



what is

# enlightenment

redefining spirituality for an evolving world

Whatever happened to

## **KARMA?**

Ken Wilber and  
Andrew Cohen

## **ECKHART TOLLE**

takes a time out

Beyond religion

with the **DALAI LAMA**

## **SEX & THE CITY**

gets a conscience?

## **THE AMERICAN EMPIRE:**

Rogue superpower  
or global savior?

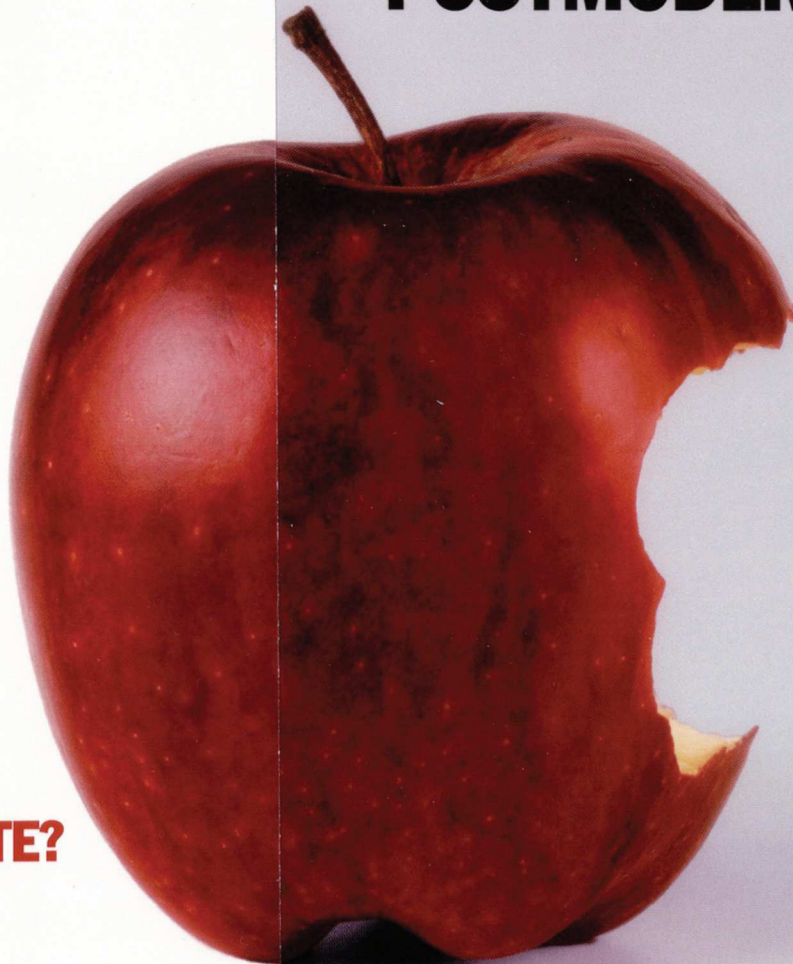


## **DRINK, DANCE, AND ... MEDITATE?**

NY nightlife gets  
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# MORALITY BITES!

SEARCHING FOR ETHICS IN A  
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Notes from Burning Man

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## **ENLIGHTENMENT GETS INTERACTIVE**

A new computer game  
tests your *samadhi*

Issue 24 February-April 2004  
US \$7.50 CAN \$9.50 UK £4.95  
EUR €9.00 AUS \$13.75 Incl. GST



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**What Is Enlightenment?** is dedicated to a revolution in human consciousness and human culture. Guided by the always-evolving vision of founder Andrew Cohen, whose tireless passion for spiritual inquiry continues to push the edge of contemporary thinking, we are in search of a radical new moral and philosophical architecture for twenty-first century society. We believe that finding this framework for transformation—rooted in the timeless revelation of enlightenment, reaching toward a truly coherent ethics for the postmodern world—is imperative, not only for the evolution of our species, but for our very survival. By asking the hard questions of the new science and the ancient traditions, of art and culture, of business and politics, *What Is Enlightenment?* seeks to create a dynamic context for conscious engagement with the greatest challenges of our times, a groundwork for the ongoing liberation of human potential.

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*What Is Enlightenment?* is published quarterly by Moksha Press, the publishing house of the Impersonal Enlightenment Fellowship, a nonprofit organization.

For general inquiries call 413.637.6000

**Subscription inquiries or address changes:**

*What Is Enlightenment?*  
PO Box 9010  
Maple Shade, NJ 08052-9710  
USA  
Tel: 888.837.7739, 413.637.6000  
Europe: +44.207.419.8100  
email: subscriptions@wie.org

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Printed in the USA on recycled paper  
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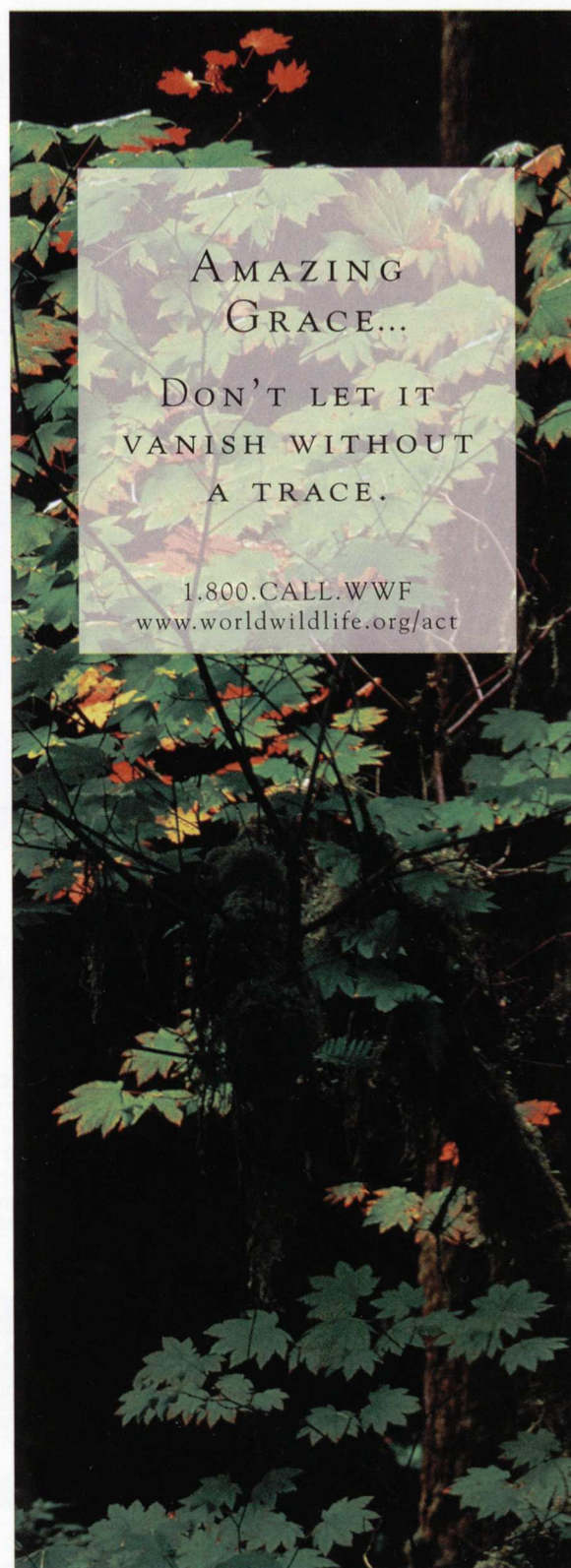


*What Is Enlightenment?* Issue 24, February-April 2004  
[ISSN 1080-3432] is published quarterly for \$24 per year by the Impersonal Enlightenment Fellowship, PO Box 2360, Lenox, MA 01240, USA. Periodicals postage pending at Lenox, MA, and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *What Is Enlightenment?*, PO Box 2360, Lenox, MA 01240.

