But if we could let go of this identity that we hold on to, if we could realize that there is no fixed place to call *oneself*, that we are also in a state of change, that change is nature itself, then we would move in harmony with change and we would not be afraid.

For instance, in a battle, you’re facing a person you believe to be your enemy, and that person is attacking you. If you’re afraid, you will stand there and you will be struck down. Because the fear says, “He’s bigger than me, he’s stronger than me, and if I move, he’s going to get angry.” However, if you don’t harbor the fear in your mind, then you’re still aware of your body, you’re aware of the vulnerabilities of your body, and you know the dangers, but you adapt, you move out of the way of the projectile, the fist, whatever it is. You become sensitive, so you’re able to flow with whatever is being done. You don’t know what the person’s going to do, and you have no fixed plan as to how to respond. You just simply relax and flow in a way that preserves the integrity of your back.

If people could understand that the nature of our mind, the true mind, is its ability to adapt to, or accommodate, whatever is out there, they would realize that whatever happens, it’ll be okay, they can adapt to it. They can meet it, whatever it is. But most people are afraid; they think they can’t do that. But the nature of what in Sanskrit is called “Buddha mind” is that it constantly meets the experience of *right now*. It doesn’t have to have a plan. Because until there’s a problem, there’s no need for an answer. But when the problem is there, the answer is also there. We see the problem; we come up with the answer. When we can trust that our fundamental nature is that perfection, that we as human beings were created to handle situations on this planet, when we can understand that that *is* our nature, then singly and collectively we will know we can deal with anything.

Toni Packer

Q: How can the realization of the changeless, timeless ultimate reality help us to navigate a future in which constant change may well be the only constant? (full question on page 101)

A: Right now as we are sitting here, where are we? Are we in this timeless presence without division, without you and me? Is this from where we're going to look and talk? Or are we engaged in this accelerating, changing world? Because it makes a big difference whether we speak and look and ask and listen from the timeless or from involvement in the changing, in time, which includes wanting things to change, wanting to change ourselves—which is all part of the changing relative world the Easterners speak of. This, to me, is essential. Because the timeless presence—emptiness, if you will, or wholeness—that does not *do* anything. That does not operate in the usual way that we are accustomed to. It just beholds, observes, listens, understands, realizes.

Zen Master Dogen once said, "Firewood does not turn into ashes." When I heard that the first time, I didn't know what he was talking about because obviously firewood turns into ashes. I mean, we've all experienced it. And the next time we had a campfire, I watched and observed, and the time quality fell away. It was just being there and there was no change from fire to ashes; it was just what was. Fire. And then sometimes it collapses, and there are some sparks, and it seems to turn black. But when you're really there, timelessly, it is not a process of time that you're observing but the presence: eternal, everlasting, without time.

If you are established in this timeless presence, if you are in touch with it, you don't have to navigate and negotiate. You're just here, and a response will come out of this intelligent or wise presence. One's response will be intelligent. That presence does not even perceive change as change. That's already an evaluation of what's going on. It just responds to what is here. If there is this timeless quality in one's perception, then it's not that one sees that something is changing from this to that. One simply sees what is and responds.

There cannot be any prescription for how to respond to what is going on in the world, but we are responding every moment, from moment to moment. So is there some awareness of how we're responding, what is going on in ourselves, in the world, in each other? Is there some clarity about it so that the response is appropriate?

You see, it's not that we have to become something different or go to the other shore. *We are here.* We have to wake up to



Born in Germany in 1927 to a Jewish mother and a Christian father, Toni Packer spent the World War II years in fear that her Jewish roots would be discovered. After marrying an American, she immigrated to the U.S. in the fifties, and it was here, in 1965, that she

came across the American Zen Master Philip Kapleau Roshi. Showing a strong propensity for the practice, she soon became his star student and eventually was asked by the aging roshi to be his successor. But this was not meant to be: shortly before the scheduled transfer of the mantle, she came across J. Krishnamurti's writing and resonated deeply with his mistrust of traditional structures and form. In Krishnamurti-like spirit, she refused the role that her teacher had designed for her and set off on her own, taking some two hundred of his students with her. She currently teaches at the Springwater Center, which she founded, in Springwater, New York.

that fact, and then there is a different response to what we call the relative world. It's seen through for what it is. It's like when you watch a politician on television—can't you see through the face, see what the person is all about? No words are needed to realize it. If you're taking part in it—if you're taking this position or that—then you project onto the other. But the beauty is that when there's no projection, then things and people appear the way they are, unvarnished.

From this vast, unprejudiced, and nonpreferential perspective, from this presence, the relative world spins and spins according to unfathomable patterns. But this Earth is part of a huge, vast cosmos of stars exploding, and stars newly created out of hot gases. So what are we trying to do? To change this? Can we? Or is it possible just to behold wisely what goes on here and see whether it will not go out of control? The changes come and go like the tide. If war doesn't break out here, it breaks out someplace else. We haven't really changed fundamentally. But let me make clear, I'm not pessimistic at all. On the contrary, I'm full of serenity and good cheer—not about events in the world that you're talking about as running out of control, but about this potential for a human being to wake up to what we are, changelessly.

Leslie Temple-Thurston

Q: How can the realization of the changeless, timeless ultimate reality help us to navigate a future in which constant change may well be the only constant? (full question on page 101)

A: Well, in a nutshell, living in the changeless is an egoless state, and therefore, there is complete fluidity and an ability to flow with life in each moment from a place of total freshness and newness with each experience. The old structured ego in which we have lived in the past, and in which we still tend to live to this day, is very rigid. It doesn't give way. It doesn't let go. It's not fluid. We tend to have traditions that we follow, perhaps not even knowing why. We've lost the thread of why. And we're blind to what the moment calls forth from us. We simply live in a rut. And that is what has to change in this world if we are going to cope with the speeding up of time. So timelessness is not a static state at all. It is completely flexible, malleable consciousness. As that timelessness connects to worldly experience, it brings a malleable, flexible, alive, and awake-in-the-moment consciousness that can adapt instantaneously to situations.

The flexibility comes because there's no mind. The no-mind state is unfathomable intelligence, and it has this deep and profound knowing of what's appropriate in each moment, in terms of action. So it's not being drawn from memory. The decisions we make when we choose to act in this world are not being drawn from memory banks of how we've done it before, or how everybody else does it, or what the norm is, or "Am I going to look good doing it?" There's no self-consciousness there at all. So then the action comes with complete integrity from source, out of that unfathomable intelligence. And it manifests in a completely appropriate way. We actually become creatures who are totally different in each moment. In other words, the personality or the appearance of a personality rolls with the changes. It's like being a river rather than an enclosed system, which is what the old ego was.

That's my experience of this. So what I ask my students to do is to clear the ego, to process and let go of all the structured, stratified, habitual routines that they learned in childhood, and become fluid. Fluid consciousness. That's the timelessness you are speaking about. No resistance. Timelessness implies no resistance, and the ability to access that unfathomable



Born and raised in South Africa, Leslie Temple-Thurston studied fine arts and worked as a professional painter and art teacher when she was in her twenties. She emigrated with her family to the United States in the 1970s and, following the spiritual inclination that had

guided her since childhood, pursued the study of mysticism and ancient wisdom through meditation, yogic teachings, and spiritual psychology. In the late 1980s, her many years of practice came to fruition when she experienced what she describes as "the complete dissolution of her old identity and a profound spiritual transformation and awakening." Since then, she has worked with seekers worldwide and has done humanitarian service work in South Africa, especially with AIDS sufferers. Her books include *The Marriage of Spirit* and *Returning to Oneness*.

intelligence, the knowing, the instant knowing of what's appropriate in the moment.

So, I pin my hopes for the future of the human race on a mass awakening because I really think that that's the only thing that is going to thin the veils of separation enough to release the resistance to change. I don't know what the critical mass is exactly, but I do think a lot of people are waking up, at least partially. You don't have to be fully awake to really have an impact on the environment, to have an impact on the collective consciousness. We're so connected collectively now, even globally, with the media and the passing of information through the internet.

I encourage people who seek transformation to use what's happening in the world around them as a mirror for themselves. I tell them to look at what's happening in the world and then ask, "Where am I doing this in my life?" Those who are doing transformational work generally have more integrity than average, and so they may just have residual tendencies in the psyche to abuse power, for instance. Whereas, in the media, or in politics, you see it happening on a grand scale. But you have to ask, Where do I abuse power? Even if it's in a miniscule way, it has to be cleaned up. And as we change those places inside of ourselves, it affects the collective.

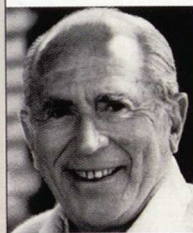
Arnaud Desjardins

Q: How can the realization of the changeless, timeless ultimate reality help us to navigate a future in which constant change may well be the only constant? (full question on page 101)

A: In my view, it is not a matter of evaluating how the realization of the changeless could help us navigate change; rather, the point is that in the realization of the changeless lies the one and only possibility of being able to cope with a frantically changing world. Indeed, if we seriously address this question, we shift onto an altogether different level of experience. It is true that, relatively speaking, we all have to develop new capacities, to enlarge our scope and way of looking at the world and stop clinging to our old ways—including our ways of passing on the timeless truths of spiritual teachings. It is true that the times demand an exceptional adaptability and openness. But mind and intelligence can only open up and become more flexible to a point. Just as we are, on a human level, trying to embrace more and more complex data, we simultaneously have to let go and trust consciousness itself, the very experience of enlightenment you are referring to. Essentially we have to stop trying to exert control and dare to plunge into the unknown, even if we do continue to do our best in the world of cause and effect. The experience of the timeless is in and of itself incomprehensible, unexplainable. In “it” lies the very source of adaptability. Consciousness is at once changeless, timeless, formless; but its formlessness makes it infinitely adaptable.

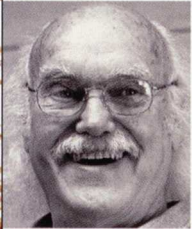
Therefore, in the midst of this ever-accelerating pace of transformation, we have to remain focused more than ever on the timeless ground of being, though not as a shelter or refuge in which we could avoid what is going on in the world. We mustn’t oppose the “inner” and the “outer” but rather be more and more rooted in the inner field of being and, from there, go and meet the world in all its complexity. We must not take refuge in heaven but deepen our perception and experience of heaven to unreservedly embrace earth, “embracing heaven and earth” in one single movement, to borrow the title of Andrew Cohen’s book. Whatever its folly at times, the ever-changing world is the manifestation of the changeless, and there cannot be any separation here. So, to conclude, I would say that the realization of what has been called enlightenment, or at least seriously being on the path to this realization, still is, as it has always been, the answer to the question of how to deal with whatever happens—provided this realization is not interpreted as a separation from the world of form but as both its source and accomplishment. As my own teacher, Swami Prajnanpad, used to say: “God is the highest possibility of man.” Change can not completely apprehend change; only the changeless can.

“We mustn’t oppose the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ but rather be more and more rooted in the inner field of being and, from there, go and meet the world in all its complexity. We must not take refuge in heaven but deepen our perception and experience of heaven to unreservedly embrace earth, embracing heaven and earth in one single movement.”



Born in 1925, Arnaud Desjardins spent many years as a producer for French television before turning his cameras to where his true interest lay—the great mystical traditions of the East. His groundbreaking films and books about Tibetan Buddhism, Hindu ashrams, Zen monasteries in Japan, and Sufi brotherhoods in Afghanistan, are credited with singlehandedly bringing the wisdom of Eastern spirituality to the French public eye. His countless overland trips to Asia brought him into contact with many of the greatest spiritual luminaries of the twentieth century, including the renowned Anandamayi Ma, with whom he spent considerable time. But it wasn’t until he met the Bengali sage Swami Prajnanpad in 1965, that he would himself formally become a disciple. During his subsequent trips to India, he spent as much time as possible at the guru’s ashram until undergoing a radical spiritual transformation, after which he himself began to teach. His beautiful ashram in Hauteville, near Lyon, is a lively center of wisdom, attracting seekers from all over France, and throughout Europe.

Ram Dass



At a moment when Eckhart Tolle's runaway hit, *The Power of Now*, is fast outpacing even Deepak Chopra's sales, it's easy to forget that the original and all-time best-selling testament to the spiritual potency of the present moment is the classic *Be Here Now* by

Ram Dass. A Harvard psychologist and psychedelic-researcher-turned-drop-out-seeker, he was one of the first Westerners to return from the East with an Indian name and mind-bending tales of meetings with Indian yogis—like the time his guru Neem Karoli Baba ingested enough LSD to flatten an elephant without batting an eye. For the past thirty-five years, Ram Dass has been one of the most listened-to voices in the burgeoning East-meets-West counterculture he helped pioneer. Although still suffering the effects of a 1997 stroke, he continues to speak publicly around the world.

Q: How can the realization of the changeless, timeless ultimate reality help us to navigate a future in which constant change may well be the only constant? (full question on page 101)

A: Well, first, I would say that I don't agree that time is speeding up. Time is going the same speed. What's changing is maybe our perception of time.

All of this multitasking is so demanding, and everything is changing so fast that it seems like we have to keep up with it, but we merely have to get into the moment. You see, if you identify with awareness itself, you identify with that in yourself which doesn't change. Because it's awareness—it's not a thing, like your body. And in that, you are less identified with what the awareness is of, less identified with the things that are changing. Then change is witnessed but the witness does not change.

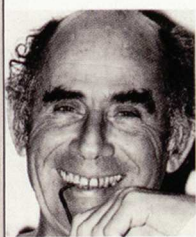
I live a life that is half in the consciousness plane of no-time and half in the plane of time. Because I can't make speeches or talk to interviewers unless I can keep time. We have to make time to do it. Time is built into the social fabric. But when I'm in the timeless, my consciousness feels very free. And furthermore, we meet in the timeless. It looks like there are many of us, but on this plane of timelessness, there is only One. Time and space are things that keep us apart, and we meet in the One.

By shifting consciousness planes to that plane of timelessness, you shift your perception of your own incarnation. For one thing, your perception changes from being an experiencer to being a witness of experiences. For instance, when I had a stroke, my witnessing mechanism changed the stroke because by being in the witness, I was not *in* the suffering. I was witnessing the stroke and the suffering. The second thing that changes is the meaning of death. While you're in time, you're constantly worried about death, worried about the end of incarnation. But when you're in that plane of timelessness, your incarnational death will be like the end of a chapter of an interesting book you're reading. In other words, you develop a distance from your own incarnation. Certainly, there's a lot less anxiety in that. You realize that you don't need to be on top of all the changes in order to find satisfaction. I think of the changing world as God's manifestation, and watching it change is humorous and fascinating.

Q: How can the realization of the changeless, timeless ultimate reality help us to navigate a future in which constant change may well be the only constant? (full question on page 101)

A: Well, the scenario that you described is undoubtedly true. All these things are happening. As a member of the human race and a citizen of the world, I'm confronted with the reality that faces me, which is constantly changing in the ways you described. But in the end, it always comes down to the question of what do you do in this moment, in this situation? I mean, if an earthquake happens, then you have to respond to the moment. So the real question is: Is it possible to deal with it from a state of being that might give you more choices, a wider or deeper view of what is a full human response to the particular situation that you're faced with?

You see, the state of enlightenment is outside of all changes. In that place, nothing ever happens. You have a state of relaxed being, and you have a perspective or a sense of a cosmic unity that you are a part of, and then there are all kinds of storms going on around, which you accept and you don't deny and don't try to withdraw from. And this perspective gives you a better basis to respond to the situation, to act in the situation, even to improve the situation because of this sense of universality that you have achieved or arrived at.



Ever since his encounter with the avant-garde psychiatrist R.D. Laing in 1967, Michael Barnett has been a pioneer of human potential. Founder of the renegade self-help group, People Not Psychiatry, Barnett emerged as one of the early leaders in the alternative

psychotherapy movement in London. But it wasn't until he visited the Rajneesh Ashram in Pune, India, in 1974 that he would find the true context for his work. Given the name Swami Ananda Somendra, he soon became one of the most influential group leaders in the notorious guru's burgeoning movement. Since splitting with Rajneesh in the early eighties, Barnett has been a spiritual teacher in his own right, giving talks and workshops throughout Europe, publishing over fifty books including *The Greatest Teaching There Is*, and guiding a community of over one hundred students in southern France.

My latest motto is "transcend and conquer." Transcend means to find that state that is beyond all change. And conquer means to deal with whatever comes up in a successful way. The transcendence hopefully gives you the equipment, or a much better set of possibilities, for dealing with the things that everybody else has to deal with, whether it's something in a relationship or with your kids or with your colleagues or with your students. You see, if you are *involved* in the change, then you're going to have emotional reactions to it, and you're going to have preferences about what's going on, and therefore you won't really be able to get a distance from it and even hope to get a sense of what is universally right in the situation.

But the connection with the unchanging enables you to get a more detached view of things and to weigh up the situation as a whole rather than simply your personal responses to the situation. That's what makes it possible to escape from all of these personal attitudes, which are bound to influence what you say and what you do and what side you take in any particular matter, and then you've got a much better chance of being objective, of being clear. It becomes possible to get a detached look at what seems to be the best thing to do in the circumstances from a neutral point of view, from a feeling of looking at the whole of the world or the whole of humanity.

The more critical the situation, and the more rapid the changes are, the more valuable it is to be in a space where you're not whipped immediately by everything that happens and, ideally, even in a space where you're not whipped at all. Like the way the Dalai Lama has been over all the years since his flight from Tibet. In the face of all the things that have happened there, he's kept his cool, and he's been extremely effective. Because nothing could be more personal to the spiritual leader of a country than the state of that country and its people. I know he must be incredibly involved, and yet, at the same time, he keeps this distance from it and is able to be much more effective than he would be if he were more hysterical about it.

So when I say "transcend and conquer," I really mean, "I go into the world and regardless of what I have to confront, I can still say, well, this is part of the world I live in and it's a big factor, so I have to somehow conquer the *relationship* to whatever it is." It's not that you have to conquer anybody involved, but you have to conquer your relationship with that event going on. So the conquering has to do with conquering the ordinary reality that comes to you, whether you're in a clear, enlightened, timeless space or not.

R

ichard Moss

Q: How can the realization of the changeless, timeless ultimate reality help us to navigate a future in which constant change may well be the only constant? (full question on page 101)

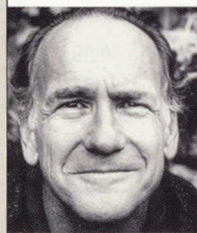
A: If we look at the subconscious premise, the underlying premise in the hearts, minds, brains, and souls of human beings that is organizing life for us in the twenty-first century, it's not hard to see that deep down in all people, until they've known that which is changeless and timeless in them, there is a fear, a quality of anxiety, that orients us toward life with distrust, so that our fundamental effort is about survival. We're changing very fast, but we are so frightened in ourselves that we don't adapt to change well at all.