**ILLUSTRATION CREDITS:** Snakehead image, cover and tip-on cover, photo from *Snakes* by Donna Bailey, by permission of Bruce Coleman Inc./Jane Burton; Jessica and John Roemischer photos, pp. 5, 64, 70, by Miriam Roemischer, p. 73, photo by Nancy Hoffmeier; *Burning Man* photos, pp. 5, 25-28, by Ross Robertson; Pilot Baba photos, p. 6, 81, by Jessica Devlin, p. 79, by Derek Bierman, p. 82, by Craig Hamilton; *Sex and the City* illustrations, pp. 6, 111-115, by Marguerite Sauvage; Andrew Cohen photos, p. 14, 40, courtesy of Impersonal Enlightenment Fellowship; Robert Wright photo, p. 16, © Barry Munger; Tyohar photo, p. 20, courtesy of Tyohar Organization; Ann Druyan, p. 20, by Ron Luxemburg, courtesy of Cosmos Studio; Joe Firmage, p. 20, courtesy of Impersonal Enlightenment Fellowship; Howard Bloom, p. 20, courtesy of Howard Bloom/Bob Guccione, Jr.; Dzongsar Khentse Rinpoche, p. 20, © Prayer Flag Pictures, by C. Ryan; Nadeen Satyam, p. 20, courtesy of R & R Resorts; H.H. Dalai Lama photo, p. 21, © Don Farber, 1989, courtesy of International Campaign for Tibet, Washington, D.C.; Robbie Wootton photo, p. 21, by Jessica Roemischer; Duane Elgin, p. 31, courtesy of Impersonal Enlightenment Fellowship; John Petersen, p. 32, courtesy of John Petersen; boy throwing stone at Israeli tank photo, p. 36, AP/Wide World Photos, 10/29/2000; Jim Garrison photo, p. 37, courtesy of Jim Garrison; Ken Wilber photo, p. 41, courtesy of Ken Wilber; Ken Wilber and Andrew Cohen photograph, p. 45, by Craig Hamilton; John Roemischer photos, p. 66, war protest photo, AP/Wide World Photos, Washington, D.C., 1969, p. 68, passport photo, courtesy of John Roemischer; Jessica Roemischer, photos, p. 67, 71, by Miriam Roemischer, Jessica with Korean Zen Master, p. 69; Martin Buber photo, p. 71, *I and Thou*, Martin Buber, Charles Scribner & Sons, 1958, cover; *Whale Rider* movie photo, p. 104, from www.whaleriderthemovie.co.nz/press; *The Holy Land* movie photo, p. 105, Lior Danzig, © CAVU Pictures, 2003.

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*Jessica Roemischer*

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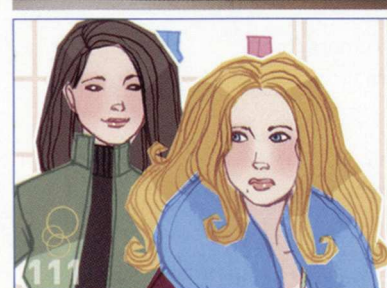
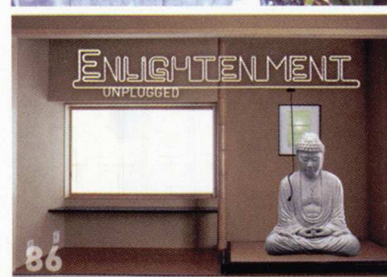
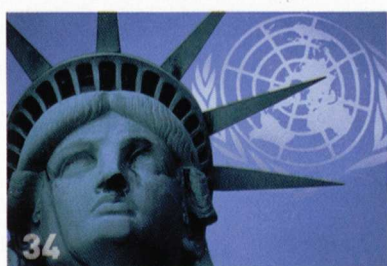
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#### COMPASSION FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Reading your last issue, the people you interviewed and their opinions, I am moved to respond: I am delighted that Huston Smith, may God grant him vigorous years, is hopeful though not optimistic, so we have at least the hope left. It is true that there is upheaval in all traditions and lineages and that their current reality maps are obsolete and their business-as-usual psychospiritual tools don't seem to work. Ken Wilber would like to see us experience transformation instead of "mere" translation. Oy, how I would like to see us embrace the integral life! How I would like to see the inherent mystical core of religious traditions brought to the fore in houses of worship! How I would like to see a global embracing of the good ideas offered in that last issue.

It is true that countless people who still attend churches and synagogues are often bored at services, the sermons irrelevant, the bodies forgotten in what should be exciting and even ecstatic worship. There are no real action directives offered that are rooted in an ethical-moral spirituality. Worse yet, while God is spoken of in the words of the liturgy, the sacred Presence is not really faced by the liturgist and the worshippers. Souls remain frustrated and unfulfilled. Still, I found most of the articles elitist and not dealing with the people who still come to religious services in the hope that there would be something that would, in Quaker language, "speak to their condition." Among your authors and "experts"

there were none of the pastors, priests, rabbis, and chaplains who toil with dedication and compassion at their ministries.

While it is true that the reality maps need to be renewed, that Gaia has to be healed, and that the biological and social world must be aligned to the natural order, the business of that poor hour of worship at the weekend needs to be refocused and redesigned. Seminaries teach their ministers-to-be with attention to the past and not with what is emerging now and taking us into the future. Driving by the rearview mirror, they will not get to where we need to go. Spiritual formation is not producing the bodhisattvas we need at this time. Denominations, busy to protect their power and turf, are obsolete at this juncture. Where is the compassion for the people in the pew?

For the ongoing need that people have for weekly renewal instruction in daily spirituality and ethics, a reinvigorated liturgy needs to be considered. Here is where help is needed not to dislodge the people in their simple devotion and piety (for those who still hold onto it). They need to be reinforced in holding the families together, in fidelity to their spouses, and in being able to turn, in the present, to the God of their ancestors. It would be well if *What Is Enlightenment?* would invite the pastors who have faithfully served their congregations, helped them through crises, and ministered to their lifecycle needs to speak their minds. The people who serve in hospices and hospitals, chaplains in their daily rounds, have something to say that is also relevant.

**Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi**  
Boulder, CO



# SPIRITUAL, NOT RELIGIOUS

In as much as I find myself indebted to Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber, I find their "dialogue" a mixture of both that which is profoundly aware and that which is found wanting. Thank you, particularly Ken, for pointing out that authentic spirituality "has to have a profound realization of the unborn" and not just a clinging to the manifest world. And thank you, Andrew, for clarifying the both/and exalting passion for the "total" of both transcendence (acknowledging the unborn) and for the manifest. I thank you both.

At the same time when you, Ken, spoke with such authority about what others mean in their distinction between "religion" and "spirituality," you seem to have dropped your own four-quadrant model and become an authority on others. I, for one, use the term "spirituality" to distinguish between egoic "rightness," which largely manifests itself as dogma, and authentic transformation, which occurs both individually and in community. I also often use these terms in combination with a distinction made in the past, between "translative" religion and "transformative" spirituality, which I find very helpful. Such are important distinctions. Sorry, Ken, but you come across a little egotistical, or at least sloppy, by making such an unqualified, sweeping statement.

That said, I would like to close with further gratitude for the acknowledgment you both made that a greater egolessness simultaneously manifests a greater oneness and sense of community with the all and "a greater and more authentic autonomy." Or, as Andrew put it, "... where the distinction between autonomous individuality and higher unity (becomes) thinner and thinner," paradoxical as it may seem. I think the gift you are both manifesting, for the most part, is indeed pointing to a new

"religion" which is integral-transformative and that doesn't let folks rest too long in some compartmentalized translative state. This I greatly welcome.

**Kurt Treftz**

Spiritual—not Religious  
via email

# SCULPTORS' CLAY

I found myself nodding my head at most of what was said in this issue's installment of "The Guru and the Pandit." However, one idea in the dialogue seems problematic. Both Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber seem to reject the idea of ontologically independent structures of consciousness before human volition and intention create them. This makes sense in one respect. If they are speaking about specific instantiations of knowledge or purpose, then Wilber's idea of "Kosmic habits" seems perfectly logical. In fact, I see resonances between these "habits" and Rupert Sheldrake's "morphogenic fields," where once a particular subtle informational matrix has been established, continual referencing by entities strengthens the field, and others are more easily able to intuit or tune in to the essence of the thought, concept, paradigm, or information contained in the field. In that sense, consciousness could be seen as evolving. And yet, these localized fields of consciousness with particular content occur in the flux of time and the manifest universe.

My qualm with the assertion that these structures of consciousness don't exist *a priori* is that we are left with a logical quandary. In what sort of "reality space" or ontological substrata do these localized fields of consciousness occur? If they are non-physical, wouldn't another basic level or structure be necessary for these fields to exist? And couldn't these fields be conceived as independent ontological grounds? My own sense is that on the level of the

created universe, consciousness in one respect is like sculptors' clay, able to be shaped by the intention and volition of self-aware beings for specific aims or moving in desired directions, which is what these "structures of consciousness" or modes of orientation to the world would seem to be.

Sincerely,

**Collin Ferrari**

Sparks, NV

# THE IDEAL MIX

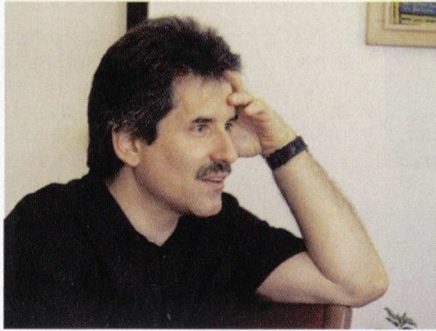
I am so impressed and entertained by your articles that I must write to you. For me, *WIE* added to and filled out my awareness of the many "end time" scenarios, mystical philosophies and perspectives, and current perspectives from the spiritual front. Carter Phipps' "The Hour of My Coming" was one of the most informative and delightful articles I've ever read about millennial messiah wannabes. He has, for me, the ideal mix of balanced information reporting, terminological reminders (I've encountered "eschatology" before, but only now, post Phipps, can I use it), and really "laugh-out-loud" throwaway comedy lines. The range of his review, spanning at least half a dozen major belief systems, and both ancient and modern prophets and messiahs, was great. I 'bout cracked up when "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." I could go on at length, discussing thoughts and inspirations gleaned all through my romp through your really good read. The progression of ideas and discussions was organized with a spiral elegance. Any reader who followed your path must certainly finish deeper, wider, and higher than at the start.

**Richard Wing**

via email

*continued on page 124*





Andrew Cohen  
*What Is Enlightenment?*  
Founder and Editor-in-Chief

**FOR THOSE OF YOU** who have been reading *What Is Enlightenment?* for some time, as well as those of you who are just discovering us, I'm pleased to announce that you are now holding in your hands our very first quarterly issue! For the past twelve years, we have come out semiannually, and I have to admit that instead of being a real magazine, we had slowly but surely turned into nothing less than a big fat book that appeared twice a year. Each issue was based on a single theme, and this enabled us to cover the topics we chose with a kind of comprehensive depth that is rarely found on newsstands. And we were proud to be able to offer the world a philosophical and spiritual triple-decker sandwich every six months.

But for some time now, the editorial team and I have yearned for greater creative freedom. We wanted to be able to explore the ever more rapidly changing world that we are all living in from the perspective of enlightened awareness, in an evolutionary context, free from thematic constrictions. We longed to spread our wings and fly anywhere that seemed appropriate or important in the moment. Also, we wanted to be more inclusive, to begin to explore culture, politics, the arts, and current events, expanding our ongoing inquiry beyond the so-called spiritual marketplace. In fact, what we're trying to do, in our own small way, is help to redefine the very meaning of the word "spiritual" for the postmodern world at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The world that we're living in is changing faster and faster every day. And the very speed of change itself is forcing all sensitive and thoughtful souls to stretch beyond familiar modes of thinking in order to meet the overwhelming demands of our time. The way we create the future literally depends on the way that we think about it. In the pages of *What Is Enlightenment?* we want to help create that future by trying to expand and deepen the context in which the leading edges of that thinking are taking place. It is our firm conviction that through the practice of sincere inquiry, of honest dialogue together, we can discover new perspectives that will enable all of us to make much greater sense of our shared human experience at this pivotal time in our development. Now that we will be coming out four times a year, we hope to widen our embrace to include more and more people in the most exciting adventure there is—ever awakening to a higher and deeper understanding of who we are and what our role is in this evolving universe.