What we don't realize, however, is that the nature of awareness itself is the ability to see those movements of fear and distrust but also to realize something that is not moving. If there's fear, there's a part of me that lives in the fear, but there's a part of me that is aware that I'm experiencing fear. What you could call self-realization is a stronger perception of that capacity for awareness, which is consciousness, so that we begin to be able to have a choice of a conscious relationship to our feelings. If culture is a subconscious process, and if our dominant culture now is one of survival and distrust, the only way that culture can ever be changed is if you challenge the feeling of anxiety, fear, or threat, inside of you, moment by moment, when it arises. An enlightened person can be frightened or anxious or threatened, but they don't feel that somehow they've become inferior or wrong because of these feelings, so there's a freedom to move through what life presents and to move *with* what life presents. And in that, they are much more capable of adapting to change, understanding that change always produces uncertainty and a certain degree of anxiety.

The nature of the future is inherent uncertainty, even as it is also infinite possibility. But the culture continues to tell this story that in the future you'll be saved, and that the past was the problem. But the futurists are themselves the problem because the future is born in my heart right now. I'm asking every human being that I meet, Where does your story begin? Where does our human story begin? And the answer to that question for me is: it begins right now. It always begins right now. If it doesn't begin now, there's no hope at all. There will be a convergence of the collective self-avoidance. And since what we've been running from is a fear of non-being in ourselves, what we are creating is collective non-being or extinction. That is where we're going. And every scientific discovery helps us get there faster. Every new social regulation helps us get there faster. Because we're never starting right now and saying, "Despite my vulnerability, my fear, my dread, my despair, I am sufficient as I am. I hold my pain. Nobody is respon-

sible. The emotional buck stops right here. I reinvent culture with my choice of how I am relating to my experience right now." If I don't understand that, then I'm simply waiting for someone to save me. We're all going to keep hoping that some human being is going to stand up with the right values, with sufficient intelligence, and save us. But it's never going to happen. It's never, ever going to happen. And it's not going to happen in the labs, and we're not going to convert the profit motive in business into some sort of altruistic generosity because it's all coming from the survival fear that is at the heart of every human being and is constantly being perpetuated by the culture.

So if we don't understand the nature of who we are, then we will only be victims, and anything we run from is just going to get bigger. And since we're running from fear, fear is going to keep getting bigger. Bigger and bigger and bigger, until it is all going to converge in a colossal process of collective human despair, as if an asteroid were coming at us and there was nothing we could do. We will only start our culture over when we finally realize it didn't work. It's never worked. You know, when we talk about the process of fundamental realization or enlightenment—before that happened for me, I was devastated. I was brought to my knees. I was brought to a place of no hope. And you know, every time I've ever really felt my heart cracked open with love, it's because of some process inside of myself that I don't understand that brought me to my knees. I think we're going to bring ourselves to our knees. I don't know whether we're going to survive, but I'm not going to quit for one minute believing in the capacity to reinvent culture in the heart of one human being at a time.



After receiving his doctorate in general medicine in 1972 and pursuing a short career as a general practitioner, Richard Moss had a "personal experience of spontaneous and profound spiritual opening" that both bestowed upon him remarkable healing

powers and prompted him to begin "a new career sharing the awakening of consciousness with others." He has been doing just that for more than twenty years. Every year he travels extensively in the U.S., Europe, South America, and Australia, conducting seminars and retreats on self-awareness and spiritual transformation and focusing increasingly on the transformative power of what he calls "conscious relationship." His books include *The I That Is We*, *How Shall I Live*, *The Second Miracle*, and *Words That Shine Both Ways*.

Lama Surya Das

Q: How can the realization of the changeless, timeless ultimate reality help us to navigate a future in which constant change may well be the only constant? (full question on page 101)

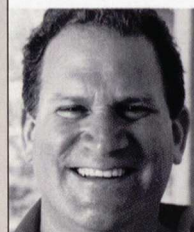
A: I don't really think that time is accelerating. I think that we're accelerating. The pace of modern life is accelerating. Technological development is accelerating. And I think our challenge is, and always has been, to be able to deal with change.

My late guru, the Sixteenth Karmapa, said on his deathbed, "Nothing happens." In light of the timeless or the changeless reality, in truth nothing happens, nothing changes. But in the relative world, everything happens. And the recognition that nothing happens informs a vision in which we can see everything flowing and changing but in which those two are not mutually exclusive. Space never changes, but the weather, which is local, is always in flux and flow. So holding those two in perspective helps one cope with it or be at ease with it, be in the center of it, *be* it.

For example, although we can't see, with our naked eye, the space between the parts of the atom, we now understand through physics that an atom is mostly space. It's mostly emptiness and it's more of a pattern than a solid thing. Similarly, in our own self, in our own mind, when we see that we're not just a solid thing, that we are flowing, that we are part of the flow, then it undermines a lot of the solidity of our self-concept, of our clinging to the reality of external things and the reality of internal noumena or mind stuff and the reality of the self. So there's a natural releasing of the grasping or clinging or resistance. There's a natural letting go of who we think we are and being whatever *is* in the now.

So I think that facing change rather than resisting it, and recognizing that we *are* it, is the liberation point or the freeing point. Otherwise, we're holding on to things with a tight grip of reification, of clinging, of dualism, thinking they are separate from us. And we're getting rope burn because all things are forever flowing through our hands. The tighter we grip, the more rope burn, and the more irritation and pain there is.

By seeing through the whole notion of permanence, we realize that we *are* the change, that the change is us and that we are it. No separation. So then we have dual vision—we see the one and the many and we understand the wholeness of the entire changing pattern—but we have a bigger frame for it. In Dzogchen, we call it "the view" or "bigger perspective" or "stance." So, whatever speed the wheel of change is turning, we still recognize that it's a wheel. We can roll with it, rather than



Named Surya Das by his first spiritual teacher, the notoriously wild Hindu guru Neem Karoli Baba, this self-dubbed "three-sport jock from Long Island" went on to become the "most highly trained Western lama" in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Having undergone two tradi-

tional three-year retreats and studied extensively under many of the greatest lamas of the late twentieth century, he now teaches and lectures around the world, offering workshops and retreats aimed at translating the high Tibetan teachings of Dzogchen into contemporary language and life. Author of *Awakening the Buddha Within* and *Awakening to the Sacred*, among other books, he has become one of the bestselling popularizers of Buddhism today.

being rolled under it, because we're not separate from it. We can feel more centered, we know our place in things, we can rest at the source of all things.

Carlos Castaneda's master, Don Juan, the Yaqui man of knowledge, said, "Stop the world." I used to think it meant quietism or calm mind or being still and silent. But I don't understand it that way anymore. It means realizing that everything is already at peace in the great flow. The Tao is like a great ocean or a great river. It's flowing all the time—that's the impermanence of it. But actually, it never leaves its primordial bed, its beingness. It's not going anywhere. It's beyond coming or going, gain or loss. It's like being at the center, the axis of the wheel. Then, whatever speed the wheel of change turns at, we remain unmoved. That doesn't mean unfeeling, but centered.

I think that appropriate responsiveness comes naturally from resting at the source of all phenomena, from realizing that *nothing happens* and *everything can happen*. In that, there's infinite, inexhaustible proactivity or creativity appropriate to circumstances. When you're resting, when you're in the flow, when you're one with change, when you realize you *are* the flow of change and of all things, then naturally the waves or the ripples on your surface rise or fall, depending upon outer phenomena and conditions, but it doesn't mean your depths are stirred. So there would be a calm or peaceful heart, but at any speed. It could be active. It could be responsive. It could be compassionate and service-oriented, or it could be like the Bodhisattva, a spiritual warrior in the world, taking forceful action for the good. Peace can move at any speed.



wami Niranjanananda

“There is no doubt that our perspective will change after realizing the absolute reality because we will see this world in relation to and as a part of That. The sages call this kind of knowing or seeing wisdom, and a world guided by wisdom is the proverbial heaven on earth.”



Prodigies start young. Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati was only four years old when he left his family to join the ashram of his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati (a direct disciple of the legendary Swami Sivananda) in 1964.

At the age of ten, he was officially initiated into the monastic order of sannyasins, and a year later, orange-robed and shaven-headed, he was sent by his guru to Europe, Australia, and the Americas to establish ashrams and yoga centers. Living close by his master's side through his teenage years, he was eventually given responsibility for directing many of the ashram's activities, and in 1993 he was appointed successor to his guru. In addition to overseeing an international network of centers and the yoga university he founded, he has authored many classical books on yoga, tantra, and the Upanishads, and continues to travel extensively both in India and abroad to spread the message of yoga.

Q: How can the realization of the changeless, timeless ultimate reality help us to navigate a future in which constant change may well be the only constant? (full question on page 101)

A: As long as this timeless dimension remains in the domain of concept and theory, it cannot tell us very much. Talking or reading about an alternate state of consciousness is not the same thing as experiencing it for oneself. The timeless dimension can only help us when we have actually entered it. Wishful thinking will not help us here. We cannot realize a timeless state of being with a time-bound body and mind. In order to travel beyond time, we need to undergo some form of transformation process through prayer, contemplation, concentration, visualization, meditation, or whatever method we may choose.

Discovery of the timeless dimension requires a shift in the mental process and its perception. Just as when you travel by air, the plane lifts off the ground and soars higher and higher into the sky, similarly, so does this shift in consciousness lift the awareness up and away from the material and time-bound associations into higher and higher dimensions, where the body and mind disappear and time stands still. Until this shift takes place, the mind remains confined to its limited dimension of perception and cognition and cannot experience the timeless reality, which extends outside of this boundary.

The experience of a world in which time seems to be accelerating out of control indicates total preoccupation with mundane concerns. Modern society provides every possible facility but no means to develop our inner life. It takes time to transcend time. We must find the time and space to be alone with ourselves, to discover ourselves, to realize the source of our Self, which is beyond time. This timeless potential state exists within each one of us, here and now, but it is not accessible to our intellect. It is not a state that can be purchased or obtained with a ticket or a tablet.

In order to enter the superconscious dimension, where the awareness shines in its own light, unlimited by space and time, we must leave everything that we know and identify with behind. This is the real issue that must be addressed, not the benefits that this state can offer us in the world of time and space. There is no doubt that our perspective will change after realizing the absolute reality because we will see this world in relation to and as a part of That. The sages call this kind of knowing or seeing *wisdom*, and a world guided by wisdom is the proverbial heaven on earth.

Byron Katie

Q: How can the realization of the changeless, timeless ultimate reality help us to navigate a future in which constant change may well be the only constant? (full question on page 101)

A: How do we respond to a world that seems out of control? The world seems that way because it *is* out of control—the sun rises whether we want it to or not, the toaster breaks, someone cuts you off on your way to work. We’ve never had control. We have the illusion of control when things go the way we think they should, and then when they don’t, we say we’ve lost control, and we long for some sort of state where we imagine we’ll have control again.

But suffering isn’t a result of not having control or of things accelerating. It is a result of arguing with reality. When we believe our thoughts, we suffer, but when we question them, we don’t suffer. Freedom is as simple as that. When the unquestioned mind moves out of its arguments with reality, we move into alignment with constant change. After all, change is happening anyway, whether we like it or not. Everything changes, it seems. But when we’re attached to our thoughts about what that change should be, being out of control feels uncomfortable.

If there is, in fact, an acceleration of changes, it’s a gift. The apparent craziness of the world, like everything else, is a gift that we can use to set our minds free. You can’t free yourself by finding a “timeless, changeless dimension” outside your own mind. When you question what you believe, you eventually come to see that you *are* the timeless, changeless dimension that you’ve been seeking. Then you may find that you don’t need to navigate a future at all—that what appears now is all you’ve got, and even that is always immediately gone. And when you’ve stopped doing war with reality, you *are* what changes, totally without control. That state of constant change is creation without limits, efficient and free and beautiful beyond description.



Byron Kathleen Reid was living what seemed to be an ordinary life: three kids, a second marriage, a successful career. In her thirties, however, Katie became increasingly depressed and over a ten-year period sank into rage, paranoia, and despair, obsessively thinking about suicide. Finally, in February of 1986, she checked into a halfway house. Then one morning, a few weeks later, she spontaneously discovered a wordless process of inquiry that dissolved all her suffering, leaving her without any concepts of who or what she was. In response to others who saw her radical transformation and wanted to achieve the same state, Katie created what she calls “The Work,” putting into words the internal questions that were the keys to her freedom. Katie currently spends most of her time traveling and teaching. She recently published her first book, *Loving What Is*.

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2003 AD

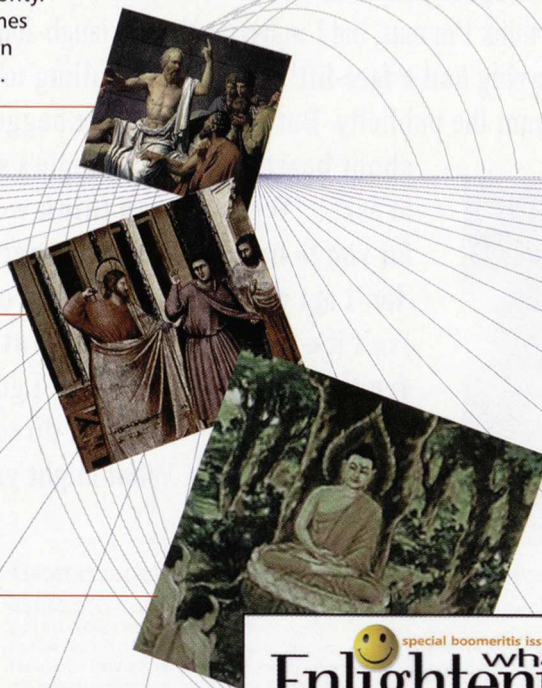
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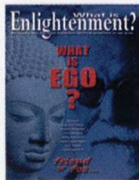
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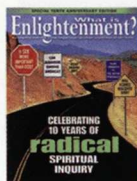
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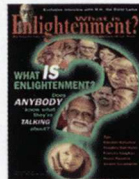
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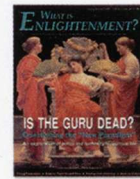
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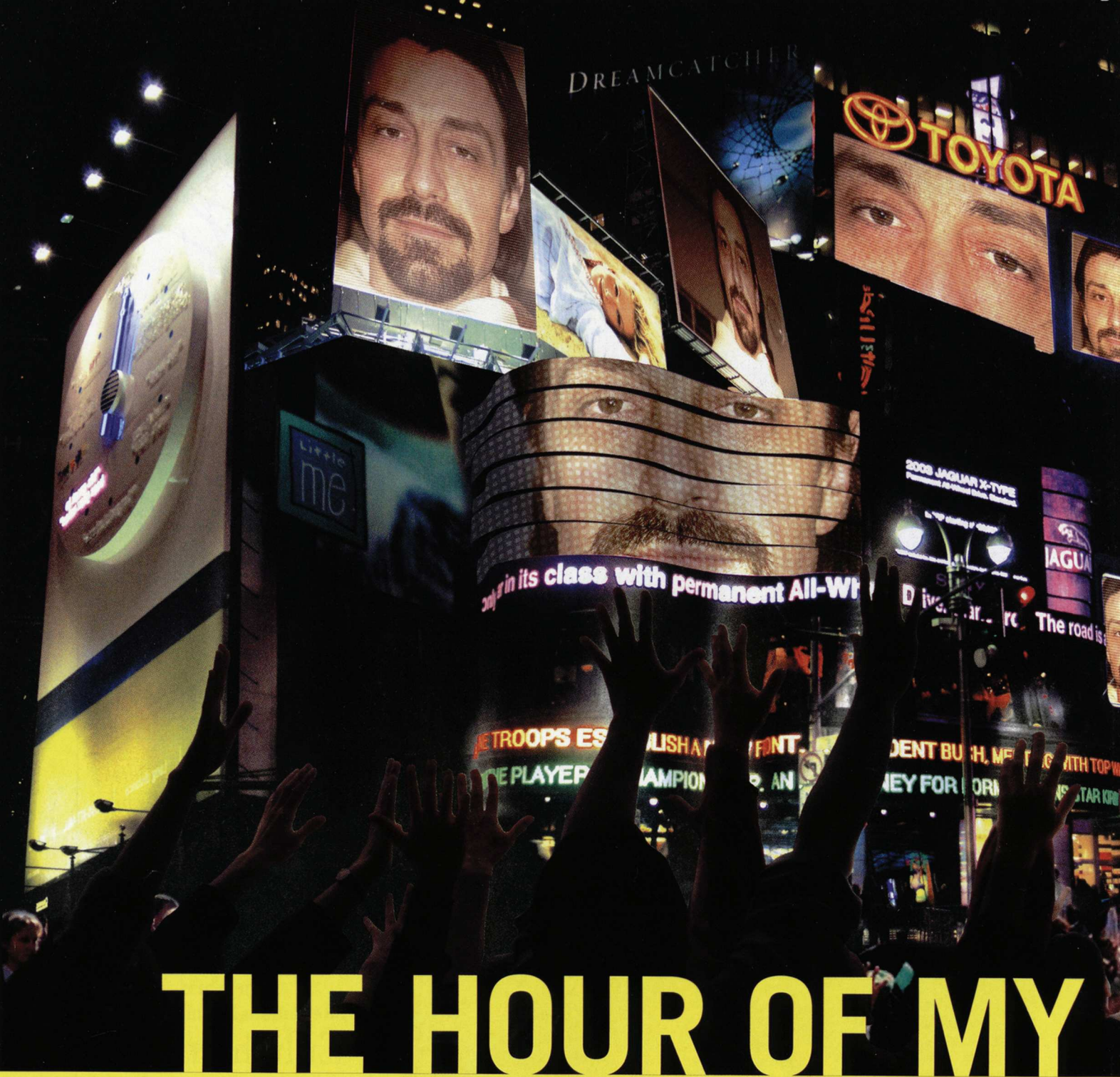
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MILLENNIAL MYTHS AND MODERN MESSIAHS

by Carter Phipps



Journal Entry - July 30, 2004

I have often asked myself what it would have been like to live in the time of Jesus, to be a monk in the time of the Buddha, or to live in Greece in the company of Socrates. No longer. After the earth-shattering events of today, people in the future may very well be asking what it was like to live on this planet in the year 2004.

The day started like any other. I was at the office early, working on some reports for the week. But there was a heavy feeling in the air. The news was bad. Pakistan seemed to be teetering on the edge of chaos and the Middle East on the brink of war. The recent attacks in L.A. were still on everyone's mind, and the talk in the office was of little else.