Andrew Cohen



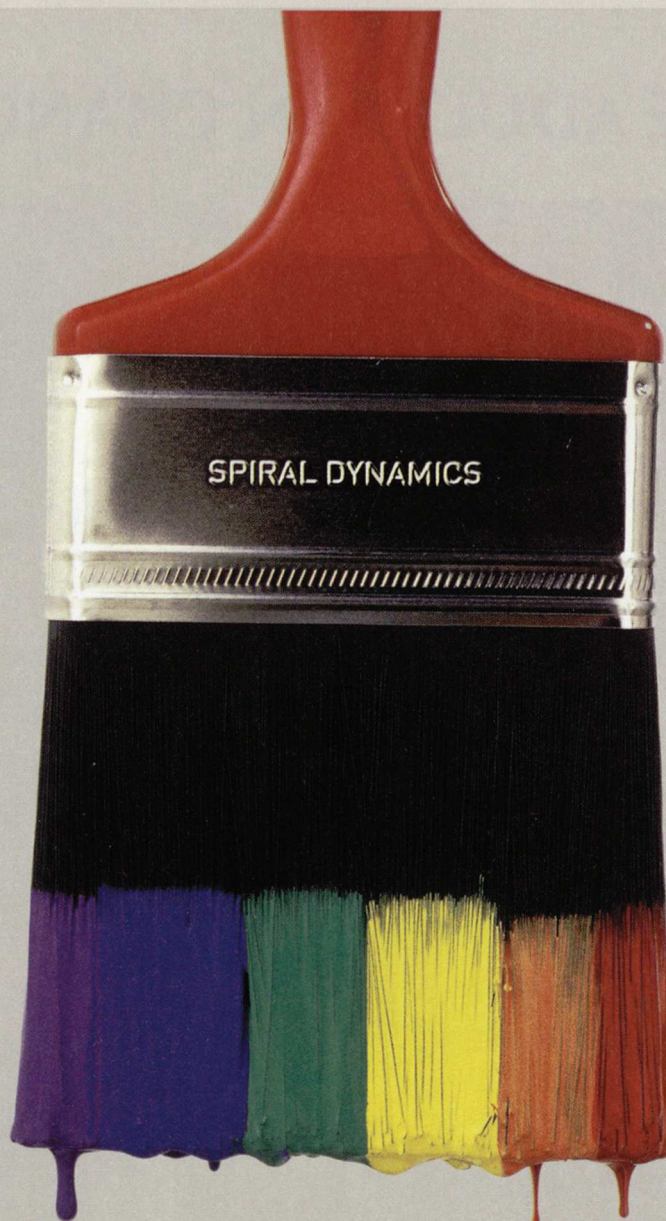
## The colors of change

Iraq and Afghanistan may get a little help from a new developmental theory

For those more than a little worried about exactly how America and its allies are going to succeed in rebuilding Iraq and Afghanistan, help may be on the way—in the form of the up-and-coming psycho/social/political theory of Spiral Dynamics (SD). Dr. Don Beck, longtime SD evangelist and a regular contributor to *What Is Enlightenment?*, was officially approached last August by Tony Blair's Department of International Development, headed up by rising Labour politician Baroness Amos. After initial consultations, Beck was all set to help show the Blair/Bush politicians exactly how the world might look better using the SD developmental model. However, just as this issue went to press, Amos's star was lifted even higher as she was promoted to a new office—leader of the British House of Lords. And whether or not her replacement will show a similar interest in this pioneering theory remains to be seen. While SD, which charts levels of cultural development using a color-coded eight-level system, is hardly new to the international scene—Beck

used it in South Africa, and integral theorist Ken Wilber has written several books highlighting the importance of the theory—without question this would be its biggest stage yet. And if the deal is done, Beck may see his own stock skyrocket in a world desperately in need of innovative mechanisms to deal with the developmental issues that confront and confound the planners of the war on terrorism. The U.S. may be the world's policeman, but few would argue that we

desperately need to be a better guidance counselor for the world's developing countries. Maybe SD could give Bush and Blair a leg up. After all, at least one forward-looking president in North America seems to think so. Indeed, the Fox government of Mexico is a recent addition to Beck's client list, joining a number of major multinationals. It's a brave new world, and one day soon SD colors may be all the rage. Now if we could just convince Ariel Sharon . . .



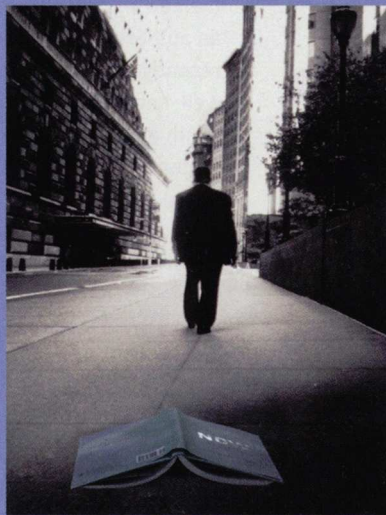
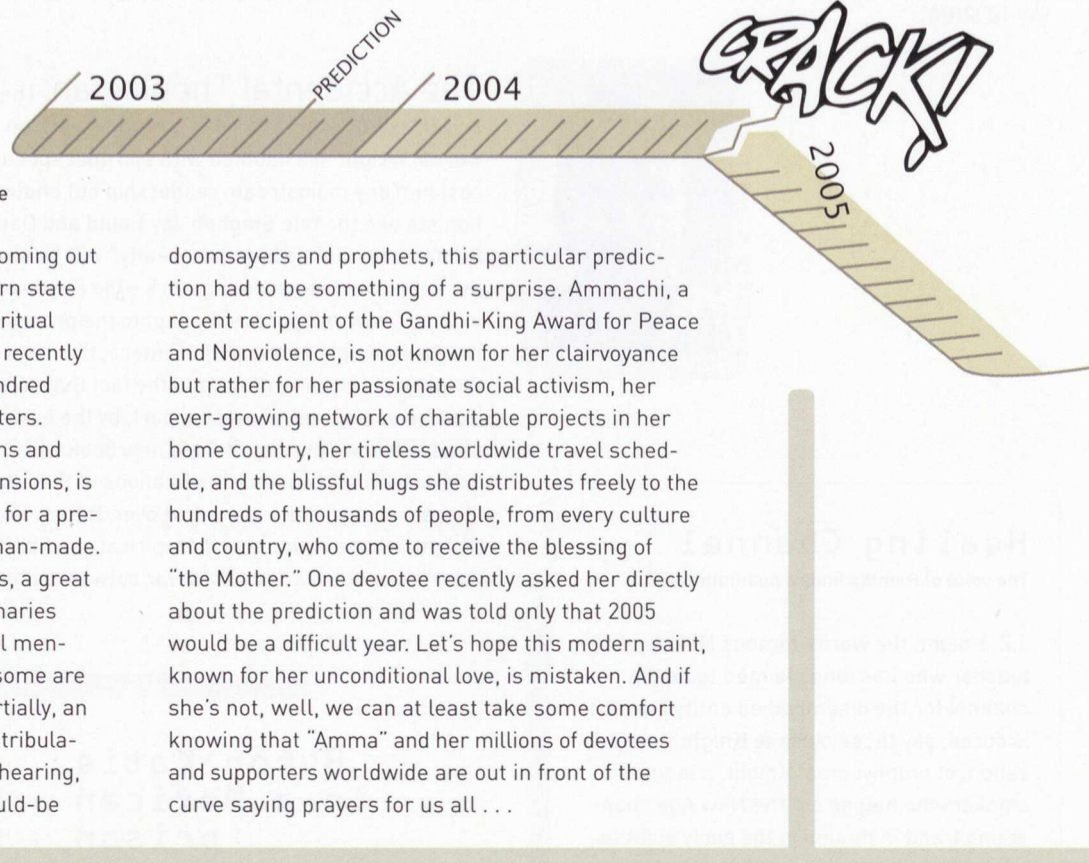


## Praying for time

India's hugging saint warns of a precarious future

World cataclysm in 2005? That's the word coming out of Cochin, India, a coastal city in the southern state of Kerala where world-renowned Indian spiritual teacher Ammachi (Mata Amritanandamayi) recently held a birthday celebration with several hundred thousand of her closest friends and supporters. Ammachi, whose stature among both Indians and Westerners has achieved near mythic dimensions, is said to have recently given 2005 as the year for a predicted global cataclysm, either natural or man-made. While the birthday bash was, by all accounts, a great success—the guest list included such luminaries as the current president of India—no official mention of the prediction was made. However, some are saying that the celebration was, at least partially, an attempt to lessen the impact of the coming tribulation through prayer. Even for those used to hearing, and dismissing, the warnings of today's would-be

doomsayers and prophets, this particular prediction had to be something of a surprise. Ammachi, a recent recipient of the Gandhi-King Award for Peace and Nonviolence, is not known for her clairvoyance but rather for her passionate social activism, her ever-growing network of charitable projects in her home country, her tireless worldwide travel schedule, and the blissful hugs she distributes freely to the hundreds of thousands of people, from every culture and country, who come to receive the blessing of "the Mother." One devotee recently asked her directly about the prediction and was told only that 2005 would be a difficult year. Let's hope this modern saint, known for her unconditional love, is mistaken. And if she's not, well, we can at least take some comfort knowing that "Amma" and her millions of devotees and supporters worldwide are out in front of the curve saying prayers for us all . . .

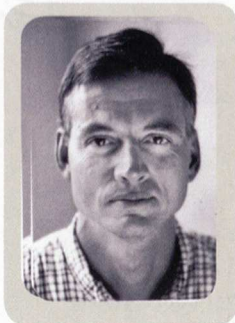


## Stillness stops speaking

Eckhart Tolle steps away from the limelight

These days, if you're Eckhart Tolle, life is good. Your book, *The Power of Now*, has sold over 700,000 copies and still sits atop the bestseller lists. Your newest release, *Stillness Speaks*, is flying off the shelves. Oprah and Meg Ryan have publicly promoted your work. Every talk, every public appearance, every retreat sells out almost immediately. Offers of all kinds are pouring in and you cannot respond to even a fraction of the requests for your time, your teaching, your wisdom, and your guidance. So what's the next step? What does the future hold for the man who has inspired millions to forget about the future altogether? How about retirement? Don't laugh, because according to those close to the phenomenally successful teacher, Tolle is planning to hang up his traveling shoes and disappear back into the quiet stillness that speaks to him when the crowds of admiring devotees are far, far away. Some say he has grown disillusioned with his position as a teacher, some say he was worried the organization around him was getting too, well . . . organized, and some say that Tolle, who once wandered the park benches of London a happy homeless mystic, would just prefer a version of the "now" that is a little less hectic. Whatever the case, he has given his last American teaching for the foreseeable future and plans only to fulfill a few remaining obligations in 2004. After that, it's anyone's guess, but *WIE* has learned that his only definite plan at this point is to start work on a "substantial book" tentatively entitled *A New Earth*, which will address humanity's spiritual development on the collective level. No one really doubts that we will eventually see Tolle active again in the public arena, but it would also be wise not to underestimate the hermetic instincts of a man who once said that he can sit for over two hours and not have a single thought . . .





**The Accidental Theologian:** The esteemed author of *The Moral Animal* and *Nonzero*, Robert Wright, is hard at work on a new book. In each of his previous works, Wright has dabbled with spiritual speculations, but just barely—not enough to cost him any mainstream readership but enough to earn the ire of mainstream evolutionists like the late Stephen Jay Gould and Daniel Dennett. However, the man who Bill Clinton says “influenced me greatly” will be stepping a little deeper in this time with the subject of his upcoming work—*The Future of Religion*. He told *WIE* that he plans to explore “how religions will adapt to the process of globalization,” as well as to examine the future implications of the “interaction between science and religion.” Considering Wright’s previous writings and the fact that some of his more adventurous speculations have been inspired, at least in part, by the early-twentieth-century visionary Teilhard de Chardin, we predict that his new book will: 1) be impeccably argued, 2) speculate on fascinating planetary implications of the future of evolution and spirituality, and 3) upset materialists the world over. It took Nixon to go to China; maybe it will take Wright, whose rational and empirical sensibilities are finely honed, to help further thaw the centuries-long cold war between religion and science . . .

## Healing Channel

The voice of Ramtha finds a quantum cure

J.Z. Knight, the world-famous New Age teacher who has long claimed to be the channel for the disembodied entity Ramtha, is cured, say those close to Knight’s organization, of emphysema. Knight, a longtime smoker who helped set the New Age channeling trend in motion in the early eighties, was recently diagnosed with the disease, and tests showed that she had small “holes in her lungs.” No longer, Knight claims. These days, she is physically healthy and her lungs are cured, an amazing transformation that by all reports is reflected in a complete change in her outward appearance and energy level. So what’s the explanation? According to Knight, the answer can be found in a technique based on the teachings of Ramtha, and on the science of quantum physics. Apparently, Knight simply accessed a part of her brain, a neural net “in which she had never been a smoker,” that allowed her physical body to eventually change and heal to reflect that new reality. Confused? Well, frankly, we are too, but something seems to have worked. And though Knight has refused to go back to the doctor for more tests, she feels well enough to consider herself free of the disease. Maybe it was providence, maybe it was new physics, but whatever the case, it looks like Ramtha will have a few more years on this planet to convince us why quantum mechanics is the key to more spiritual power than we could ever imagine. Even Werner Heisenberg would never have guessed . . .

## Byron Katie in a Mexican prison

The popular spiritual teacher takes her technique across the Rio Grande



Byron Katie’s four-step enlightenment therapy—called “The Work” by Katie and her students—is expanding a little beyond the usual spiritual markets. Katie, who was named a “visionary for the new millennium” by no less popular an authority than *Time* magazine, was recently to be found performing her well-known transformation techniques south of the border in the Mexican penal system. What turn of events prompted her to take an interest in the prisons of our southern neighbor is unknown, but apparently it’s not just Mexico. She was recently seen at San Quentin prison in northern California as well. And speaking of California, other new developments in Katie’s work may be pointing her a little closer to the city of angels. Yes—move over, Oprah—Hollywood has come calling. *WIE* has learned that the networks are looking to make Byron Katie a spiritual version of Dr. Phil. Nothing definite yet, but negotiations are ongoing, and with Katie’s growing popularity and the simple design of her four-question therapy, the native Californian might soon be performing The Work under the bright lights of a television studio. Now, who would you be if you weren’t attached to *that* thought? . . .