Around six, I left work. It was a warm evening, and as is my habit, I decided to walk the twenty blocks home. I usually pass through Times Square on my way, and tonight it didn't take but a glance down the street to see that something strange was happening on Broadway. Even from several hundred yards away, the scene was bizarre. Traffic was stopped, taxis were parked in the middle of the street, and everyone was standing still, as if someone had hit the pause button during a crowd scene. As I approached, the gathering, maybe several thousand strong, seemed unusually quiet. New Yorkers are never this quiet, I remember thinking—not on their own, not in public, and certainly not in Times Square on a summer evening. There was a strange intensity in the air, and everyone was looking up at



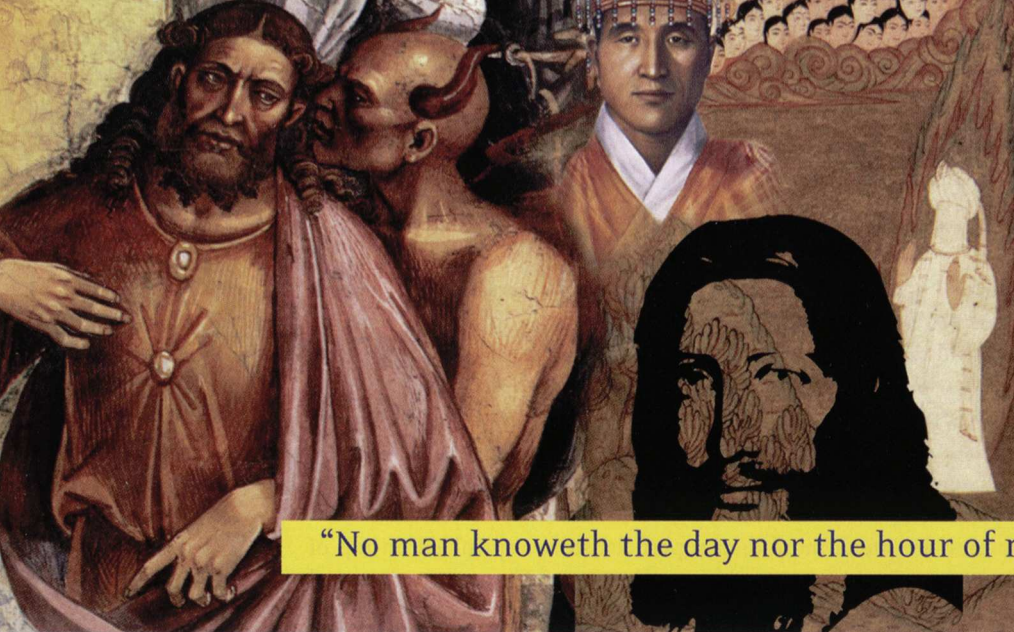
something I couldn't see—probably one of those new giant television screens hanging above the street. Had something happened? For a moment, frightening images burst into my mind—another chemical attack on an American city, exploding nuclear weapons in South Asia. I rushed around the corner and as I did, a voice pierced the quiet night—a voice that seemed to be speaking directly to me.

Startled, I looked to see who was addressing me, but even as I did, it began to dawn on me that the voice was not coming from outside, but from inside my own head! "What the hell?" I exclaimed, and I must have said it louder than I thought because a couple of people a few feet away turned and caught my eye. Saying nothing, they just put out their hands and pointed upward, at the television screen, the focus of everyone's rapt attention. The scene on the screen looked simple enough, a news conference from London. A dark-haired man, dressed in a flowing white robe, was gazing beatifically into the camera. And as far as I could tell, he was not saying a word. Then it hit me. The words I was hearing in my mind were coming from the man on the screen. "Oh my God!" another exclamation slipped out of my mouth. But I felt no fear, only a growing sense of amazement.

"Yes! Yes! I understand," a woman next to me cried out, falling to her knees in response to some unseen inner dialogue. I recognized that my experience was being shared by what must have been almost ten thousand people at that point, stopped in the street, all hearing the inner words of the figure on the screen. In perfect English, he addressed us, a clear and compelling voice that spoke of the spiritual crisis now facing humanity. He explained that the time has come to change the course of human destiny. Forever. A wave of peace and bliss welled up within me as he boldly declared, "I am the One, the one who so many religions have waited for: the Jewish Messiah, the Christian Christ, the Kalki Avatar, the Maitreya Buddha, the prophesied Mahdi of Islam. I have come for all of your sake, to bring hope and salvation. I have come to establish a true and lasting brother- and sisterhood among all of the races and peoples of the world. Together we are going to build a new civilization based on the principle of love."

Something cracked inside. I began sobbing uncontrollably. The hard inner shell born of years of frustration and despair seemed to dissolve, melting away in the warm summer evening. I knew, without any doubt, that the man speaking these words inside my own soul was the holiest of men. Awestruck, I stood there for what seemed like an eternity.

Then the voice became quiet and the scene on the television changed. CNN started showing images from around the world—hundreds of thousands of joyous people celebrating, singing, and dancing in the streets; crowds praying in mosques, churches, and temples. Everywhere, it seemed, people had heard His message. The entire world, from the tip of Africa to the coast of California to the edge of Siberia, had heard this new Christ, this divine messenger, and everywhere you could feel the ecstatic release. As for myself, standing there with thousands of stunned New Yorkers on a summer night in one of the great bastions of our modern material civilization, I knew that humankind was finally unified as one—one world civilization, changed forever. He has come—and from now until eternity, nothing will ever be the same.



“No man knoweth the day nor the hour of my coming.” MATTHEW 24:36

The scenario described above might sound implausible, even ridiculous, to the modern ear, and who would argue otherwise? The Second Coming? The Messiah? Isn't that strictly the arena of late-night televangelists and New Agers who have spent too much time in the California sun? After all, now that we have passed the millennium with our computers still functioning, our oceans still within their relative boundaries, our nuclear weapons still in their silos, all rogue asteroids still keeping a safe distance, and the prophesied Four Horsemen still absent from yonder sky, you might think that those voices telling us that the end of the world is near, that a new age is dawning, that an apocalypse is brewing, or, in this case, that a messiah is coming would be muted. But you would be decidedly wrong. In fact, as we enter a new millennium, the sheer number of individuals insisting, warning, hoping, and even praying that the trajectory of human destiny is about to undergo some serious alterations is unprecedented. And before you dismiss these cultural Jeremiahs and go back to the morning paper, it might be good to take a closer look . . . at the morning paper. Iraq, Israel, SARS, genetics, India/Pakistan, 9/11, nanotechnology, nuclear missiles, North Korea, global warming, cloning, famine, AIDS. The list of radical breakthroughs, dangerous flash points, and volatile issues on the human horizon is long, and getting longer. Indeed, it seems safe to say—and many of the individuals interviewed in this issue would concur—that we are living in a unique time in our species' development, a time of transition, a time of convergence, a time of culmination. But just *how* unique is it? After all, transition is one thing, but apocalypse? A new age? The Second Coming? Who would go that far? Well, millions and millions of Americans for a start. Indeed, if you ask the average American where human history is ultimately headed, *forty percent* are going to tell you that we are destined, sooner or later, for Armageddon, the final Biblical battle between good and evil, often seen as a prelude to the Second Coming of Christ. If you don't believe that statistic, keep in mind that the *Left Behind* series, which novelize the events foretold in Biblical prophecy with a cheerfully apocalyptic perspective, have sold over fifty-five million copies to date. And it's good to remember that this isn't just an American phenomenon. For that matter, it's not even a Christian phenomenon. Almost every major religion has some version of events that signal the coming of a great messianic figure who will rescue the world from darkness and usher in a new age of light and

peace. Hindus speak of the next great avatar, the Kalki Avatar; Muslims foretell the coming of the Imam Mahdi; Christians, the Second Coming of Christ; Jews, the coming of the Messiah; and Buddhists, the future Buddha, Maitreya. Each does have its own particular emphasis, its own version of the events that will herald the coming world teacher, but the similarities among them are nevertheless quite striking, especially given that these traditions weren't exactly developed in a time of global internet collaboration. And that's not to mention the similar notions in Zoroastrianism, countless references in New Age literature, centuries of esoteric and occult traditions prophesying a world teacher—the list goes on and on. And let's be clear—these myths, these prophecies, are much more than superficial stories sprinkled on top of religious theology, a little sugar and spice to go with the main course. They are fundamental components of their respective traditions.

So what really is going on here? Is there a messianic figure waiting in the wings of the new millennium? Should we give any credence at all to this often dismissed yet near universal theme in the great religious traditions? Is this how God plans to handle the challenge of the twenty-first century? With a personal messenger who can set right the troubled ship of our global state? A divine proxy battling for the salvation of the world? If so, then when and where might this messianic savior arrive on our planet? And the most intriguing question of all may be: What if he or she were already here? For this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* we were curious to look a little deeper into the messianic myths of humanity and discover what, if anything, they might have to do with spirituality in the twenty-first century. Given the volatile nature of this moment in history, it seems important—indeed, absolutely essential—to stand back and take a look at our spiritual legacy, just in case, in our collective rush toward the future, we might be missing the fact that God has already stacked the deck.

THE END TIMES

“The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all convictions, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.”

W.B. YEATS, “THE SECOND COMING”

Eschatology. Yes, the spell checker on my computer is still working and this is actually a word—albeit a rather obscure one for the ninety-nine percent of us whose path through higher education did not include a few years at the seminary. But as unsexy as it sounds, for many, a good chat about eschatology will get the heart beating and the neurons firing and maybe even the endorphins pumping like few things this side of the local Nautilus.

Eschatology, to put it simply, is a theological term that means “the doctrine of last things,” the study of the end times. And if that definition doesn't clarify the matter, let me throw out a few words that may help: Armageddon, plagues, 666 the Mark of the Beast, the Rapture, the Antichrist, the New Jerusalem, the Seventh Seal, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,

Judgment Day, and, of course, the Second Coming. Now that I have your attention, let me explain a little further. You see, when we talk about the Messiah, or the Second Coming, we are in essence talking about the end times, the end of history, when a religious savior is prophesied to return and sort out the rather embarrassing mess we have made of this planet that we have the good fortune to live on. And even though eschatology is a word used primarily in association with the Abrahamic religions—Islam, Judaism, and Christianity—our Eastern brothers and sisters have their own doctrines that describe the end, if not of the entire world, then at least of this age in history.

“When our whole existence is threatened, as it is today, the eschatological veins in the various religions come to the fore,” observes Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr. And though some may accuse him of stating the obvious, the point is well taken. Like a slow-building multi-car pileup on a busy highway, we are witnessing the unprecedented convergence of eschatological trajectories that, for the most part, were set in motion thousands of years ago, and no one this side of paradise quite knows what will be left when the smoke clears. Will Jesus be standing there with his “terrible swift sword”? Or Islam’s prophesied Mahdi declaring to the infidels of the West that there is “no god but God”? Or maybe a New Age messiah spreading the Aquarian gospel to a troubled world? Or perhaps some as yet unseen power, awakened by humanity’s desperate need, will descend into Bethlehem and give birth to a golden age. Whatever the case, don’t fool yourself into thinking that eschatology is merely a backward theological doctrine of a bygone era. In fact, today it seems to be all the rage. Everything from New Age preoccupations with prophesied “Earth changes” to digerati intuitions of a coming technological omega point called the “Singularity,” to Hollywood’s recent obsession with end-of-the-world scenarios could be seen as part of what we might call an “eschatologically driven” culture that has grown up in the time in which we live. And wherever you have this kind of culture, there are several other elements that you are likely to find near at hand. First and foremost is a messiah, a prophesied religious savior. And of course, any messiah worth his or her weight in human history needs a *raison d’être*, and that reason, more often than not, is to usher in a new messianic age, to bring about a promised new world, to help build Shambhala, to create a new heaven on a rejuvenated earth.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF MILLENNIUM

“And they lived and reigned with Christ
a thousand years.”

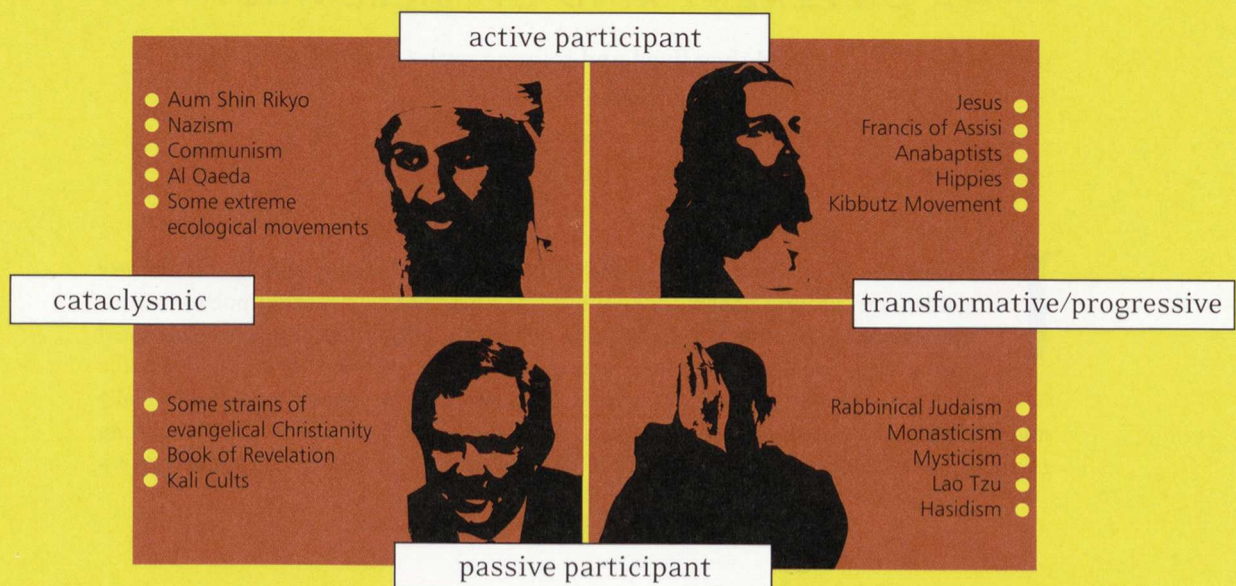
REVELATION 20:4

If you were to walk into a major university these days and start talking about a new golden age, writing papers on how to build Shambhala, or waxing poetic to your students about creating heaven on earth, one of two things would happen: either you’d promptly be fired, or (if you have tenure) you might just be sent down the hall to the Millennial Studies Department. Indeed, in the world of academia where they actually study subjects like eschatology and messiahs, there is a name for the belief in the coming golden age—*millennialism*. And it’s similar to eschatology . . . only different. “Eschatology is a

term that means the doctrine of last things,” explains Dr. Richard Landes, director of the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University, “and I use it to refer to the belief that when the day of judgment comes, a resolution will take place beyond the physical plane. In other words, the physical plane is going to be destroyed, vanish, or be transcended at that point. The bad go to hell, and the good go to heaven. Millennialism, on the other hand, is about the transformation of the world. It’s a kind of outrageous hope that it is actually possible for embodied human beings to live in a just society together.”

For Landes and a number of other scholars, millennialism is a label that can be applied to just about every truly progressive movement—religious, social, political, etcetera—whose vision and work in some way entail the creation of a just society on this earth. But when it comes to millennialism, the essential question is: *How* do we get to the promised kingdom? Good deeds? An apocalypse? A proletariat revolution? A messiah? “There are two patterns of millennialism,” Dr. Catherine Wessinger of Loyola University explains, “*catastrophic* and *progressive*. Catastrophic millennialism is the belief that the transition to collective salvation will occur catastrophically. This is apocalypticism. The other type is called progressive millennialism, which is the belief that things are getting better all the time and that human effort, motivated by and working in conjunction with a higher power, can help to create the millennial kingdom.” And that, she says, is where the whole notion of a messiah comes in: “The Messiah is someone who is believed to be empowered by a superhuman agent to create the millennial kingdom.” That kingdom may take many forms. It may be painted with bright Hindu colors, with sober Buddhist hues, or even with New Age pastels. It may require every last ounce of effort and toil that we can muster, or it may come unexpectedly “like a thief in the night.” It may be one beautiful historical age in an endless series of universal cycles, or it may be the greatest collective retirement party of all time. But one way or the other, the message of antiquity is unequivocal: collective salvation is possible through the grace, love, and wisdom of the coming World Teacher who will lead the way to a glorious future. That’s the good news. The bad news is, of course, that accompanying many of the visions of this glorious future is a not-so-glorious apocalypse. All of which begs the obvious question: Are we getting close? Are we approaching midnight? And, how do we know if we are?

HOW DO WE GET FROM HERE TO THERE?



“God gave Noah the rainbow sign,
no more water, the fire next time.”

AFRICAN-AMERICAN SPIRITUAL

“**T**he evangelist John has spoken of . . . two resurrections in the book which is called the Apocalypse [Revelation], but in such a way that some Christians do not understand . . . and so construe the passage into ridiculous fancies.” These words began St. Augustine’s rebuke of the narrow, literal interpretations of the Book of Revelation which, in 410 AD, were finding plenty of traction among the residents of Rome. The Book of Revelation, for those who have neglected their Bible scholarship, was written by John of Patmos (not to be confused, most scholars agree, with the apostle John). John was the man, we might say, who put eschatology on the map. His visions foretell a powerful version of the end times, and in the early fifth century, they resonated with many Romans, who had just watched their city fall to the invading Visigoths—a defeat that had deeply shaken the confidence of the newly converted Roman Empire. Surely these must now be the end times, the population cried; the messianic kingdom of our Lord must be near at hand. In response, St. Augustine set forth a rebuke so powerful that his own more conservative and allegorical interpretation of the Book of Revelation became official Catholic Church policy regarding the Apocalypse from that moment forward. But Augustine did not altogether reject apocalyptic prophecy or the Second Coming, and both notions continued to exert tremendous influence on the spiritual development of the Western world. Various strains have long run rampant in both Christianity and Islam, influencing such important figures as Martin Luther, Christopher Columbus, and Oliver Cromwell. Augustine’s rebuke is, however, the reason that apocalyptic visions figure more prominently in the Protestant mindset than the Catholic one, and why much of today’s preoccupation with the end times and the Second Coming finds a more receptive home in Protestant hearts.

So it is perhaps no surprise that the United States, with its heavily Protestant population, would provide particularly fertile ground for all kinds of messianic fervor, and for what

TRANSITIONAL SCENARIOS IN MILLENNIALISM

CATAclysmic VS. TRANSFORMATIVE/PROGRESSIVE

Cataclysmic scenarios hold that immense destruction necessarily precedes the sudden triumph of the forces of good. These include vast cosmic signs and terrestrial catastrophes (earthquakes, plagues, war, famines, etc.) and the death of immense numbers of people. Jewish tradition calls them the “birth pangs of the Messiah;” Christian tradition calls them “the Tribulation.” They tend to find favor among people who hold pessimistic views of human nature and assume that only by the death of the majority can good finally reign.

Transformative/Progressive scenarios hold that when the time comes, most people will turn willingly to the good in dramatic acts of repentance. These include vast gatherings of people who mutually forgive each other and establish covenants of peace, the willing transformation by the elites of their weapons of oppression into tools of honest labor (swords into plowshares, etc., Isaiah 2:2-4), and also other more gradual transitions. They tend to find favor among people with optimistic views of human nature, who believe that most, given the opportunity, would prefer to be good.

ACTIVE VS. PASSIVE

Active scenarios hold that the true believer is an agent of the cosmic forces in bringing about the transformation of the world. All secular apocalyptic scenarios are active, since there is no God who can do any of the work (e.g., communism). In the case of **cataclysmic** scenarios, active strains represent the most dangerous form of religious belief imaginable, often resulting in crusades, *jihads*, and plans for “destroying the world to save it.” In the case of **transformative/progressive** scenarios, active strains provide many of the progressive movements that have contributed to modern democratic societies, including science and social work. Modern technology has greatly enhanced the potential (and therefore the appeal) of active scenarios.

Passive scenarios hold that the true believer is an observer of cosmic forces in which God and the angelic host do the heavy work, leaving the faithful the task of preparation (renunciation of evil ways, joining in expectant communities, warning others of coming doom). Until modern times, most cataclysmic scenarios were passive.