## Myst Meets Mysticism

A unique computer game gives new meaning to the term "interactive"

All right, we'll admit it: The New Age has entered the twenty-first century. Yes, with the release of a spiritually themed video game with a biometric twist, the void between "the Age of Aquarius" and the year 2004 has definitively been bridged. The brainchild of two self-described "New Age entrepreneurs from Eldorado Springs," it's called *The Journey to Wild Divine* (featuring a user manual intro written by Jean Houston herself). And the best thing is, it's actually pretty cool.

What makes it cool isn't exactly the game itself—a *Myst*-like adventure with lush graphics and a mysterious plot—but rather its state-of-the-art *controller*. Wearing three "magic rings," or biofeedback sensors, the player advances through the game by manipulating objects on screen. These sensors fit on the tips of your fingers and detect two different types of biometric data: your Skin Conductance Level (SCL) and Heart Rate Variability (HRV). SCL represents the activity of your sweat glands, which increases or decreases depending on how excited or relaxed you are, and HRV is a sophisticated calculation of the difference in heart rate from one beat to the next.

Now, games in the *Myst* genre typically require the player to solve mind-bending puzzles, but here the idea is to participate in "events," relying on your feelings, breathing, and imagination to interact with the game and complete the task at hand. The Tibetan ex-monk Nawang Khechog acts as your in-game guide,

giving helpful advice as you strive to juggle balls by thinking creative thoughts, maneuver boats with rapid breathing, practice archery with your eyes closed, steer hot-air balloons through deep breathing exercises, and in various other ways use the Force. Some of these events are harder than others, but getting frustrated is often precluded by design. When, for instance, a rabbit doesn't appear fully from behind a wall because you aren't relaxed enough, you know from experience that getting frustrated or anxious isn't going to help matters. And as far as kids are concerned, unless they're unusually patient, this game is going to put them to sleep.

*Wild Divine* has a high novelty factor and replay value (the user manual even suggests returning to your favorite event as a daily meditation technique), but most significantly, it shows exciting potential for the future of interactive games. One can only imagine that those impatient kids of today might be wearing full body suits of biometric sensors a decade from now, immersed in an epic virtual-reality spiritual adventure, meditating somewhere in the infinite vastness of cyberspace with all their gaming peers. ([www.wilddivine.com](http://www.wilddivine.com))



# pulse)))

News, gossip, and rumors  
from an emerging culture

It's a bird, it's a plane, it's a . . . sail? **Joe Firmage**, founder of the new venture *ManyOne*, is teaming up with **Ann Druyan**, widow of the late **Carl Sagan**, and the organization Sagan founded, *The Planetary Society*, to launch the first "solar sail" spacecraft next year. The launch of this highly experimental spacecraft is scheduled for next spring, and so is the launch of Firmage's new web portal, **ManyOne**. Think "PBS of the web," says Firmage, the onetime wunderkind of the internet age, who has not lost his passion for awakening the masses to the wonder and mystery of the cosmos. And what about his scientific ventures into the realms of zero-point energy and antigravity? They're on hold, he told *WIE*, though he still believes resolutely that the world of physics is destined for some major shake-ups in the next few years. . . . **Howard Bloom**, author of *The Global Brain* and *The Lucifer Principle* and former PR guru to rock

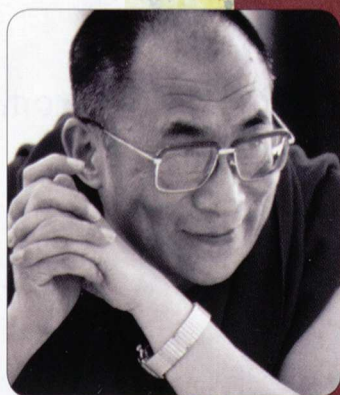
stars like **John Mellencamp** and **Michael Jackson**, recently ventured outside his house to give a public lecture, something he had not done in over fifteen years. The talk, given in Brooklyn, NY, where he lives, was a step in a new direction for this brilliant eccentric who has spent the better part of the last two decades watching his body struggle with CFS, or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, while his mind contemplated the mysteries of evolution and his pen produced thousands of passionate pages of original ideas—only a small minority of which have actually been published. Bloom's message, with its call for a "religion of capitalism," was a little disconcerting to some in the audience, but given his history of visionary thought, we'll assume he's on to something that's not yet obvious to the rest of us. . . . The Hindu holiday of **Guru Purnima** comes every July as a time to celebrate and honor one's spiritual mentor. Rumor has it that students of the Costa Rica-based Israeli-born spiritual teacher **Tyohar**, a young guru once considered by some to be the spiritual heir to **Osho Rajneesh**, have given the holiday an extra kick by getting together and taking the powerful psychedelic drug mescaline to honor this sacred day. Tyohar is one of a new breed of Westerners teaching a form of Advaita Vedanta, a fast-track enlightenment philosophy derived from Hinduism that claims to be able to take the seeker directly to the ultimate state of nondual consciousness beyond all experience. And the way a mescaline drug experience fits into that picture is, well—we have no idea. If only Castaneda were still alive to explain

it all. . . . And while we're on the subject of Costa Rica, spiritual teacher **Satyam Nadeen**, who founded the well-known retreat center in that country, **Pura Vida**, is coming out with a new book. Nadeen, who has recently recovered from a bout with cancer, is calling this one *Finders Keepers: Beyond Enlightenment*. . . . For Tibetan Tulku **Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche**, the road to enlightenment continues to pass by way of Hollywood. The director of the highly acclaimed Tibetan tale *The Cup* is hard at work on a new movie tentatively titled *Travellers and Magicians*. Shown on the cover of a recent issue of *Shambhala Sun* wearing designer sunglasses in a movie-star-like pose, the rinpoche has raised the hackles of some fellow Tibetans for acting rather un-monk-like with his proclivity toward "worldly activities," which is, we guess, a euphemism for making movies. **Lama Surya Das**, hardly a conventional Tibetan practitioner himself, spent time last year in Bhutan hanging out on the set with the talented Dzongsar. Surya Das recently stumbled on some star power of his own, *WIE* has learned, when the star of *Donnie Darko*, **Jake Gyllenhaal**, showed up at one of his events declaring that Surya's book, *Awakening the Buddha Within*, had changed his life. . . . Presidential hopeful **Dennis Kucinich** has well-known spiritual inclinations, having been close to such New Age figures as **Shirley MacLaine** and spiritual teacher **Chris Griscom** in the years after his tumultuous mayoral stint in Cleveland. Apparently Kucinich, one of the few vegans in Congress, still considers himself something of a seeker, and *WIE* has heard various claims as to the sort of spiritual writing that is currently capturing his attention—from the lofty visions of twentieth-century Indian





## PULPIT



## The Ethics of Interdependence

H.H. the Dalai Lama

**WIE:** *Because many of us in the West have left the religious traditions behind, we've also lost the moral and ethical foundation they provided for us. Where can we turn today for a new morality that will be relevant to our contemporary scientific age?*

**H.H. THE DALAI LAMA:** Once I had a conversation with a German politician whose opinion was that morality and ethics have to be grounded in a religious faith tradition. Without that grounding, he felt, it is impossible to have an ethical system. But I disagree. My own understanding of an ethical system is that it provides us with a way of conduct, or a way of thinking, that takes long-term welfare and happiness into account. And I believe we must find a secular, or nonreligious, ethics.

I often say to people that right from birth, we learn to appreciate the affection of our mother. And our mother freely and naturally gives her affection to us. There is a reason for this: that affection is crucial for the survival of the child. And many other animals have a similar sort of experience—the children are also entirely dependent on the mother for survival. But in some species, such as turtles, the children are not dependent on the mother, once the eggs are laid. So if someone tried to bring a mother turtle and her offspring together, would they feel affection? Would there be a bond? Probably not. Her children are independent from birth, so they would never develop that kind of feeling of closeness.

Now, if we extend this logic of dependence further—from the family out to the community and society, to the national and international levels, and even to the economy and environment—then we can see how interconnected we are, how interdependent the world is. Given this reality, we cannot escape the necessity for care toward each other. This has nothing to do with religion. I'm not talking about God or Buddha. I'm talking about understanding and appreciating this highly complex and interdependent world. Then, even from the point of view of one's own personal survival and well-being, one can argue for an ethical system based on affection.

A young child's affection does not come through faith; it is naturally very strong. I think the mistake we make is that when we're grown up, we start to think we're independent. We think that in order to be successful we don't need others—except maybe to exploit them! This is the source of all sorts of problems, scandals, and corruption. But if we had more respect for other people's lives—a greater sense of concern and awareness—it would be a very different world. We have to introduce the reality of interdependence. Then people would discover that, according to that reality, affection and compassion are essential if anything is ever going to change.

philosopher-sage **Sri Aurobindo** to the esoteric theosophical teachings of **Helen Roerich**. For an aspiring president, **Aurobindo**, who led India's independence movement before **Gandhi**, would seem the better role model, but then again, he did spend a significant amount of time in a British prison. . . . **Ken Wilber** and **Integral Institute** (through their *Integral Naked* edutainment division) are planning to get in on the recent trend in NY and SF toward spiritually inspired raves—where hip nightlife meets the latest in spiritual ideas—with some holistic fun of their own. Called *Integral Naked LIVE*, these events will vary from discussion forums to multimedia spectacles to all-out raves, with the bigger extravaganzas being a combination of all three. We've also heard rumors of plans between Integral Institute and **Ed Kowalczyk**, lead singer of the band *Live*, to put on a major benefit concert for the organization under the auspices of *IN-LIVE*. So let's chug a few Red Bulls, warm up with some downward dogs, and dance!

*If you have any news, rumors, or gossip appropriate for Pulse, please email [pulse@wie.org](mailto:pulse@wie.org).*



# God is a DJ

Robbie Wootton has a vision for spiritual nightlife from NYC to Shanghai

by Maura R. O'Connor



**ENTERING A NARROW STEEL-REINFORCED** door at 530 West 27th Street, my colleague and I were immediately confronted by a dozen construction workers feverishly pounding away at floors and walls. As the screeches and howls of their power tools filled our ears while we stepped around vats of wet cement, dodging electrical wires, it was difficult to envision the scene we were told would take place in six weeks. But by

raves, by upgrading them to the spiritual realm, the 85,000-square-foot building is destined to become the second of seven nightclubs that will be located at the "light centers of the earth." This multimillion-dollar endeavor is fueled by an ambitious vision from what some might consider an unlikely source.

Two years ago, restaurant entrepreneur, music industry veteran, and general entertainment capitalist Robbie Wootton

Spirit Dublin was already up and running; after the opening of Spirit New York in November, clubs in Cape Town, Athens, Sydney, Shanghai, and Rio de Janeiro are to follow. As if falling into a rabbit hole, we had stepped through that door right in the middle of a process of creation that was making Robbie's vision a literal, physical manifestation on the streets of New York.

Raves themselves are easier to define when one examines them in contrast to the previous inhabitants of the club circuit. In short: The eighties produced the narcissistic cocaine-snorting materialists who themselves were the offspring of the awfully phony, also cocaine-snorting, Disco generation. At least this is how a raver would put it to you. In truth, narcissism, drug-induced fun, and sexual overtones have never stopped defining the club circuit no matter which subculture eventually takes over. The real difference between raves and their close ancestors lies in the belief, on the ravers' part, that *depth* is an essential aspect of

House, techno, trance: whatever you want to call it, music is understood by ravers as far more than just entertainment—for them, it's literally a medium for transcendence.

the time you are reading this, that ramshackle building site will have become transformed with the tangibly charged energy of artists, musicians, spiritual personalities, and thousands of entertainment-hungry club goers. As part of a larger plan to revolutionize the all-night dance party phenomenon known as

began a journey that would eventually land him in the African bush. There, he received what he describes as a "calling" to open up seven "Spirit" clubs around the world, whose mission it would be to "take a role in encouraging people to evolve to a new plane of consciousness." When we went to see Robbie in New York,





a rave experience. Words like *spirituality*, *oneness*, *love*, and *community* are part of the common vocabulary used to describe the experience of dancing till 8am with thousands of one's peers. These may not be inaccurate words to use but unfortunately they are often spoken by a person on E, not a spiritually awakened individual. Ecstasy and methamphetamines of every kind defined rave culture to such an extent during the nineties that law enforcement officials and the general public were forced to respond with disdain and force toward the entire subculture. In a twist of irony, the very spot where the new "drug-free" Spirit Club New York is located was previously the infamous Twilo nightclub. Twilo was shut down two years ago, at least in part as a result of the deaths of two of its patrons who overdosed. But it was also a result of Mayor Giuliani's crackdown on disreputable nightlife, often characterized by the presence of drugs. And where there were raves, there were drugs. Until, that is, Robbie Wootton entered the picture.

Upon meeting this Dublin native, what is immediately striking is the impressive span of his limbs, evident even in the length of his fingers. Robbie has a penchant for staring into the distance when attempting to articulate a particular personal experience or idea and then speaking concisely in a rapid manner about anything from Elvis ("Elvis was a prophet") to the politics of working with architects. Speaking with him also made me realize that we live in a time when we don't have to go very far east to be exposed to the spiritual dimension of life or even to make an effort to attend a New Age spa or meditation retreat. Rather, in the twenty-first century spiritual revelation can happen at a rock concert. Robbie has been close to U2 since he was part of the creation of Windmill Studios in Dublin where many of U2's albums, including *The Joshua Tree*, were recorded. It was backstage on U2's Elevation tour in 2001 that Robbie was first introduced, through a conversation with a stranger, to what he describes

as "this world that had been a complete mystery, but that I had always wanted to know about." That encounter changed his perception irrevocably. Having taken a year off to travel around the world, he found that whether in Southeast Asia, South America, North America, or Africa, he continually met people whose understanding of the spiritual realm set him on fire. These travels ultimately confirmed for him that a fundamental Oneness underlies the human experience, a sense that grew more profound with every border, continent, and language that he encountered.