Courtesy of the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University

Dr. Wessinger calls “catastrophic millennialism”—the belief that the transition to a millennial kingdom will occur through a kind of apocalyptic event. Indeed, from Reagan’s Interior Secretary James Watts’s famous statement that conservation wasn’t necessary because he didn’t know how many generations we had “until the Lord returns” to Hal Lindsey’s near-legendary seventies bestseller, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Americans have continued to show an unexpected appetite for end times theology. *The Late Great Planet Earth*’s original print run was for a few thousand copies. Thirty-five million later, Lindsey is still going strong. And that figure would be even more impressive if it weren’t for that new kid on the block, the *Left Behind* series, which, at this point, is practically an industry in itself. Somebody, it seems, really believes not only that Christ is coming but that He is coming soon.

It is not only traditional religions that are driving this phenomenon. Even in the ever-optimistic love-and-light doctrines of the New Age, reading between the lines can be a little frightening. “I believe that a time of tribulation occurs whenever there’s a great shift in consciousness,” says Gordon-Michael Scallion, one of the most respected psychics/futurists on the circuit these days. In what has to be one of the strangest pairings of philosophical opposites since James Carville and Mary Matalin, some New Age voices are beginning to sound more and more like Christian fundamentalists with their talk of Earth changes and planetary shifts. Indeed, Scallion, who made his reputation accurately predicting several earthquakes, sounds almost like a fundamentalist preacher when he says, “We can look throughout the world and see that there have been specific predictions of certain signs that would indicate that the world is either going to be destroyed or going to be reborn. And these predictions have told us that various messengers and masters would come and help prepare the way. At the same time, there will be the ‘anti-’ of those people and there will be great battles. And when these battles are through, there will be a new earth born and, as a result, enlightenment for the planet. So these conditions are being met now. They’re being fulfilled.” As outlandish as it may seem, it is a statement that merely fleshes out the core doctrine of almost every religion in the world—the one difference being the specificity of Scallion’s timing. But what makes him, and so many others, convinced that the moment is now? Is there really anything *objective* about this time in history that would lead us to the conclusion that a messiah, any messiah, is actually on his or her way?

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

“You know, I turn back to your ancient prophets
in the Old Testament and the signs foretelling Armageddon,
and I find myself wondering if we’re the generation that is going to see
that come about. I don’t know if you’ve noted any of those prophecies lately,
but believe me, they certainly describe the times we’re going through.”

PRESIDENT REAGAN IN 1983, SPEAKING TO AN ISRAELI LOBBYIST

“I think it’s purely subjective,” Dr. Wessinger told me last January. “There is no objective way to draw that conclusion, to my knowledge. Because when you look at it from a historical perspective, people at any given point in time will be looking at current events around them and saying, ‘This is the time.’” Dr. Landes put it more colorfully: “I don’t know of any case of an apocalyptic prophet who did not look around and say, ‘Can’t you see? The world is going to hell in a handbasket.’”

Still, it would also seem that a genuinely objective reading of the nature of our current historical moment could easily support that very conclusion. “That is the scary thing,” Dr. Wessinger acknowledged. “We’re living in a time right now when there is a lot of conflict in the world. You’ve got climatic issues, environmental issues, nuclear issues. And there are a lot of hot

"The next incarnation [of Vishnu], the next avatar is not going to be anything like Jesus Christ . . . or anything terribly friendly. It is going to be Kalki, it will be the tenth and last incarnation in this cycle of time of the God Vishnu, and it is the end of the human race in fire. And then after that, according to Hindu lore, it will all begin again."

GORE VIDAL, AUTHOR OF *KALKI*, SPEAKING TO BENJAMIN CREME
ON THE *MERV GRIFFIN SHOW*, FEBRUARY 3, 1982



A 19th century South Indian interpretation of Kalki, the next incarnation of Vishnu

spots where things could get out of control. It could turn out very bad. So therefore, naturally, it's going to feed into all of those traditional prophecies, and the interpretations of those prophecies." This would seem especially true given that perhaps the only element of most of these prophecies that doesn't seem open for question is the fact that the appearance of the Messiah corresponds with a difficult, if not disastrous, time in human history.

For example, Hindu scripture tells us that the Kalki Avatar will come at a time when "the rulers of the earth will have degenerated into plunderers" and when "the practices taught by the Vedas and the institutes of law shall nearly have ceased." Buddhist scriptures are even more graphic, describing, as Buddhist scholar José Cabezón explains, a time of great strife when "human beings basically continue to deteriorate both mentally and physically. There's constant fighting, constant feuding. Humans become physically shorter, and they have shorter lifespans. When it gets really bad, the figures that I've heard are that they live only about ten years, and they're about ten inches tall. These things could be metaphors, but in any case, that's the time when Maitreya comes." Islam, heavily influenced by Christian end times theology, shows little mercy in its description of the conditions surrounding the Mahdi's coming. We are told that "the false Messiah (the Antichrist) will remain for a while, destroying mankind completely, and the earth will witness the greatest *fitnah* (tribulation) in its history." Judaism, which has already lived through one apocalypse in the last century, is the only one of the major religions that doesn't seem to insist that things must get worse before they get better.

"Prophecy has often been discredited in the past by misguided people who said that the end of the world was near or that the Messiah was coming," declares Hal Lindsey in the video version of his book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. But Lindsey has his own reason for believing that now really is the moment of messianic destiny. "The key to the whole prophetic pattern," he assures us, "... has always been the rebirth of the State of Israel." Modern interpreters like Lindsey offer statements like this one to place the end of history firmly in our lifetime, but definitive statements in relationship to any Biblical or, for that matter, Talmudic, Kabbalistic, Koranic, Vedic, or Pali prophecy tend to be inherently problematic, to say the least. Indeed, the traditions offer very few clear benchmarks by which to measure the veracity and timing of their predictions, a situation that has left an interpretive vacuum waiting to be filled by generations and generations of messianic Chicken Littles. Or so history has proved them to be so far.

So is there anything more concrete outside of the context of traditional religious scripture?

Well, if you don't mind your prophecies being delivered in more unconventional packages, then there is a veritable mountain of evidence that begins to tumble out of the pages of history. Not necessarily evidence that would get past a good lawyer—but then again, those ancient prophets of the scriptural canon didn't exactly have to subject themselves to the mainstream press. Prophets are sort of like presidents: the farther back in history, the more respect we tend to give them. There are the usual suspects like Nostradamus, whose obscure quatrains are almost impossible to decipher but which seem to suggest, at the very least, some kind of tribulation at some future moment in history. And then there is Edgar Cayce, the famous early-twentieth-century psychic, who correctly predicted both World Wars and made such cheery pronouncements as, "The earth will be broken up in the western portion of America. The greater portion of Japan must go into the sea. The upper portion of Europe will be changed as in the twinkling of an eye." The Mayans had a prophetic calendar that points, we are told, to the date 2012 as the end, or the beginning, of an entirely new cycle in the pages of history. Add the Hopis, the Aborigines, the Eskimos, many of the occult traditions, and a few hundred other miscellaneous soothsayers and would-be prophets to a mix that already includes just about every major religious tradition and it's enough to make you at least wonder if *something* (or someone) big isn't headed our way in the near future.

But we live in a rational age, and most prophecy, no matter how compelling, isn't going to convince the skeptical Sergeant Fridays (or Agent Scullys) of anything. Indeed, if all we have are highly subjective interpretations, based on highly uncertain timing suggested by prophetic statements that we may or may not yet believe, then the notion of the coming Messiah starts to look like it's resting on pretty thin ice. And so it may be. However, there is more to the story, and it has to do with something far more objective than any particular interpretation of any particular prophecy. It has to do with the unique characteristics of this moment in history.

As a species, we are just waking up to the fact that we have become a global power capable of giving and taking away life on a planetary scale. Whether or not we are in the end times, we are definitely playing an endgame with human history. Everything we do has global implications, and these days God's wrath is pretty low on the list of apocalyptic concerns. Indeed, we're quite capable of taking out the biosphere, destroying civilizations, and releasing plagues, all by ourselves. Don't like the Book of Revelation? Fine. Just read some recent issues of *Science* magazine. Or *Wired*. Or Michael Crichton's latest novel. The end of the world is a notion that has escaped the confines of theology and now thrives in sociology, economics, science, and politics. And that should give everyone more than a moment of pause—not only for the gravity of our collective situation but also for the fact that never, before a very recent point in history, has it been possible to so easily fulfill the prophetic statements of our apocalyptic heritage. As Dr. Landes puts it, "Just at the moment where I don't know of any serious scholar who would actually profess publicly that he believed in a God who intervenes in history, we now don't need to believe in a God who intervenes in history to believe in an apocalypse. Up until recently, you had to have God for an apocalypse to occur. But we now have objective scientific reasons to believe in it."

While it might not be enough to make one a true believer, the recognition of this time period as a profound global transition point unlike any other in recorded history starts to have eerie resemblances—the first such similarities that have existed in history—to the exact conditions that we are told over and over again will call forth a messiah into this crisis-riddled world and change human destiny forever.

"Truth is an arrow and the gate is narrow that it passes through,
 He unleashed His power at an unknown hour that no one knew.
 How long can I listen to the lies of prejudice?
 How long can I stay drunk on fear out in the wilderness?
 Can I cast it aside, all this loyalty and this pride?
 Will I ever learn that there'll be no peace, that the war won't cease
 Until He returns?"

BOB DYLAN, "WHEN HE RETURNS"

“Only a God can save us,” declared the German philosopher Heidegger as he approached the end of his life and looked out on the looming realities of the twentieth century. He was perhaps speaking for a great many who look out at the overwhelming nature of our modern society and find themselves reaching beyond human agency for the answers to the urgent questions of our time. For better or worse, we live in a culture well primed for a messiah—a culture that Dr. Landes describes as a “supersaturated solution.”* “In order for an apocalyptic movement to take,” he explains, “it really has to be carried by a prophet who has sufficient charisma to act as sort of a seed crystal in a supersaturated solution. Seed crystals won’t work if the tension isn’t big enough. But if the tension is big enough, amazing things will happen.” Those “amazing things” may be even more amazing in today’s world, as messianic movements find themselves poised to have an unprecedented global impact. For all would-be messiahs out there, that is good news indeed, but for the rest of us the picture is a little more murky. Indeed, Heidegger himself was temporarily seduced by the Nazi regime, and his and others’ missteps serve as fair warning that when it comes to picking messiahs, human beings don’t always do such a great job of evaluation. And in this brave new world, everyone is potentially affected by both our successes and our failures. There simply is no longer any geographical isolation behind which we can hide from the eschatological visions and millennial dreams of our brother and sister religions, not to mention our own. When an evangelical minister suggests to Pat Robertson that maybe he should not run for president because success in making the world a better place might delay the Second Coming of Christ, you don’t have to be a fundamentalist or even a Christian to feel the dangerous proximity of the apocalyptic fires of Western history. And when certain groups in radical Islamic circles declare that the only way to bring about the true Islamic society ruled by the Mahdi is to act as violent agents of a cataclysmic transition, none of us can afford to ignore the implications. Like it or not, we truly are a global village, and if a few neighbors down the street decide the Apocalypse is near and the prophesied one is set to arrive, there is no way to pack up your house and move on.

Still, the omnipresent reality of globalization cuts both ways. “Christ and the Buddha worked in a time where they had a very limited influence because of the geographical constraints upon them. Today, any true teacher who comes forth has the media at his or her fingertips and can reach the entire planet rather than just a small area in Palestine or a small area in India,” says Kathy Newburn, an editor at Lucis Trust, publisher of the works of the late esoteric spiritual teacher Alice Bailey. “The power for planetary transformation is so much greater this time, and that’s why I think there’s an opportunity here for a teacher, or teachers, to come and transform the consciousness of the planet as a whole through the internet and mass media. There’s a possibility that through the influence wielded by a group of men and women who are truly enlightened, the whole structure of our planet can shift to a much higher level.” In messianic millennialism, as in all other fields, globalization is a twenty-first-century reality, and it is a reality that could be our greatest ally or our most dangerous foe. In the end, perhaps, it simply depends on exactly what kind of messiah figure we are talking about. And that brings up a crucial question: What kind are applying for the job?

*A supersaturated solution is a solution that contains more dissolved solute than can ordinarily be accommodated at that temperature. Therefore, if you drop a seed crystal into it, the entire solution will crystallize out almost instantaneously. All the chemicals in the solution will quickly find their places in relationship to the seed crystal.

A WORLD FULL OF GODS

“Whenever the world declineth in virtue and righteousness;
and vice and injustice mount the throne, then cometh I,
the Lord and revisit my world in visible form, and minglenth
as a man with men, and by my influence and teachings do I destroy
the evil and injustice and reestablish virtue and righteousness.
Many times have I thus appeared, and many times hereafter
shall I come again.”

BHAGAVAD GITA

“**T**he witness of history is that always the appearance of man’s necessity has been met with a divine Revelation,” wrote Alice Bailey, author of *The Reappearance of the Christ*, in the middle of last century. Considering that “man’s necessity” has perhaps never been so acute as it is today, it may be time to start watching the skies, or the internet, or maybe even Times Square for the signs of a new revelation. And once you start looking for a messiah, you will find that there is no shortage of eager aspirants. Just type “avatar” or “second coming” into Google and see what you get. “Christ is back. He’s black. He’s gay. And he shall overcome” are the words running across the top of one website. Welcome to the democratic internet age, where everyone has a platform and no one is excluded from the messianic sweepstakes—a fact that becomes somewhat overwhelming after spending just a few minutes online. But even in the midst of the confusing free-for-all of this messianic clamor, a few teachers have put forward more serious, or at least more influential, bids in this high-stakes spiritual drama in which, tradition tells us, there can be only one—only one Messiah, one Maitreya Buddha, one Imam Mahdi, one Kalki Avatar, only one true Son of God . . . or maybe not. Certainly if we’re talking about Hindu avatars, apparently there can be many.

Avatar is a Sanskrit word that means the “descent of Divinity into flesh” and originally referred specifically to the incarnations of Vishnu, with the Kalki Avatar being number ten, prophesied to appear at the end of our current age, the Kali Yuga. Why, then, an astute observer might ask, do avatars seem to be proliferating everywhere in today’s spiritual world? Indian spiritual teachers Sai Baba and Mother Meera both call themselves avatars. The late Meher Baba adopted the designation in the early twentieth century; Swami Yogananda was referred to as an avatar; the mythical yogi Babaji as a “maha avatar”; the early-twentieth-century Indian sage Sri Aurobindo and his spiritual partner The Mother were declared to be avatars by their students—and the list continues to grow. There is even a quick and easy weekend enlightenment program called “The Avatar Course.” All of which adds up to not so much a descent but a veritable cascade of divinity into flesh. Vishnu, it would seem, has some explaining to do.

At the same time, in a postmodern world that tends to lean heavily toward a diminishment of spirit and a cynicism about the unabashed, one can’t help but be slightly in awe of the willingness of so many to unequivocally proclaim themselves to be the prophesied religious savior of humanity. “The Promised God-Man Is Here,” announces the most recent book of American spiritual teacher Adi Da. But even that outrageous statement has some serious competition from a former traffic cop all the way over on the other side of the world. “I am



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THE ONCE AND FUTURE MESSIAH

“The King Messiah will in some future time come, restore the kingdom of David to its former power, build the Temple, bring together the scattered of Israel, and all the ancient laws will again be in force. Sacrifices will be offered, and years of release and Jubilees will be kept as prescribed in the Torah. Whoever does not believe in him, or does not hope for his coming, shows a lack of faith not only in the prophets, but also in the Torah. For the Torah testifies concerning him in the words: ‘And the Lord your G-d will again bring back your captivity, and show mercy unto you, and again gather you from all the nations. If your outcasts be at the ends of the heavens, from there will the Lord gather you, and the Lord will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed.’ (Deuteronomy 30:3-5)”

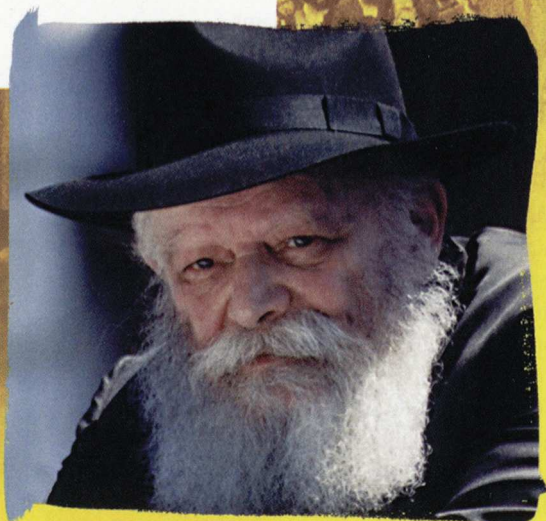
MAIMONIDES, *MISHNEH TORAH*

If one has messianic aspirations but doesn't quite have the inclination to stand up before the world and unequivocally declare oneself to be the religious savior of humanity now manifest on this earth, one needn't despair. There are other ways to end up on top of the messianic heap. Indeed, a look around at our eclectic spiritual world tells us that one of the most common and direct ways is simply to have others recognize you, to be what we might call an accidental messiah, the helpless pawn of a messianic drama that installs you in the unsought for position of avatar, Christ, Mahdi, or whoever the particular tradition might be waiting for.

For example, Sri Kalki Bhagavan, founder of the Golden Age Foundation, is a popular and well-established Hindu spiritual teacher who now goes by the name of the Kalki Avatar and is one of the best-known Kalki claimants around. So how did he come to adopt this rather bold and conspicuous title? Was there a point when he recognized the truth of his own incarnation, a moment of awakening that revealed to him his true identity? “It was neither a revelation nor an experience, nor was it a spiritual awakening,” Sri Kalki Bhagavan explains. “It was always so from the beginning. I knew I had come here to give enlightenment to humanity.” But lest we assume that this knowledge, along with his adoption of a messianic title, constitutes a personal claim to be the mythological Kalki Avatar, he sets the record straight. “I have never proclaimed to be the Kalki Avatar,” Sri Kalki Bhagavan says. “It so happened that lots of people began to have visions and revelations that I am the Kalki Avatar come to set man free. On the basis of those experiences, people started to call me Kalki.”

Of course, it should be said that the recognition of one's own spiritual realization by students is a crucial indication of any spiritual attainment—although hardly a definitive or objective standard. And obviously, to even be considered a serious candidate for a position as extraordinary and profoundly influential as a prophesied religious savior, one would have to already possess an unthinkable spiritual depth and purity, or at the very least, a rare charismatic power that few could even begin to approach. But in a world filled with all kinds of mahdis and messiahs, it never hurts to have a few supporters to push you over the messianic hump.

Another fascinating case study of this dynamic and, in fact, a number of dynamics



RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON

"How is it that the Moshiach has still not come?" the rabbi asked his audience. "Why is our world still a place in which evil and suffering prevail? Why is it acceptable that redemption should not come tonight, nor tomorrow, nor the day after? You must do all that you can to bring our righteous redeemer, immediately! . . . It is up to each and every one of you to bring the ultimate redemption with your actions. It is in your hands to bring about the harmonious, perfect world of Moshiach."

surrounding messianic claims, is the saga of the late Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Brooklyn, NY. Few would disagree that Rabbi Schneerson, founder of the Lubavitch movement in America, was a divinely inspired leader, a spiritual genius, and by all accounts a true *tzaddik*—a deeply wise and holy man. But the Jewish Messiah himself? Could it be true that the prophesied one, long awaited by so many, has already lived and died . . . in Brooklyn? Rabbi Simon Jacobson, a close student of Schneerson who worked with him for over fourteen years, is careful in his response: "You see, this is not up to my opinion here. This isn't a popularity contest. What we humans can do is look at the criteria. Does a certain individual fit those criteria that tell us God is choosing that person?" For all messianic hopefuls, the criteria are laid out in various Jewish scriptures. Perhaps the three most significant of these, as established by the Jewish prophets, are that he will come from the House of David, rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, and gather all of the exiles back to Israel.

Rabbi Schneerson never announced himself to be the Messiah nor did he seek the title in any active way. Yet for the last several years of his life, a culture grew up around him convinced that this great rabbi was indeed the prophesied one—a culture of belief and speculation that he never unequivocally dispelled. His death in 1994 would seem to have put the issue to rest once and for all, given that at least two of the major prophecies concerning the Messiah remained rather conspicuously unfulfilled. But when it comes to charismatic spiritual leaders, death often seems to enlarge rather than diminish their mythological standing in the eyes of followers, and Schneerson's death has provided little deterrence to those who see in his deeds the works of the prophesied king from the House of David and the promise of the messianic kingdom he will bring. They point to the fact that resurrection is hardly an unheard-of concept in the Jewish tradition, and there are those who believe that Schneerson may still be planning a return engagement to this world. There are even rumors that a camera sits watching over his grave, ready to record the expected event. "He's not with us anymore," says Rabbi Jacobson. "But in Judaism, there is a belief in resurrection." Jacobson is a little more circumspect about the rabbi's status: "That doesn't mean it's easy to believe. Trust me, I don't find it easy to believe that the dead will rise, but I do believe in spiritual energy, that saints can change the world. At minimum, he definitely set in motion a chain reaction that is a major contributor to the new age. Rabbi Schneerson is secondary to the fact that the world is ready."

This passionate expectation of an imminent golden age is characteristic of millennial movements such as the one Schneerson inspired. And if this expectation is unfulfilled, explains Dr. Landes, then you have to come to terms with disappointment. “You can’t start out with an announcement of the imminence of the kingdom without getting disappointed. And there is no more exquisite or painful description of disappointment than in the response of the apostles to the crucifixion. That is sort of the prototype model. The most important way that that disappointment is handled is the Second Coming.” This is especially true of Islam and Christianity, Landes feels, but not as common to the Jewish tradition, a tradition that has over the centuries seen many would-be messiahs come and go—acknowledged mistakes in the messianic drama. That is what makes the talk of Schneerson’s resurrection so unusual, he says. “In some of Schneerson’s disciples who are talking about him sitting next to God in heaven and that he’s coming back, you are beginning to have a group of people who sound more and more like Christians.”

Ironically enough, it was this disappointment—the fact that the messianic age has not yet arrived—that Rabbi Schneerson himself was addressing in one of the last public talks given a few months before he fell sick and eventually died. “How is it that the *Moshiach* [Messiah] has still not come?” the rabbi asked his audience. “Why is our world still a place in which evil and suffering prevail? Why is it acceptable that redemption should not come tonight, nor tomorrow, nor the day after? You must do all that you can to bring our righteous redeemer, immediately! . . . It is up to each and every one of you to bring the ultimate redemption with your actions. It is in your hands to bring about the harmonious, perfect world of *Moshiach*.”

A WORLDCENTRIC MESSIAH

I will tell you, Sariputta;
 Listen to my speech.
 In this auspicious aeon
 Three leaders there have been:
 Kakusandha, Konagamana,
 and the leader Kassapa too.
 I am now the perfect Buddha;
 and there will be Maitreya too
 before this same auspicious aeon
 runs to the end of its years.

THE BUDDHA, ANAGATA-VAMSA

Amidst the strong passions, revelations, and inspirations of world teachers and coming saviors, Buddhism has registered a little lower on the overall messianic Richter scale. Perhaps it is because the tradition seems to clearly put the arrival date of the future Buddha, Maitreya, far in the future. Or perhaps it is because the ecstatic revelatory passion that might lead individuals to declare their own messianic potential tends to be discouraged in this more sober-minded religion. Whatever the case, one has to search hard to find in Buddhism the same intensity of expectation that has caused so many around the world to see their own religious impulses through messianic and apocalyptic eyes. However, when it comes to the name “Maitreya,” it’s a different story altogether. Indeed, somewhere along the line, the name Maitreya slipped away from the Buddhist fold, hopped a train to the West, and went off cavorting with all kinds of rogue messianic movements, most notably Theosophy and the New Age.



Madame Blavatsky with
(from left) Masters Kuthumi,
El Morya, and St. Germain



Annie Besant with J. Krishnamurti
(right) 1911

"When I left my body the first night, I went at once to the Master's house and I found Him there with the Master Morya and the Master Djwal Kul. The Master talked to me very kindly for a long time, and told me all about the Initiation, and what I should have to do. Then we all went together to the house of the Lord Maitreya, where I had been once before, and there we found many of the Masters—the Venetian Master, the Master Jesus, the Master the Count, the Master Serapis, the Master Hilarion and the two Masters Morya and K.H. [Kuthumi]. The Lord Maitreya sat in the middle, and the others stood round Him in a semicircle like this.

Then the Master [Kuthumi] took my right hand, and the Master Djwal Kul my left, and they led me in front of the Lord Maitreya, you and Uncle [Leadbeater] standing close behind me. The Lord smiled at me, but He said to the Master: 'Who is this that you thus bring before me?' And the Master answered: 'This is a candidate who seeks admission to the Great Brotherhood.'"

J. KRISHNAMURTI, IN A LETTER TO
ANNIE BESANT AT THE AGE OF 14 (1910)

"I've been using Maitreya as the name for the World Teacher," says Wayne Peterson, a former diplomat with the U.S. State Department. "It's a name, of course, that has been known to Buddhists simply because they always knew that in the future, one would come who would be called Maitreya Buddha." Peterson is one of the most vocal supporters of what we might call the Maitreya conspiracy—the idea, originally put forward by author Benjamin Creme, that the coming World Teacher, the fulfillment of every religious tradition's highest hope for humanity's future, is now working behind the scenes from a base in London. Slowly seeding the world consciousness with his ideas and quietly contacting important political, economic, and religious leaders, he is methodically preparing us all for an eventual public coming-out party the likes of which this world has never seen. "I certainly believe that Maitreya is the Kalki Avatar, now that we're at the end of the Kali Yuga period," Peterson explains. "Many people also call Maitreya the Christ, but it would be best for people to see Maitreya as really a universal figure or a world teacher who is not here for any specific religion or spiritual movement but who will show all humanity another way to live."

This world teacher, this Maitreya, as Benjamin Creme and Wayne Peterson understand him, may have the unique distinction of being the first truly global messiah in history. Or perhaps, we should more accurately say, the descendant of the first global messiah in history. The first, arguably, was born in the late nineteenth century in the esoteric doctrines and astral planes of the Theosophical Society. In those days, the renowned social activist Annie Besant was president of this fledgling but quite popular religious movement founded by Russian prophetess Madame Blavatsky, and she felt strongly that the world was poised for the coming of a new kind of savior—a world teacher who would ignite a global religious revival, a universal messiah who would bring a universal teaching for humanity. Besant, along with her colleague Charles Leadbeater, began a search for a "vehicle" who could bring this new and improved cross-cultural, interfaith messianic figure they named Maitreya into the world. Their search culminated on the west coast of India in 1909, when Leadbeater noticed a young boy playing on the beach who, as he would later put it to friends, had an extraordinary aura around him that contained no selfishness. The boy was J. Krishnamurti and the rest is modern history. Krishnamurti, under the initial guidance of Besant and Leadbeater, grew to become one of the greatest spiritual teachers of the twentieth century—but not in the way that his mentors had foreseen. Indeed, at the age of thirty, Krishnamurti rejected, once and for all, the messianic mission appointed to him, leaving the door open for others to pick up the pieces of the dream of Maitreya and carry it forward. Benjamin Creme, inspired by the esoteric doctrines of Theosophy, did just that, suddenly proclaiming in 1982 that the new Christ had reappeared in the world and was living not in the high Himalayas or in the Old City of Jerusalem but rather incognito amidst the Asian community of London.

THE HIERARCHY OF MASTERS

“And round about the throne were four and twenty seats:
and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders
sitting, clothed in white raiment;
and they had on their heads crowns of gold.”

REVELATION 4:4

“**M**aitreya is his personal name. As mine is Benjamin, his is Maitreya.” When you speak to Benjamin Creme, you have to get used to talking about the coming World Teacher, the prophesied Messiah, as if you were speaking about John Q. Public who lives down the street. It is one of the many likable qualities of Mr. Creme, a longtime student of the work and philosophy of Alice Bailey. If Bailey and Besant were theosophical prophets heralding the coming of Maitreya into this world, then Creme sees himself as a sort of John the Baptist, enthusiastically announcing the imminent appearance of the World Teacher, wherever and whenever he is able to.

“Maitreya is the head and leader of the group of advanced men we call the spiritual hierarchy of our planet, or the esoteric group of masters of wisdom who oversee affairs on earth. For thousands of years,” Creme explains, “these masters have lived, for the most part, in the mountain and desert areas of the world—in the Himalayas, the Andes, the Rockies, the Cascades, the Urals, the Gobi Desert.” In 1945, at the end of the war, Maitreya announced his intention to return to the world, and this time not alone but with a group of these masters.

The flesh-and-blood masters originally spoken of in Theosophical circles have, in the hands of modern interpreters, sort of morphed into what are often called *ascended* masters, with a great number of psychics, channelers, and all sorts of unusual folk claiming to be mediums for their messages to the world. If all of this sounds as if we took a left turn into some New Age alternate reality a few paragraphs back, it’s good to remember that traditional religions are also filled with just these sorts of myths—the Communion of Saints, the Great White Brotherhood, the Hierarchy of Angels—and that Bailey, Besant, and Blavatsky were speaking about these masters long before channels, walk-ins, crystals, and Shirley MacLaine were even a thought in the Aquarian mind.

Despite these strange trappings and his unconventional entourage, if you’re looking for a world teacher with global reach and a comprehensive vision, few can compare to Creme’s as yet unseen world savior. No ivory tower ascetic saint is this messiah, we are told. Deeply concerned about the state of the world, politically and economically astute, extraordinarily well-versed in esoteric philosophy, and of course, spiritually without peer—this is a messiah envisioned with an eye toward modernity. His global outlook also underscores a crucial point—the sheer potential for his message to be heard in today’s interconnected world. This is not lost on the publicity-savvy Creme, who has envisioned quite a scenario for Maitreya’s coming-out party. He calls it the “day of declaration.” “The day of declaration will be unlike any that the world has ever seen,” Creme explains, “because he will come by demand and appear on the television networks of the world. And we will all know when to tune in, in the different countries, and we will all see his face simultaneously on the television. And this time, he will announce that he is Maitreya. But he won’t actually speak. He will come into telepathic rapport with the whole of humanity simultaneously. Each of us will hear his words in our own language, whatever that happens to be. And this is a repetition on a world scale of the true happenings of Pentecost, two thousand years ago, and also a pre-vision of the future ability of humanity to speak telepathically at will over any distance.”

JERUSALEM—APOCALYPSE GROUND ZERO?

Politics makes for strange bedfellows, the saying goes, and the same could certainly be said of messianic beliefs. For example, did you ever wonder why white American evangelical Protestants are often the strongest supporters of the Jewish state of Israel? The answer in a word: prophecy. Indeed, Israel, and more specifically Jerusalem, plays a crucial role in the messianic prophecies of not one but three world religions—the Abrahamic trio of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. It is these three religions and their intertwining visions of messianic salvation that have made for some rather strange alliances on the world stage. Jimmy Carter alluded to this in a recent *New York Times* column, pointing out the fact that most Christian leaders were opposed to unilateral military intervention in Iraq, with the exception of some Southern Baptists, who “are greatly influenced by their commitment to Israel based on eschatological, or final days, theology.” Many of these Christians believe that a crucial step along the path to the Second Coming of Christ will be the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. The only problem, and it’s a big one, is that the site of the ancient temple (of which the only surviving structure is the outer western wall, often called the Wailing Wall) is also home to the Dome of the Rock, one of the most holy places in Islam. And it’s a problem in Jewish scriptures as well, as many foresee that the Jewish Messiah himself will lead the charge in rebuilding what would actually be the third temple on that site—and protecting the Dome of the Rock isn’t exactly high on the priority list.

The city of Jerusalem plays a crucial role in Islamic apocalypticism as well. As Islamic scholar David Cook of Rice University explains it, Islam has adopted many elements of Christian end times theology, including the figure of the Antichrist. “This satanically empowered individual, or nation as some interpret it, will persecute Muslims, who will flee before him and finally take refuge in Jerusalem,” Cook says, “setting up a great battle in which Jesus [considered an Islamic prophet] will come down from heaven and kill the Antichrist.” Jesus’ pursuit and destruction of this Antichrist will, in turn, pave the way for the rule of the Imam Mahdi, Islam’s prophesied messiah.

Adding to the inflammatory nature of the situation is the all-too-easy labeling of the United States or the West in general as the Antichrist figure in these scenarios, persecuting Muslims, forcing them to flee to the holy city. This has particularly strong strains in regard to Western policies in Iraq and Afghanistan, and in the U.S. support of Israel. And it has certainly not gone unnoticed by those seeking to warp Islamic theology to serve their own ends, like Saddam Hussein, who supported the publishing of a great deal of anti-U.S., anti-Western apocalyptic propaganda in the Islamic world. His efforts, according to Cook, have corresponded with a general rise of interest in Islamic apocalyptic prophecies—and that’s not good news. As Dr. Landes explains: “The apocalyptic scenario they’ve adopted is not only cataclysmic, as in, for example, Hinduism with the Kalki Avatar or the Book of Revelation, but it’s *active* cataclysmic, in the sense that they see themselves as God’s agents in bringing about the necessary violence to transition from this world, where evil still plays a strong role, to a world in which the good has won.” And he adds, “We can live with the passive. We can’t live with the active.”

So against the backdrop of today’s political struggles for control of the city of Jerusalem and rights to the holy places therein, deep currents of history and thousands of years of messianic aspirations have set the apocalyptic pot to boil as three religions each await the prophesied One who will lead the chosen people into a new age. Unfortunately for all of us, these three visions of redemption, in their orthodox forms at least, are mutually exclusive.



THE WAILING WALL WITH THE DOME OF THE ROCK IN THE BACKGROUND

If Maitreya sees telepathy as part of our twenty-first-century future, then what about spirituality? What would the alleged incarnation of the Messiah, the Buddha, the Christ, the Kalki, and the Mahdi have to say about spirituality in the twenty-first century? Speaking to me last winter, Creme paused for a moment and posed the question to Maitreya . . . telepathically. “What today is possible for the gurus, the yogis, those who sit in contemplation up in the mountains, abstracted from life—this awareness that they are seeking will become possible for everybody.” Creme’s voice sounded roughly the same, apparently just passing along Maitreya’s thoughts on the matter. “Everyone will grow more and more into the expression of the faculties of divinity. And this will lead to a complete transformation of our lives. Life will deepen. War will become a thing of the past. And the key to it all is the simple understanding that we are brothers and sisters of one humanity. This means that the resources of the world, the food, the energy, the science, must be redistributed more equitably. And when we begin to do that, we create the right circumstances for the demonstration of the divinity in each and every one of us.”

A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

“When the Matrix was first built, there was a man born inside
who had the ability to change whatever he wanted. . . .

It was he who freed the first of us, taught us the truth. . . .

After he died, the oracle prophesied his return, and that his coming
would hail the destruction of the Matrix, end the war,
bring freedom to our people. That is why there are those of us
who have spent our entire lives searching the Matrix,
looking for him. . . . I believe that search is over.”

MORPHEUS SPEAKING TO NEO IN THE FILM *THE MATRIX*

Just as the messianic myths of humanity are helping to shape the emerging contours of twenty-first-century culture, so is our modern interconnected society influencing in turn this most traditional element of our religious heritage. Perhaps at no point was this clearer to me than when I came across an article on the Eastern Lightning sect in Mongolia titled, “Jesus Is Back and She’s Chinese.” Now that headline is revelatory in more ways than one. Indeed, at what other point in history would it have been possible to have a headline quite the same? We live in a world where two of the most vocal and popular claimants for the mantle of the Second Coming of Christ live not in the Bible Belt of the American South or in any ancient stronghold of Christianity but rather in southern Siberia and in an unknown province of China. Today, we have American gurus from Long Island naming themselves after the Kalki Avatar of Hinduism, Englishmen proclaiming the arrival of Lord Maitreya in North London, and French-American New Age teachers from California making statements such as this one: “I have chosen to reveal Myself to the world. Let it be heralded among all creation and throughout the annals of time that I have come. As the one Jews have long awaited as the Messiah; Christians, as the Second Coming; Buddhists, as the Maitreya—all these am I and by all other names of all other prophecies, henceforth known as Bhagavan Sri Pranananda, clothed in humble, earthly disguise as Louix Dor Dempriey.” Whatever the veracity of Mr. Dempriey’s claim, one thing is clear: the messianic age has gone global, and today’s messiah is no longer constrained by the boundaries of tradition and culture.

So what's the next big thing on the messianic horizon? Christian monk and mystic Brother Wayne Teasdale offered a clue in an interview last January. A passionate activist who is deeply concerned about the potential of human activity to create an ecological apocalypse, Teasdale caught me off guard when he suggested that messianic salvation might ultimately come by the way of . . . extraterrestrial intervention. Yes, believe it or not, the UFO hypothesis has seeped into current discourse regarding all sorts of end times scenarios, some of which place our alleged ET visitors in the role of messianic saviors. After all, didn't the Bible say that the Son of God would "descend from the clouds" when he returned? Benjamin Creme actually started out in this field, spending many years of his life, as he puts it, "working with the UFOs" before he began his involvement with Maitreya. Most of these scenarios tend toward contact of a benevolent sort but there are also those who see something a little more nefarious in the possibilities. I remember an episode from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* where an alien shows up on a planet and uses advanced technology to pretend to be a mythological figure from the planet's religious culture. Easily convincing the population that she is the "second coming" or their planet's equivalent, this alien is on the verge of controlling the entire population through her charade when Picard, Data, and the rest of the Star Trek posse come to the rescue and stop this extraterrestrial pretender to the messianic mantle. Should we be on the lookout for something similar? For example, what if our Times Square messiah was actually coming to you live not from London but straight from the dark side of the moon, with plans for planetary domination? How would you know the difference? Let's play the scenario out a little further. How hard would it really be for some clever extraterrestrial, with highly advanced technology, to convince Pat Robertson and his millions of fellow believers that he or she or it was just off the bus from heaven ready to rule in the new age?

As fascinating as it can be to speculate about such scenarios, there are some for whom these questions take on a more urgent tone. For example, Stephen Greer, whose National Press Club event on the subject of UFOs made network news a couple of years ago, takes a darker but no less bizarre view of what we might call "extraterrestrial eschatology." He fears that there are those in our military "who share a certain bizarre eschatological bent: a dark view of the future, featuring an extraterrestrial Armageddon—or at least the threat of it." Such a theme, he maintains, "supports retrograde and fanatical religious causes, as well as deeply covert military-industrial plans to expand the arms race into space."

While most of this theorizing starts on the fringe and quickly goes much further out into the vast netherworlds of endless internet conspiracy, it is noteworthy that some respected individuals are actually considering these kinds of hypotheses. And for those of you who do think that all of this sounds quite mad, I would only ask if you've read the Book of Revelation lately. Indeed, from a certain point of view these propositions are hardly more speculative, wild, and unsupported than the idea that the Son of God, who was crucified and resurrected, will come again in human form, fight the antichrist beast that will rise from the ocean, walk upon the earth, and save us all from a divinely induced apocalypse. In the end, perhaps it all comes down to the same question the Hebrews were no doubt asking themselves thousands of years ago as the first predictions filtered through their local culture, the first wild speculations that their future might bring the coming of a great messiah, and a disastrous apocalypse. How do we tell, they must have asked themselves, who is the prophet and who is just plain crazy? Now it's thousands of years into the future, and we're still asking ourselves the same question.

— THE END —

Yeats quote on p.130 from the poem "The Second Coming" by W.B. Yeats, appearing in *The Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats*, Richard J. Funneman, Ed., (Scribner, 2nd Revision ed., September 19, 1996), p.140; Reagan quote p.134 excerpted from Paul Boyer's *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 1992), p.142; Hal Lindsey quote on p. 135 from the film (on videotape) *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Western Front Ltd, Palos Verdes, CA, 1976); Edgar Cayce quote on p.136, from Reading #3976-15, given on January 19, 1934 (www.geocities.com/Athens/5692/earth.htm, 2003); Bob Dylan quote on p. 137 from "When He Returns," by Bob Dylan, from the album *Slow Train Coming* (Columbia Records, 1979); Alice Bailey quote on p.13 from Alice Bailey's *The Externalization of the Hierarchy, Section III: Forces Behind the Evolutionary Process, May 1941* (<http://beakund.helloyou.us/netnews/bk/externalization/xtet1121.html>, 2003); Maimonides quote on p.140 from *Mishneh Torah*; Schneerson quote p.142 from Simon Jacobson, *Toward a Meaningful Life: The Wisdom of the Sages* (William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), p. 295; Buddha quote on p.142 from Anagata-Vamsa, (www.bci.org/prophecy-fulfilled/founders.htm, 2003); Krishnamurti letter quote p. 143 from Pupul Jayakar, *Krishnamurti: A Biography* (Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1986), p. 37; Jimmy Carter quote p.145 from Jimmy Carter, "Just War - or a Just War?" *New York Times Op-Ed*, March 9, 2003; Matrix quote on p.146 from the film, *Matrix* (Warner Bros., 1999); Greer quote p.147 from www.disclosureproject.org/disclosure.html, 2003; "Jesus Christ" quote on page 148 from Steve Baxter as Jesus Christ in the film, *The Second Coming* (Red Production Company, 1999).



VISSARION CHRIST

The Last Testament of Vissarion Christ

"You are becoming gods. There is a new master of creation—and it's you. You've unraveled DNA. You're five years away from building your own people, and at the same time you're cultivating bacteria strong enough to kill every living thing. Do you think you're ready for that much power? ... If you want the position of God then take the responsibility. ...

I was born the son of God, and the son of God came once before and gave you a testament and you ignored it. This time, there will be a third testament, a new foundation for the way you live your lives, and the third testament will be written by you."

Jesus Christ, *The Second Coming*

IF THESE WORDS DON'T SOUND QUITE LIKE THE JESUS CHRIST you remember from Sunday School, don't worry, they aren't. But they are the words of the son of God—at least one British screenwriter's conception of what the son of God might sound like in a twenty-first-century world. They are taken from a movie recently broadcast on British television, *The Second Coming*, which describes the odyssey of a young man from Manchester, England, who suddenly realizes one night after visiting the local pub with a few friends that he is, in fact, the son of God, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. And the twist is that it is actually true. Working miracles and decrying the state of the world, he sets about his ministry, speaking to crowds in football stadiums, trying to establish the "Third Testament" as the new spiritual teaching for life in the twenty-first century. Does it sound implausible? Well, don't tell that to the several thousand Russians gathered together in a remote area of southern Siberia who have decided to live out that exact scenario in a real-time version of the Second Coming. Sergei Torop, a former traffic cop in the Russian city of Minusinsk, now calls himself Vissarion Christ, having realized his true identity as the son of God in 1992. In the decade that has since elapsed, he has attracted quite a large Russian following and caught the attention of international seekers as well. Living in this sparsely populated rural region just north of the Mongolian border, Vissarion and his disciples are creating what they call "The Last Testament Church." Indeed, in austere semi-primitive conditions far from the amenities of contemporary life, these modern-day apostles have formed a dedicated community, attempting to establish what Vissarion describes as a "new world on this earth." This "micro-community," he explains, will exist separate from but parallel to the world as we know it, setting an example for how a transformed human society can live and thrive based on higher, deeper principles of the spirit.

Despite the remote setting of Vissarion's ministry, in today's hi-tech world even southern Siberia is connected to the information highway. With some help from the internet, some Russian translators, and a little perseverance, *WIE* tracked down this alleged messiah and asked him a few questions about the Second Coming, his messianic aspirations, and the last testament of Jesus (or rather, Vissarion) Christ.



IMAGES OF LIFE IN THE SIBERIAN COMMUNITY OF VISSARION AND HIS FOLLOWERS

WIE: *How did you come to believe that you are the return of Jesus Christ? Was it a revelation, an experience, a spiritual awakening? Could you describe what happened?*

VISSARION CHRIST: The description “spiritual awakening” fits best. To describe the process in words is not a simple task. There was no mysterious voice; there were no revelations coming from outside. There is nothing to compare it to. The moment of awakening itself did not convey immediate knowledge of who I am and what my name is in truth. Some time was needed for that self-awareness.

The closer the time came to the awakening, the more there were signs and circumstances that caused me to begin to feel an anxiety about the events taking place in the life of man on earth. And finally, the clear realization dawned—everything that relates to the salvation and development of the human is exactly what I have to figure out, as I contain within me everything that is needed for this to happen. Who is the human being? For what purpose is the human being born? How does the human being develop? I do not need a revelation of any sort to answer these questions, as I am the knowledge itself and I am always ready to answer all questions on this matter always, in any volume and at any level of human understanding.

Once, several months after the beginning of my open meetings with people, there emerged inside me something that could be called a recollection. In this experience, I remembered sitting on a stone bed in some very dark location and being blinded by the light coming from the entrance. The light was bright daylight. And in my head, there was an unpleasant

feeling, almost as if there had been the recent passing of a very heavy illness. And I realized that this event was the moment of resurrection.

But this event itself is not the final word on the question of self-awareness. The key to that is only what I do. I know what I have to do. I have the capacity to give everything that is necessary for humans to reach salvation and to develop in their lives everything for which they were born.

WIE: *You have said that you are here to “finish what you started.” What do you mean by that? What is the mission you are here on earth to fulfill?*

VC: In the first appearance, what was left was the Good News about the existence of Truth, of which there had been no knowledge earlier, and about the existence of laws that had not been present in the Old Testament. But the New Testament is not a doctrine. That is why it failed to bring people into a union. That is why Christians, studying one and the same Testament, ended up divided. They created a kingdom that is split within itself. Now the time has come to unfold the Doctrine of Truth, on the basis of which people will succeed in building the right relations with one another, and in putting together a truthful system of life for their own single community on the whole earth.

Furthermore, in order to accomplish the Doctrine, the presence of a living teacher is necessary because seemingly simple truths will inevitably need to be explained many times from different angles. What’s needed is the presence of a living teacher who will, through his spirit, help facilitate this coming



"I have other sheep as well that are not of this yard

together, provide the solutions for all of the emerging life issues, and provide extra strength for those who need it. This is very important.

We may talk about the salvation of humankind. But saving humankind does not mean saving all of today's civilization, all several billion people. Salvation should not be forced upon people unless they aspire to it. To imagine some wonderful phenomenon that will make all people believe in the Holy Truth at once is not realistic, to put it mildly. The psychological settings and attachments inherent to living on earth under the life conditions both of the past and of the present will not allow a huge part of the population to make the right choice. Many do not even have the capacity to make the necessary choice. In this fateful period, the salvation of all humankind can only be guaranteed if, parallel to the existing civilization, a new micro-community is formed that will be able to become the foundation of a bigger society, a new civilization of the future. The salvation of humankind must first be defined through the planting of this new world on earth that will exist in parallel, as an example to all the rest—a world that people can enter only of their own will, without violating the basic human law of freedom of choice. Whatever happens to the remaining majority, the human is sure to be preserved in the universe through such a micro-community.

WIE: *In the Bible, the end times are often described as times of great tribulation, with plagues, the coming of the Antichrist, and all kinds of difficulties for humanity. Are those tribulations and trials yet to come? Or are we about to enter the new age of peace and love that was also promised in the scriptures? What do the coming years hold for humanity?*

VC: There will be tribulations, of course. They can easily be observed already, and they will keep manifesting themselves. The new age of peace and love will come after people go through an inevitable ordeal that is meant to bring the human to the necessary change. As for what to expect in the future—this we don't talk about. People ought to be concerned about how to live *today*, trying to realize the truth today, recognizing that the better they accomplish this, the better the future will be. They create the future themselves. The teacher has come so that the future will change. And the manner in which they will accomplish his laws will determine how much the future will change. People who do not have the truth have a certain future that can be predicted. But the teacher comes to change this future altogether. And this change depends precisely on what the believers do. The question is: Will they create this new future or not? And to what extent will they make the effort to do so?

WIE: *Do you think the old religious traditions can keep up with our fast-changing times, or do we need a completely new tradition of spirituality for today's global society?*

VC: A completely new tradition is needed, of course. The old religious traditions played a positive role in their own period of time but now they will not be able to lead us further. With the existing religious teachings people rose to a certain level, and now they can only be led further by one doctrine that can provide full answers to all the problems of life facing humankind, and not just a separate group of people in this or that society. If we speak about further development, then we need to think in terms of one family of people of a single faith



IMAGES OF LIFE IN THE SIBERIAN COMMUNITY OF VISSARION AND HIS FOLLOWERS

and those I am required to bring: and they will hear my voice, and there will be one herd and one Shepherd.” John, 10:16

on this earth, a society in which individuals will have no contradictions and disagreements with one another in their hearts. Such a situation will create the favorable conditions for the emergence of a single field of conscience in the whole human society on earth. This is an important condition for full-scale development. The task now is to immediately articulate a new doctrine for all people.

The choice facing all of humankind today can be characterized as Judgment Day or as a moment of transition or the end times. Indeed, this is the time when the destiny of humankind needs to be decided upon. Because with the qualities people now possess and the level of technology they have achieved, humankind is now actively losing the right to further existence. Humankind's further existence is a threat to the universe.

The qualities that so-called civilized man now possesses have left us, in this world, with a crisis of utmost intensity. The present human thinking is not able to solve this problem. This helplessness can now be observed by anyone. Islam has existed for ages, Christianity has existed for ages, Buddhism has existed for ages, and other teachings have existed for ages, talking about the good and about love. And yet there is now a crisis that is threatening all of humankind. A simple logical deduction leads to only one conclusion: To live further in the same way people have lived up until now, even on the basis of an attitude toward the surrounding reality formed by the respectable religious teachings, is not acceptable. And this means that any attempt to maintain what has already had a place in history is unsound. For further development, we need another approach. It is precisely this problem that the new teaching has to solve.

WIE: Today, there are many people claiming to be the new manifestation of Christ in this world. For example, Benjamin Creme has spoken about the Christ Maitreya, who is now living in London; there is a Chinese woman who is claiming to be the second coming of Jesus and has reportedly written a new addition to the Bible; and many others are announcing themselves as the prophesied savior of humanity. Are these individuals deluded? Can there be more than one son of God?

VC: One has to look at the results of what these people do. The wise understand that one recognizes the tree by its fruits. And indeed, in these cases, in the wake of these people who identify themselves as teachers, who claim to be Jesus or claim something similar, for the most part, there is almost nothing to show for their claims.

One of the important aspects of the emergence of the teacher is that he brings a teaching for everyone. Therefore he should be ready to meet with all those willing and make use of any opportunity to appear wherever there are people willing to listen to him, and to answer all the questions people worry about. After all, it is he who has to comfort! It is he who has to show the way of truth! This, above all, is what has to be characteristic of the teacher of truth. Only one can be a teacher. In this there also lies a certain truth concerning human psychology. All need to be gathered in a single lap, and this needs to be done by just one voice of the living word of God. This is why it is said in the New Testament:

I have other sheep as well that are not of this yard and those I am required to bring: and they will hear my voice, and there will be one herd and one Shepherd.
(John, 10:16) ■

The Future of the Student-Teacher Relationship

definitely

**NOT just a book review of
Mariana Caplan's *Do You Need A Guru?***

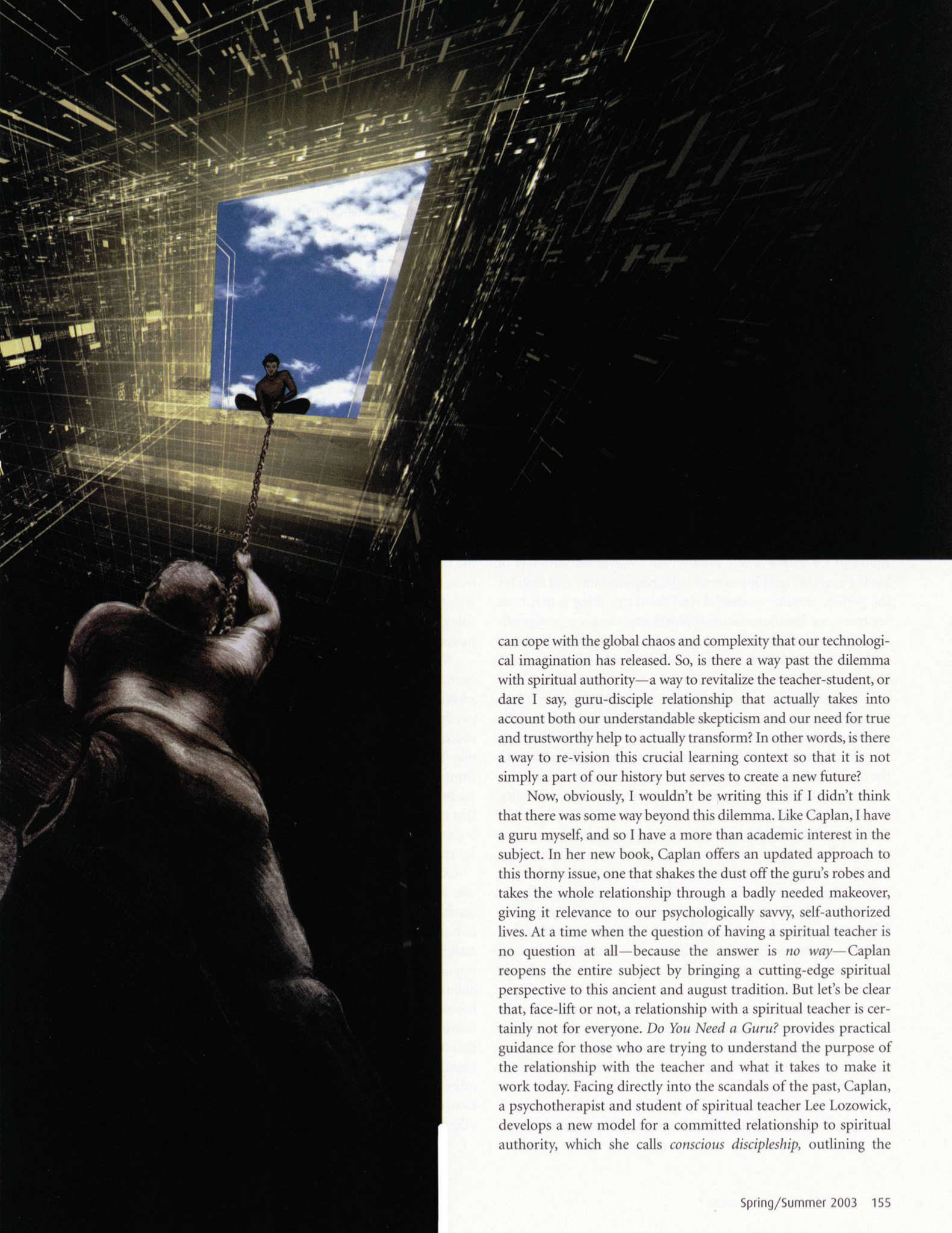
by Elizabeth Debold

HOW DID "GURU" BECOME A FOUR-LETTER WORD? "Walking into a party and telling someone you have a guru is like saying, 'I'm a heroin addict,'" writes Mariana Caplan in *Do You Need a Guru: Understanding the Student-Teacher Relationship in an Era of False Prophets* (London: Thorsons, 2002). And that's no joke. Let's think about it for a minute. What comes to mind when you hear the word "guru"? Do you get misty images from the good old sixties, love-beads and long hair and all? Folks in funky dress swaying together as they sing *Hare Krishna* in front of a smiling bearded man in long robes? Maybe you half-laugh, "Been there, done that," with the underlying resolve never to do *that* again. Or maybe you think about your meditation teacher, recognizing how much help you've been given. But she's not a guru—or is she? And you might vaguely recall news stories of a charismatic Indian man with a fleet of Rolls Royces in the desert somewhere. Or perhaps your thoughts turn even more ominous, recalling spiked Kool-Aid and other cult insanity. Funny, while we feel comfortable with business gurus, exercise gurus, financial gurus, when it comes to *spiritual* gurus—*guru* gurus—we're often not comfortable at all.

Indeed, isn't it interesting that there are few questions in the contemporary spiritual world more loaded than this one: What is the role of spiritual authority in our search for wisdom and wholeness? It's totally understandable that we're more than a little gun shy, given how much we've been failed by the authorities in our lives. The twentieth century was an age of disillusionment—our faith in the integrity of all authority, from parents to police, from religious leaders to secular ones, has been shattered over and

over again. But, even so, the truth is that for literally thousands of years, in many different cultures (including ancient Greece, the cradle of Western civilization) the teacher-student relationship has been the most venerated and successful vehicle for profound and lasting human transformation. Historians tell us that Christ sought out the teachers of his time, and so did the Buddha—before he discovered the "middle way" that revolutionized spirituality in ancient India. It is rare to find saints or sages, now or in the past, who have realized Ultimate Truth outside some form of relationship with a teacher. And in our everyday lives we have no trouble recognizing that usually the most effective means of learning just about anything is through the one-on-one teacher-student relationship. Even nowadays, our most powerful vehicle for personal growth and change is relationship with a psychotherapist or perhaps with an intimate partner.

In our spiritual lives, however, we find ourselves in a "great dilemma," as Caplan puts it. You see, even though the teacher-student relationship historically has been the primary context in which individuals reach the most profound transformation, so many gurus and spiritual teachers have drastically let us down. And we've been let down at a time when humanity desperately *needs* spiritual guidance. The future that is staring us in the face—a world of genetic engineering, weapons of mass destruction, and environmental devastation—cries out for new spiritual vision, for a transformation in human consciousness that



can cope with the global chaos and complexity that our technological imagination has released. So, is there a way past the dilemma with spiritual authority—a way to revitalize the teacher-student, or dare I say, guru-disciple relationship that actually takes into account both our understandable skepticism and our need for true and trustworthy help to actually transform? In other words, is there a way to re-vision this crucial learning context so that it is not simply a part of our history but serves to create a new future?

Now, obviously, I wouldn't be writing this if I didn't think that there was some way beyond this dilemma. Like Caplan, I have a guru myself, and so I have a more than academic interest in the subject. In her new book, Caplan offers an updated approach to this thorny issue, one that shakes the dust off the guru's robes and takes the whole relationship through a badly needed makeover, giving it relevance to our psychologically savvy, self-authorized lives. At a time when the question of having a spiritual teacher is no question at all—because the answer is *no way*—Caplan reopens the entire subject by bringing a cutting-edge spiritual perspective to this ancient and august tradition. But let's be clear that, face-lift or not, a relationship with a spiritual teacher is certainly not for everyone. *Do You Need a Guru?* provides practical guidance for those who are trying to understand the purpose of the relationship with the teacher and what it takes to make it work today. Facing directly into the scandals of the past, Caplan, a psychotherapist and student of spiritual teacher Lee Lozowick, develops a new model for a committed relationship to spiritual authority, which she calls *conscious discipleship*, outlining the

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qualities needed by teacher *and student* for success. She also explores the “hot issues” related to obedience, betrayal, and even outrageous behavior on the part of the guru. Never straying far from either its inherent pitfalls or promises, she gives us an eyes-wide-open, contemporary look at this relationship that has been a crucible for human transformation for millennia.

Yet, the question “Do you need a guru?” is more than a practical one. Opening it up confronts us with some of the most deeply held shibboleths of our postmodern era—those hot button beliefs about who we are, what is humanly possible, and how we should relate to each other. I mean, even the relatively simple question—*Why would one choose to have a committed relationship with a spiritual teacher in this day and age?*—can have quite a charge. Right below the seemingly placid surface there often float some big assumptions. In fact, most of the time, what “Why would one want to have a teacher?” typically means is something more like: C’mon, haven’t we become far too sophisticated and knowledgeable to put ourselves in that kind of dependent relationship? Or to put it less politely: Isn’t this whole business of having a teacher simply a way to avoid responsibility and look for the perfect mommy or daddy? And the tricky thing is that both are true—we *have* become too sophisticated to assume a dependent role in an authoritarian relationship, and too often the desire to find a teacher *is* all mixed up with other motivations that have more to do with comfort and solace than with real transformation.

Yes, we’ve become too egalitarian and psychologically astute to have the same relationship to teachers that you’d find in India or Tibet. “Question authority” and “Know thyself” were twin slogans of the sixties, slogans that have now been absorbed into the very atmosphere of postmodern life. The sixties assault on traditional authority—anti-war protests, struggles for civil rights, the battle for equality between the sexes—cracked the hierarchies that created the fixed positions of dominance and dependence that had been in place since medieval times. In our questioning, we found our authorities wanting, and so made *ourselves* the ultimate authorities in a glorious ideal of equality and freedom for all. For perhaps the first time in human history, an entire generation had the option to step outside the bounds of tradition and expectation to create new plots for our life-stories. Rather than looking to authorities for answers, the question became: How do we authorize ourselves to lead our own lives? And so, increasingly, psychological investigation—the exploration of our own needs, desires, fears, and motivations—became our guide to fulfillment in these new personal narratives. Psychology gave us the knowledge to self-authorize, to author our own lives by looking to ourselves for direction.

It’s no wonder, then, that in this democratic climate of self-determination, the relationship between spiritual teacher and

aspiring student—which always is and always has been hierarchical—might seem simply out of date or useful only as a safe haven for those not ready, willing, or able to take charge of their own lives. And this dominant cultural view has only been exacerbated by the disastrous mess left in the wake of many of the Eastern gurus coming West. Caplan ironically presents “a simplification of the trendy spiritual perspective,” which goes as follows: “The gurus came West in the sixties, we believed in them, gave them our money and lives and souls, and they betrayed us with scandals of money, sex, and power.” The dubious conclusion that we drew from this affair, she says, was that “we have passed through that immature phase, and are now ready for the new: the great return to rugged, spiritual individualism.” Sharply noting that this stance of independence is “a classic example of American thought” and therefore nothing new at all, Caplan observes that “We burned through thousands of years of tradition as quickly as we are burning through all the rest of the world’s natural resources.” And what does spiritual individualism entail? Taking the teaching, not the teacher. Reading classic and contemporary teachings on our own, perhaps going to see different spiritual teachers to get a variety of perspectives, engaging in different spiritual practices. And using our psychological knowledge of ourselves to guide us on the path to greater fulfillment.

All of this is well and good—in fact, it’s great. When in human history has so much spiritual wisdom been so widely and readily available? Probably never. But in our anti-hierarchical, psychologically aware state, what could be the role of the teacher-student relationship? Clearly, as time-honored as this relationship may be as a means to transformation, it cannot just be airlifted from another culture and dropped into our own. What would it mean to bring all of who we are at the beginning of the twenty-first century, all of our questioning of authority and our psychological perceptiveness, into this preeminently powerful context for change?

Caplan has a straightforward solution: it all depends on what you want. What we get from our relationships with spiritual teachers is up to us—and this proactive and empowered approach is how to bring our twenty-first-century selves into this most ancient of contexts. The relationship with a true guru—as opposed to occasional guides on the path—is fundamentally about *radical* transformation toward the realization of the highest human potential, Caplan explains. And she is very clear that this transformation requires nothing short of ego death. What does that mean? It means dropping our self-centered motivations and identification with our narcissistic desires and fears. This identification is what makes up the bounded contours of ego and leaves us with a nagging and numbing sense of separation from Life and other human beings. And, in the death of the ego, a human being

is released into an ongoing, living realization of the most profoundly natural and creative state, the True Self. Caplan calls the teacher who is a living manifestation of this True Self an *absolute authority*. Such an absolute spiritual authority “does not love the student’s exterior or personality,” Caplan tells us, “but [only] the soul itself, a soul which has been crying to be set free since its birth or before, and which knows that only a true teacher, and what he or she represents, can free it.” She leaves us with a question: Is this what we want—do we want to be pulled far beyond what we have ever thought was possible into the most profound engagement with life? And do we have the heart and guts to take responsibility for what we truly want? “*Spiritual life is dangerous*,” she warns. “It is reserved for the rare few who dare to ‘step off the 10,000-foot pole.’ . . . The people who have succeeded in spiritual life—the great ones whom the uncompromising spiritual student longs to emulate—have risked *everything*, especially who they think they are.”

There is a thrilling directness in Caplan’s call to meet this ultimate challenge. If we are deadly serious, who can stop us? Okay, she’s saying, let’s take all of our questioning and psychological awareness and direct it at ourselves. Do we realize that we’re actually looking for constant affirmation, desperate to prove to ourselves that we’re lovable? Well, we need to be psychologically aware enough to know that this is part of the baggage we bring to the relationship, and that it isn’t a need that’s going to be met by a true teacher. If we find ourselves in a relationship with a corrupt teacher—who do we blame? Not the teacher: we entered into the relationship willfully, intentionally. It’s our responsibility to check out the teacher very carefully *before* making the commitment. Question authority first—look at the teacher’s way of life; look at the students surrounding him or her—then make the choice. This is conscious discipleship, which, she explains, “is a powerful position, a possibility which undermines our sense of victimization by false gurus and empowers us as mature students of transformation and Truth.” Consciously or unconsciously, she tells us, we get what we want, so we had better make sure that we know exactly what we’re up to. And if we don’t know, and find ourselves confused or hurt or betrayed at the hands of a less-than-scrupulous teacher, where should we look? Well, the first place to check is the mirror.

It certainly is a powerful position—one that makes good use of our psychological acuity and personal authority. Caplan’s tough-love (or is it *tough luck*?) approach to taking full responsibility for our relationship with a teacher made me snap to attention and sit up straight. *Right*, I found myself thinking, *don’t let them get you down!* To continue, after betrayal and disillusionment, to aspire for the highest possibility in the teacher-student relationship rather than falling into cynicism and protecting one’s self and soul shows a very deep commitment to the heart’s



cry for freedom. And having the gumption to learn about *ourselves* when our expectations are not met, rather than only blaming the teacher, has to be an important part of developing greater psychological maturity.

But then I began to scratch my head a bit: Doesn’t this let the teacher off the hook? Doesn’t the teacher have to be trustworthy? And if we enter the relationship wary about being victimized, can we develop the kind of trust in the teacher that takes us beyond ourselves to transformation? You see, the teacher’s living expression of integrity, the real-time manifestation of the highest Self, is fundamental to the success of the relationship—because the more deeply we trust the teacher, the more open we are to realizing the True Self as our own self. At first glance, Caplan seems to acknowledge this, noting that “the process and practice of trust and surrender between student and teacher prepares the individual to trust in God and Life.” Moreover, “trust involves . . . the trustworthiness of the teacher and our own capacity and willingness to trust,” she states. “Both must be in position in order for an effective student-teacher relationship to take place.” Indeed, trust is the lifeblood of the teacher-student relationship. How would it be possible to risk everything, to abandon all of the ways that we define and know ourselves, to leap into no-limitation and never return, if we didn’t have a profound trust in that human being, our teacher, who calls us from the other side of the chasm we have to cross? This leap requires an extraordinary trust, a trust in something far beyond the self, because although we may be very attracted to the call of the spirit, from the perspective of ego, the demand of the teacher is experienced as virtually life-threatening. This too, Caplan recognizes, as she says, “To the distrusting egoic structure . . . genuinely authentic behaviors and interventions on

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the part of the teacher will be regarded with suspicion. The student comes to the teacher to be shown that Love is true, that God is true—but continually defends him- or herself against that realization.” So the core dynamic between teacher and student goes something like this: the teacher does everything in his or her power to guide, inspire, provoke, or even pressure the student to give up identification with ego, to evolve beyond the limited sense of self, and the student, armed with trust in the teacher and the soul’s passion for freedom, battles mistrust and the hundred habits of separation to meet the teacher in the realization of the One, the True Self. The path beyond ego is about trust beyond oneself—and then trust, and then more trust—because abandoning oneself to Life beyond the cramp of fear and the grasp of desire is ultimately challenging.

So, while the conscious disciple’s stand of full responsibility, regardless of what the teacher does, is liberating—I began to wonder if it simultaneously liberates the ego from having to take the risk to trust. And does it also keep us from holding teachers accountable for the trust placed in them? Trusting to this degree is hard enough—I really cannot imagine trusting someone to pull the rug out from under my ego if I didn’t find him or her to be fully trustworthy as a human being. If conscious discipleship places full responsibility on the student for becoming involved with a teacher who lacks integrity, what obligation does the teacher have? “Although conscious discipleship requires 100 per cent responsibility on the part of the student,” Caplan says, “the teacher is also 100 per cent responsible.” But then at the same time, she tells us that we cannot judge what the teacher does: “It is really not a matter of right or wrong regarding which of the teacher’s imperfections are worthy of amnesty in the Spiritual Supreme Court.” Again, the responsibility for the teacher’s behavior is put squarely back on the student. “What is our bottom line?” she asks. “What can we handle and what can we not? Drugs? Sex? Prudishness? Puerileness? Dirty jokes? Poverty? Inflation? Vanity? Pride? Righteous indignation? Demanding rigor?”

Excuse me? Okay, while I’d certainly agree that we have to be clear about whether, for example, we are willing to submit to a life of poverty, chastity, or intense purification, we shouldn’t have to submit to a teacher’s self-aggrandizement, self-indulgence, or selfishness. Caplan tends to give these issues psychological treatment—noting that such behavior must come from a teacher’s unresolved childhood wounds and that, if we react, it’s an expression of our own psychological woundedness. “If I grew up with alcoholic parents and was significantly wounded by the manifestation of their disease,” she says, by way of example, “the intake of alcohol by one who was professed to be a master would be totally unacceptable to me, perhaps even interpreted as a definitive sign that the teacher’s mastery was less than complete.” But let’s slow down a bit here. Some of the thornier issues Caplan lists can’t just be reduced to psychological problems. These are issues of trustworthiness and integrity on the part of one who assumes responsibility for the spiritual growth of others. A truly transformative relationship with a teacher demands that we trust in the teacher’s guidance implicitly, in fact, more than we trust our own minds. How would that be possible if the teacher acted with blatant disregard for self or others?

Caplan, however, insists that we “*will* become disillusioned.” Now, on the one hand, I’d agree that to some extent that’s probably true. The ego is so easily bruised anyway that engagement with an authentic teacher who wants us to leave ego behind is bound to give rise to all kinds of wounded feelings and self-righteous responses. But having our pride stung surely isn’t a betrayal of trust—whereas a teacher sleeping with students or stealing money from the community coffers or alcoholism or drug abuse sure is. How could the kind of trust needed to build a bridge to total transformation develop between teacher and student if the teacher cannot—or will not—provide an example of how to negotiate the complexities of postmodern life with its easy access to power and pleasure? What does awakening mean if it doesn’t compel the *teacher* to act with basic human integrity and trustworthiness?

As one question after another arose in my mind, I began to wonder about the consciousness of the conscious disciple. If trust is an essential element in our transformation, but we can’t—and shouldn’t—trust the teacher to embody an enlightened Truth that has meaning and relevance in human interaction, then what are we trusting in? Caplan tries to separate the guru—the human being who lives and breathes and makes mistakes just as we all do—from what she calls the *guru function*, which “is entirely distinct from the person and personality of the guru, [yet] it is at the same time intricately related to it.” The *guru function* appears to be the impulse in the teacher to do whatever necessary to help disciples to realize the Self. Likewise, she divides the behavior of the teacher—this time even including the ways that the teacher

teaches—from what she calls *transmission*, which is the subtle communication of grace or Truth or higher consciousness from the True Self through the teacher to the disciple. Transmission, she holds, not behavior or ethics or anything else, “is what we should *really* be considering when we talk about the teacher.” As a human being, then, the teacher is not, and does not have to be, trustworthy. Caplan is telling us, *trust the transmission, not the teacher*—which sounds remarkably like a new variant of *take the teaching, not the teacher*, that foundation of good old spiritual individualism.

Could this be true? Does conscious discipleship—Caplan’s bold attempt to uphold the guru-disciple relationship—end up being another postmodern example of the “rugged, spiritual individualism” that she herself decries? Let’s look at the bottom line. Where does the conscious disciple really stand in relation to the tricky issues of trust, obedience, integrity, and so on? Well, frankly, despite Caplan’s strong take-full-responsibility stance, homing in on where the conscious disciple is supposed to stand on any of the fundamental aspects of the relationship to the teacher takes some doing. In fact, Caplan moves so quickly from one position into reverse and then back again that following her could give you whiplash. Here, as far as I could gather from the very different positions she takes, are what we might call the basic principles of conscious discipleship:

- **yes, trust...** “trust unreservedly and unconditionally in order to receive the full possibilities of discipleship”—which leads to the realization of the True Self.

- **don’t trust...** because teachers are only human “with unconscious psychological ‘holes’ that they [may be] unwilling (unconsciously, of course) to allow to be uncovered.”

PRINCIPLE #1: “Discriminating trust”: We “take as long as we need before we are willing to give our trust,” often seeking therapy to “learn to deal with the seeming betrayals of trust and surrender” so as to develop “the capacity for trust.” Trust, then, is negotiable—and often not even explored with the teacher but with an outside therapist.

- **yes, follow...** the example of the teacher because she or he is the “breathing, talking stand-in for the unwavering conscience and integrity that we find so difficult to maintain.”

- **don’t follow...** the teacher when he or she is not acting with integrity, such as when engaging in the “habits” of drinking or drug use or sexual affairs.

PRINCIPLE #2: No moral judgment: No matter what the teacher does—alcoholism, drug use, sexual affairs, financial impropriety—“our task is not to make moral and rigid judgments.” “The process of conscious discipleship is about empowering and taking

full responsibility for our *own* practice, not morally evaluating the teacher’s practice.” Don’t judge but don’t follow, even though the teacher is our externalized conscience.

- **yes, obey...** because it is preparation “for the ultimate surrender to Truth, Life, the Will of God.”

- **don’t obey...** because “there are many reasons we choose not to obey, and they are best considered with understanding, respect, patience, without judgment, and with an appreciation for rightful timing.”

PRINCIPLE #3: “Conscious obedience”: “As conscious disciples, we benefit from gaining a deep understanding of the principles of obedience and then experimenting with them in accordance with our own aspirations and perceived needs, making conscious choices about who and what best serve our soul’s true longing.” Conscious obedience is surrender when and how the disciple chooses—which makes one wonder what surrender means at all.

In conscious discipleship, Caplan tells us, “everything and its opposite is true.” Now, I’d agree that the issues *are* complex, which means that simple rules are not easy to come by. Making the decision to commit to a spiritual teacher may be the most significant decision in one’s life; in fact, Caplan rightly argues that it is a more serious commitment than marriage. And the student has to be responsible for his or her choice. But my question is: Once that choice has been made, once authority-questioning, psychologically hip postmodern selves have decided that, in their heart of hearts, they want to realize the potential for radical transformation inherent in the guru-disciple relationship, and then have found a teacher worthy of the commitment, does Caplan’s conscious discipleship help to realize that potential?

My answer is no. Why? For two main reasons. First, because, in conscious discipleship, even after a commitment has been made, the student holds on to his or her fundamental authority, the right of refusal—the right to not trust, to disobey the direction of the teacher. And of course, as intelligent adults at the beginning of the third millennium, no one can take that away from us. But even though it is a real challenge, the whole point of accepting a teacher into our lives is to accept the teacher’s greater spiritual authority. This is the struggle, the battle within ourselves to trust the True Self beyond our own minds, fears, and desires. And it can only happen when we have made a commitment and stopped negotiating with the bottom line, stopped rationalizing why we shouldn’t trust or whether we will follow our teacher’s instructions or not. Caplan, at one point, tells us that “there are times in my discipleship when I know that my teacher is asking something of me that will support my deepest longing and Truth, but I capitulate to seemingly ‘lower’ desires anyway.

At those times I may simply be indulging something that needs or wishes to be psychologically satisfied before I am willing to relinquish it. Who could ultimately judge such matters?" But we *need* to judge. Because once the commitment is made, the decision to disobey is a betrayal, not simply of the teacher, but of our own hearts. It is no longer merely a psychological matter but a matter of our deepest integrity.

And the second reason is that the transformative potential of this relationship in our unpredictable postmodern age not only calls the student to a new level of responsibility—it also asks for something far more from teachers themselves. Caplan glosses over just how egregious the behavior of many gurus and spiritual teachers has been, often reducing their betrayals to psychological issues, rationalizing what they have done without holding them accountable. Noting how many avowedly celibate Eastern teachers have broken their vows in the sexually charged and permissive West, Caplan says that these men "are in a difficult bind—their reputation and vows on one hand, and their desire to know a different kind of freedom and pleasure on the other. 'Scandals' commonly take place when they attempt to sustain their status as celibate monks while at the same time engaging in sexual experimentation." But wait a minute. These aren't "scandals" (wink, nod); they are literally *scandals*. No matter how much these men were curious about sex Western-style, as long as *they* professed celibacy, they earned trust on the basis of having given up the pleasures of the world for a higher purpose. And while it is true, as she says, that the students who sleep with these teachers are mutually complicit and getting something out of it for themselves, it still is a scandal, a betrayal of a sacred vow that has an impact far beyond even the lives of the persons immediately involved. Caplan argues that, except for "the most extreme instances," determining what's scandalous is not easy: "Exactly what constitutes a scandal is a question that is as critical as it is unanswerable. . . . The problem with judging as scandalous the behavior of one who is considered a master is that we are judging *their* perspective from the standpoint of *our* morality or degree of understanding." Well, that's right, we are. Because *we're on the receiving end*. Betraying vows, violating the basic teachings, lying, or stealing goes against what the teacher stands for, not only in the hearts of students but also in terms of his or her own life commitment. It's not that it matters less for teachers to keep vows and uphold the sacred teachings in the loose moral climate of the West; in fact, it may matter more. So many Westerners are desperate for living examples of integrity and truth. And if teachers of enlightenment cannot guide us as to how to live an enlightened life in the shifting dynamics and endless possibilities of our postmodern world, then a renewed teacher-student relationship won't get off the ground.

In a painfully ironic twist, Caplan's conscious discipleship lands us right back in the clutch of the dilemma that it was trying to liberate us from: What do we do when we fear being betrayed by a teacher and yet recognize the necessity of seeking guidance? Caplan's solution is one that ends up only reinforcing the "rugged, spiritual individualism" of our postmodern spiritual world, keeping us safe from the risk of being betrayed because we can never risk trusting the teacher. Since the student can only ultimately control his or her own behavior and not the teacher's, conscious discipleship seeks to respond to this dilemma by granting the student ultimate authority in the relationship. And so, rather than being a crucible for transformation, the relationship with the teacher itself becomes schizophrenic, divided between the teacher's transmission (which we trust) and the living teacher (who we do not). This only further legitimates the fundamental gap within so many seekers—the gap between our most profound experience of higher consciousness and the way in which we usually live our lives.

Bringing our postmodern knowledge of psychology into this arena, Caplan's conscious discipleship basically encourages us to use the relationship with the teacher as a vehicle for psychological growth—to better understand our fears and motivations and desires. In this popular postmodern blend of psychology and spirituality, our egos are put in charge of ego death—engaging in psychotherapeutic conversations about fears of trust and surrender. This is one of the endless games of the wily ego, to buy time before doing what it will never want to do: surrender to the unseen and unknowable sacred dimension of life, and trust in a teacher who is pointing the way. The temptation to resort to psychological explanations—of how we project and defend against letting go and trusting—blinds us to what we are *really* up to, how we are actually betraying what we avow is most precious to us.

Caplan struggles to find a way to respond to the disaster that scores of scandals have wrought upon the sacred space of transformation that the guru-disciple relationship traditionally has been and needs to be. While she pushes the edge of the I'm-my-own-best-teacher spiritual paradigm to make room for the role of the teacher, strangely, she never calls on or expects teachers to live up to a higher standard, to meet the conscious disciple in a new potential for a wholesome relationship. Thus, poignantly, Caplan's conscious discipleship ends up expressing the deep cynicism so prevalent in the postmodern world, a cynicism that says it really isn't possible to have a relationship between student and teacher that is based upon mutual trust and integrity. And this cynicism lets all of us off the hook, leaving teachers unaccountable to live their realization with integrity and letting students do as they will. So, despite words and hopes

of serving humanity and of realizing our potential, this spiritual path fundamentally becomes about trying to get what we can get, to absorb into ourselves whatever energy or consciousness we can—to capture something from the teacher for ourselves, some great experience or feeling of belonging. But this only serves to make an object out of the teacher and of the transcendent rather than placing us in service of the highest aspiration that is ever beyond reach. We keep our eyes on our empty hands, ready to grasp, rather than looking to the far horizon beyond the known.

The legacy of the guru failures of the seventies and eighties is indeed a bitter one. In their aftermath, there has been enormous confusion about the meaning and significance of spiritual awakening. Because these teachers, who came mostly from the East or were influenced by Eastern teachings, so inspired us with the love that they transmitted and the glimpses of the vast potential of Being that they made us aware of, it has been difficult to comprehend how so many of them could behave so badly. Caplan's conclusion is that we cannot judge because these extraordinarily realized beings operate from a cosmic intelligence that exempts them from the ordinary rules of human behavior. She argues that Western culture doesn't have the "matrix" to support their wisdom.

But perhaps, in a sense, it is the other way around. The Eastern model of enlightenment arose in an ancient world where life was seen as an endless cycle of birth and death, where one's life course was immutably set by the inescapable feudal hierarchies that structured all of human existence. Enlightenment, the realization of the timeless and changeless perfection of Being, was the only escape from an often harsh existence that was not possible to change. The emphasis on transcendence, on the sacred dimension that shimmers in and through every bit of creation, gave hope, beauty, and dignity to lives that constantly brushed with death. The events and entanglements of earthly life were seen as relatively unimportant—illusory and fleeting experiences of pain and pleasure—or as a way of testing one's freedom from attachment in the midst of the relentless struggle for subsistence. The Eastern gurus who came out of this world had no framework for understanding Western life with its innumerable choices and opportunities, its self-determined morality and psychological complexity, and its understanding of evolution and love of progress. But even so, this doesn't exempt them from having violated their own standards, the teachings and practices that they brought with them. It only points to the need for enlightened guidance to be directly brought to bear on the challenge of living life in the West.

What would it mean to revitalize the guru-disciple relationship for the twenty-first century? At this historical crux, with life literally hanging in the balance as our technological prowess

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and surrender.

rapidly outstrips our ethical awareness, human beings have to evolve to a higher consciousness that has the potential to transform the world we live in, not merely escape from it. Our god-like power to affect every life-form on this planet is dangerously without God-consciousness to guide it. Historically, the guru-disciple relationship has been the most effective vehicle for consciousness change. However, both guru and disciple will have to evolve this relationship to be able to meet who we now are and what our evolutionary predicament now is. We are far too worldly-wise and know too much about the human psyche to simply try to adopt the traditional Eastern model of this relationship. But updating the relationship doesn't mean turning it into some variant of the therapy relationship, subverting it with our psychological knowledge in a defense against moving beyond ego. What it does mean is that we authority-phobic, wounded postmoderns have to take the risk to evolve beyond our cynicism about spiritual authority—to find in our desperate global situation the inspiration, courage, and humility to seek guidance and pursue wholeheartedly the transformation of consciousness through the vehicle that has been designed for such transformation: the relationship with the teacher. And for that to happen, we need teachers who recognize their obligation to lead us to live in our complicated and conflictual world with an integrity that comes from the truth of the One Self. Perhaps, then, a new possibility for a powerful partnership with spiritual authority can emerge, based in the evolutionary imperative that human consciousness must evolve. When self-aware, self-reliant students and Self-realized teachers join in the urgent need for evolution, a natural hierarchy arising from the authority of greater and higher consciousness is revealed that can pull all of us toward a transformative future. ■

Quotations from: Mariana Caplan, *Do You Need a Guru: Understanding the Student-Teacher Relationship in an Era of False Prophets* (London: Thorsons, 2002), pp 32, 18, xi, 28, 13-15, 5, 56, 18, 18, 101, 196, 102, 36, 216, 216, 38, 216, 53, 54, 28, 218, 217, 105, 49, 179, 179, 179, 191, 195, 204, 137, 124, 198, 31, 37-38, 252, xvi.

Spiral Dynamics

Colors of America

About a half-day after reading the article, *The Never-Ending Upward Quest*, concerning memes and Spiral Dynamics, the image of the American flag popped up in my mind seemingly out of nowhere. This “colored” way of thinking about human development gave me an entirely new vantage point from which to think about the contemporary American situation: the classic liberal tension between rugged individualism (red) and strict rule of law (blue)—a tension that’s becoming more strained and uneasy with each passing year. This is a great model with many thought-provoking implications! Thanks for sharing it with us.

Fred Polgardy, Jr.
Algonquin, IL

Ed. note: For a brief overview of the developmental theory of Spiral Dynamics, please see page 55.

Change Is Inevitable

Andrew Cohen’s insightful line, “Everybody wants to get enlightened but nobody wants to change,” in his editorial in the Fall/Winter 2002 issue, deserves a response. The natural desire of human beings is for equilibrium in life, a sense of balance. Change throws life off balance and creates stress and internal conflict. For this reason Ken Wilber (in *One Taste*) suggests the “5% rule,” which says that people don’t normally want to change beyond 5% at any given time. Why? Ken reasons that, when challenged, people experience this “as a death threat.” A “death threat” may be too strong a language but, for sure, it does jerk away their intellectual security blanket.

So how do people respond to the need for change? This was a crucial question raised by Thomas S. Kuhn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*). “How do scientists proceed when aware only that something has gone fundamentally wrong at a level with which their training has not equipped them to deal?” Kuhn suggests four responses to this “crisis” stage in human experience:

1. An immediate change to the new paradigm.
2. A “wait-and-see” attitude, which usually means a polite “Forget it, I’m not interested.”
3. A seeing of “new discoveries” upon examining the anomalies.
4. A refusal to accept change/the new.

He then adds that the type of response one has depends on how much one has invested in the old paradigm. But I suggest there is more to it than just how invested one is. Dr. Clare W. Graves, the inspiration behind Spiral Dynamics, noted that at any point in time, at least three systems are operative in the behavior and thinking of people:

1. The one that is dominating – Nodal or “Peak”
2. The one that is coming up – Entering
3. The one that is going down – Exiting

At any period in life, then, or pertaining to any given issue, an individual may be at an entering, nodal, or exiting phase in their thinking and behavior. Thus, a person at an entering or nodal phase will only want more of the same of what they are presently experiencing. When presented with something new they will not go much beyond the 5% rule. However, if a person is at the exiting phase, meaning that the old paradigm is indeed “old,” and the present memetic level no longer satisfies the hunger in their soul due to prevailing Life Conditions, then and only then are people truly ready to change. So who is going to answer Cohen’s question “Are you ready to change now?” in the affirmative? Only those at the exiting memetic phase of their life. All others will stare back with a glazed look and ask, “What?” But even then, we need to remember that while change is inevitable, growth is optional.

Caleb Rosado
Philadelphia, PA

Who’s Transforming Anyway?

Mind Fodder?

From the tone and content of your latest “spiritual satire” on advaita, it is clear that you just haven’t “got it.” Instead of adding to existing confusion about so-called “spirituality” by publishing huge volumes of intellectual mind-fodder, why not just stop and really *hear* what people like Ramesh Balsekar and Tony Parsons are communicating?

Sue Whitehead
London

Spiritual Opium

First of all, I want to applaud you for the last issue of your magazine. Without a doubt, it is the finest issue you have ever produced. After reading it I was filled with the thrill of the future possibilities and the endless potential of human beings in a context that is both deeply spiritual and eminently practical.

letters

continued
from our readers

But I was especially taken with the very last article, the satire on neo-Advaita. I must say that I think that both its content and placement were pure genius. Coming at the end of one exciting article after another on human potential, the life-denying nature of these teachings stood out in stark and shocking relief. I live in the San Francisco Bay Area and have seen a number of these teachers, as well as having read their works and visited their websites. And whenever I've left one of their teachings or finished a reading, I was always left with a vague sense of confusion, though I'd never been able to articulate exactly why.

It was not until reading your article that everything became clear. What is clear is that, while these teachers speak about some of the core truths of Advaita, they have distorted them in such a way that they pander to the worst elements of a narcissistic and self-infatuated culture. In these teachings, all that matters is that we feel good, and what we actually do seems to be of little or no importance. In the way these teachers speak, there is a complete lack of appreciation for the challenging context in which all human beings presently find themselves. One teacher implies that there is no problem in the world and another glosses over 9/11 as nothing more than a fortunate all-you-can-eat buffet for bacteria. Anything to numb the pain and recline in personal detachment. This is little more than spiritual heroin. I used to think that these teachers were harmless but now I'm sure that's not the case. Teachings like this destroy all passion to participate in life in a meaningful way. So while it might seem harsh to say so, I feel that these teachers are destroyers. Of what? Of the radical potential that lies dormant in all of us and is waiting to be unleashed for the greatest possible good. Better to stay away from the opium den and find something that will truly wake us up.

Michael Wombacher
San Francisco, CA

R.I.P. WIE

When I received my Fall/Winter 2002 issue of *WIE* in the mail, I opened the magazine and went through the entire issue, as I always do before I start reading. I was HORRIFIED at what I found: an irreverent, disrespectful, slick, Madison Avenue, stereotypical parody of itself. I said out loud, "Oh, no! What has happened to my anxiously-awaited, beautiful, uplifting, one-of-a-kind *WIE* magazine? Is this some kind of cruel joke?" I felt heartsick, let down, betrayed. I have lovingly kept all my past years' issues of *WIE* on my bookshelf. I loan them out, I refer

back to them. I literally have read every single word in most of the issues. [But this issue] was SO offensive to me. *Who's Transforming Anyway?* was absurd. How dare you make one of my beloved teachers—Gangaji—into a gross and ugly parody of herself, when in truth she is SO beautiful and magnificent. I cannot even adequately put into words the demise and loss of my beloved *WIE* magazine.

Marilyn Dessauer
Tacoma, WA

Vertical Lift-off

How is it possible for a magazine to generate vertical lift-off? Well, *WIE* can and does. Speaking of evolution, it is amazing to see the trajectory of this magazine since its first issue. The latest, *Are You Ready to Change Now?*, reaches another level of readability with a profoundly compelling clarity that thrills, nudges, cajoles, shouts, and deeply inspires. Wow! Thank you!

Mo Riddiford
Hamburg, Germany

WIE Subscribers' Extra

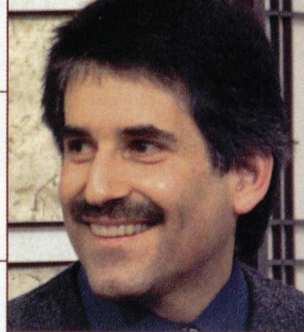
Is Technology Evolution?

A friend gave me a copy of the Summer 2002 *WIE Extra*. It was interesting but I have a comment/question about the first article by George Leonard, *Evolution and the Future of Us*. He talks about evolution of humanity, yet describes technological changes in our society as "evidence" of our evolution. I have a problem with this method of "proving" that evolution is taking place.

Technology and evolution are two separate things as I see it. There might be a day when technological improvements contribute to our biological evolution, but driving on a freeway is not such a contribution. One example, however, might be if we could implant computers into our brains to increase our ability to think, remember, recall information, speak various languages, etc. This would enable us to do personal things like meditate and explore our psychology far deeper than we can presently. However, driving on a freeway does none of this. So, when George talks about evolution, is he talking about our physiological evolution or technological? And how can one say that technological improvement is equal to bio/physiological evolution?

Ed Ober
email

From the Many to the ONE



by
**andrew
cohen**

"I THINK THE SAGES are the growing tip of the secret impulse of evolution," writes Ken Wilber in his book *A Brief History of Everything*. "I think they are the leading edge of the self-transcending drive that always goes beyond what went before. . . . They embody the very drive of the Kosmos toward greater depth and expanding consciousness. . . . They are riding the edge of a light beam racing toward a rendezvous with God."

What is the leading edge of spirituality going to look like in the twenty-first century? In these ever-more challenging times in which we are living, it seems that time itself is speeding up or, as some people say, the rate of change is changing faster than it ever has. For those at the leading edge, it's getting harder and harder to hold on to old forms and ideas. The end of an era, and the beginning of a new one, is literally forcing us to find a new path, a new way to philosophically and spiritually orient ourselves to the experience of being alive. The context for the spiritual path in our time is different than it has ever been because these days it would seem almost impossible for anyone with an awakening heart and mind to avoid the simultaneously thrilling and terrifying reality of our agitated world. So now, when the changing life conditions are forcing us to find a new way, what are we going to do? Where are we going to turn? And *who* are we going to turn to?

It was only very recently, at the beginning of the postmodern era, that large numbers of us began to look beyond our own religious traditions for spiritual sustenance. We did so because the traditions no longer seemed capable of meeting the needs of our highly educated and pluralistic mindset. Products of our own time and culture, we knew too much to carry on in the old way. And so some brave pathfinders went forth to find the answer they couldn't find at home—and discovered enlightenment. They found it in the East and brought it back so that the rest of us could partake in the great feast of liberating wisdom and higher consciousness beyond ego. And we did. But then we stumbled. We stumbled because our Eastern masters, in spite of their extraordinary knowledge of higher states, turned out to be deeply embedded in a much older world than the one we were trying to escape from. As a result, their ability to help us was limited and, when we found that out, we rejected them. We rejected them because we realized that, in spite of their knowledge of higher states, they didn't truly know themselves. And so in time, we reasonably concluded that we knew more than they did. We moved forward and boldly forged a new path, marrying East and West. We made a new and more complete map of the entire terrain of human development, from early psychological growth all the way to the furthest reaches of higher consciousness. Evolution had, indeed, occurred and history had been made.

But evolution is never that simple. In order to move forward, it was necessary for us to challenge the position, power, and authority that were part and parcel of the masters' worldview. We, at the leading edge, *had* to do this because we had discovered

that even though our perspective may not have been as high as the masters', it was definitely more broad. We had a bigger picture, a larger view, a more inclusive perspective that undoubtedly embraced a much greater spectrum of the human experience. And we knew it. But nothing is free in life, and we have paid a price for our ingenuity. We have now become experts in our own right. The Eastern masters have been replaced by Western teachers. But as educated Westerners, children of the postmodern era, our enlightenment may be stunted by the very broadness of our view. It may be that our perspective has become so inclusive that we have unknowingly negated the awesome, transformative power of the very thing that we were so attracted to in the first place—enlightenment itself. Why? Because the always overwhelming and infinitely challenging truth of enlightenment is the mind-shattering and ego-destroying recognition that *the many must be replaced by the ONE*. So we are in a difficult predicament. How do we retain the broadness of our view without sacrificing the radical simplicity of the enlightened mind? How do we transcend the ego while simultaneously and wholeheartedly embracing the complexity of our unsettled world?

We may have to let go in a deeper way. Indeed, at this juncture, in order to *continue* to move forward, our attachment to the broadness of our hard-won perspective may need to be given up. To push the edge of our own evolution, we may have to take that leap that only masters take. But in our own case, in order to take that same leap, we have to be willing to go beyond not only the ego *but also the very knowing mind and inclusive worldview that has become our cherished "new paradigm."* For those at the leading edge, the way to the future has to take us beyond where we have come to—as significant as it is. What this means is that our perspective has to shift gears, so to speak, so that we will be able to see *the many through the eyes of the One*. It was this irreducible mind-transcending vision that was unknowingly sacrificed when our broad perspective became more important to us than the height of our spiritual attainment. We began to see the One through the eyes of the many, without even knowing it. When we rejected the masters, this was the inevitable result, although it was a necessary and unavoidable step in our own bold move forward to a broader understanding of the human experience.

So now, when the urgency for awakening is greater than it has ever been, will more of us take that same leap that all true masters have had to take—from the many to the One? Let's never forget that the enlightened position, the seat of a true master, is "the leading edge of the self-transcending drive that always goes beyond what went before." And that self-transcending drive is what needs to be unleashed in more and more of us so that our collective consciousness will begin to feel the gentle tug of a higher, deeper, and more profound calling. I think that our salvation may depend on it. ■