Considering Robbie's history in the entertainment industry, it may be no mystery that he received a calling to open a spiritual *nightclub*. What is remarkable about his story is that he describes his past as that of a playboy who not only founded many clubs but also participated in the drug culture that surrounded them. But after realizing how negative his lifestyle was, he didn't simply reject the entire world that it had all taken place in. Instead, he recognized that the positive elements of entertainment, such as music and togetherness, were potential tools to be used in the spiritual awakening of others, and ever since he has been attempting to upgrade that very same world. But this would only work as long as the negative elements, such as the consumption of drugs, were kept out of the picture. Then there is the equally remarkable fact that Robbie received a calling to open *seven* spiritual nightclubs, not just one. Nontoxic raves? *Seven* of them? Attempting to spiritually awaken people through entertainment on every continent of the world? The unique optimism of such ideas did not fail to catch our attention and is the reason why we found ourselves in this downtown warehouse district of Manhattan, stepping around vats of wet cement.

The physical dimensions of the space were already breathtaking. A state-of-the-art project, it would mainly consist of three tiers, called Body, Mind, and



Soul. Robbie gave us a running narrative of what everything was and what it all meant. The third floor, he told us, would be open most of the week and house several studios for holistic healers, aromatherapists, and yoga instructors, and possibly a gallery space for artist Alex Grey's installation, *Sacred Mirrors*. He showed us the clinically clean tiled kitchen that would provide patrons of the restaurant with vegetarian/raw food on the second-floor mezzanine. Retractable glass doors were to enclose it so that diners could look down on the 2,000-person-capacity dance floor. This bottom floor was where the stage would be located, upon which choreographed performances created by contemporary performing artists like Gabrielle Roth would take place every Saturday night. "Our show starts at

about our space is about the light," Robbie declared. "The journey here is about good; it's a *triumph* of light over darkness."

In a literal sense, the light also illuminates the narrative that will be taking place on the stage and through various media, thereby orienting the clubgoers to a specific message. Robbie has been in control of every detail of the creation of Spirit, even down to the placement and role of the lights, and this kind of conscious intention is of utmost importance to him. Of course, there is no way to prevent people who just want to drink and have a good time from coming to Spirit (while the nontoxic nature of the environment is strongly emphasized, there will be a full bar on the second floor, albeit reinforced with fresh juices and energy boosters). But as Robbie explained,

**"God can be a DJ; God is Music; God is Sound; God is Vibration; everything in the Universe is Vibration."**

midnight, which is really Sunday, so it will become, I won't say a place of worship, but a place of community, a place of celebration." The performances at Spirit are part of what distinguishes the venue from the "DJ-oriented darkness" that so often defines a club experience. "Everything

"Even if people come simply because they heard, 'Oh, that's a really hot club right now,'" the sense of premeditation evident in the details, the overall energy, and the structure of the venue will guarantee that people, "can only be affected positively by what's here . . ."

A crucial element of this positivity will be the music, but a little contextualization may be needed to understand why. House, techno, trance: whatever you want to call it, music is understood by ravers as far more than just entertainment—for them, it's literally a medium for transcendence. Some go so far as to cite scientific evidence for such beliefs, mainly that a drum machine, for example, can maintain a repetitive beat infinitely longer than a human can, bringing people together in a dance marathon that leads to a feeling that they are part of a collective organism. Robbie believes that because most dance music is created by kids in their bedroom, therefore

bypassing the music industry, the music is coming directly from the divine, through the kid, and then into the dance hall. DJs who are spiritually aware or awake can create a flow with their music, a vibration that, Robbie is convinced, literally increases the consciousness of the people dancing to it. No raver would disagree. In light of this, music is undoubtedly one of Robbie's most powerful tools. He reinforced this when he told us, "For the last ten years a lot of ravers have been saying that God is a DJ because they've been having these religious experiences on the dance floor. What we are trying to say is: Yes, God can be a DJ; God is Music; God is Sound; God is Vibration; everything in the Universe is Vibration."

There is no doubt that Spirit is part of a larger movement in the rave subculture toward nontoxic environments, in response to the destructive drug consumption that defined it for so long. Whether it is evidence of a larger movement in our culture to emphasize the positive, uplifting elements of art, music, and entertainment in the context of spirituality remains to be seen. If Robbie is right when he says that the youth of today are the first generation in decades not to have a "drug of choice," this may well be the case. According to him, we will finally be able to choose community, wholeness, and true awakening over the illusory liberation of drugs that defined the sixties all the way up through the nineties in every subculture. This is no small thing, and Spirit may be just the place to go if we want to get the ball rolling. ■

For more information about Spirit performances, events, etc., go to [www.spiritdublin.com](http://www.spiritdublin.com) or [www.spiritnyc.com](http://www.spiritnyc.com)





# Naked on Stilts

## Notes from Burning Man

by Ross Robertson

### PULLING UP TO NEVADA'S LEGENDARY

Burning Man festival was like landing a time machine. As it came to a hissing, smoking stop, a lump rose in my throat—is this the right year? “Welcome to Black Rock City,” said a man in a cowboy hat. “Welcome home.” My sister-in-law Catherine and I got out of the car, as instructed. Grabbing a two-foot length of rebar, we each struck the Virgin Bell, a once-only privilege for first-timers. Thud. Through plumes of dust, I made out the edges of a circular encampment stretching for a mile in either direction; beyond that, the mountains.

We got back in the car and drove in. Though I had no idea yet what to expect, I knew I wasn't home. For one thing, people at home wear clothes. I used to hang out naked plenty myself, in my Frisbee-wielding, mushroom-munching hippie days, but I'd never seen *anything* like this. Naked with parasols, naked with saxophones, naked on stilts with glitter and a duck mask. A guy scooted by on a home-built scooter with seven-foot handlebars. Before I could register whether or not he was wearing anything, he vanished behind a Dodge van fitted out as a sheet-metal fish with electric eyes. I skirted left around a line of cars whose drivers had stopped to have their genitals “inspected” at a roadside station. Whatever you've heard about Burning Man, it's probably true.



Way out in the featureless boondocks 120 miles north of Reno, somewhere between spiritual pilgrimage and spring break, thirty thousand people were gathering to participate in a sort of do-it-

yourself municipal art project. Together, on an ancient dry lake bed known as the “playa,” they would build an entirely functional city from the ground up, only to tear it (or burn it) all down again seven days later. Everything they needed to

I wasn't uneasy about the whole thing, not least because I spent too many years myself as a Deadhead with delusions of grandeur. But everyone said Burning Man was different. It didn't give *to* you; it asked *from* you. It was the anti-rock

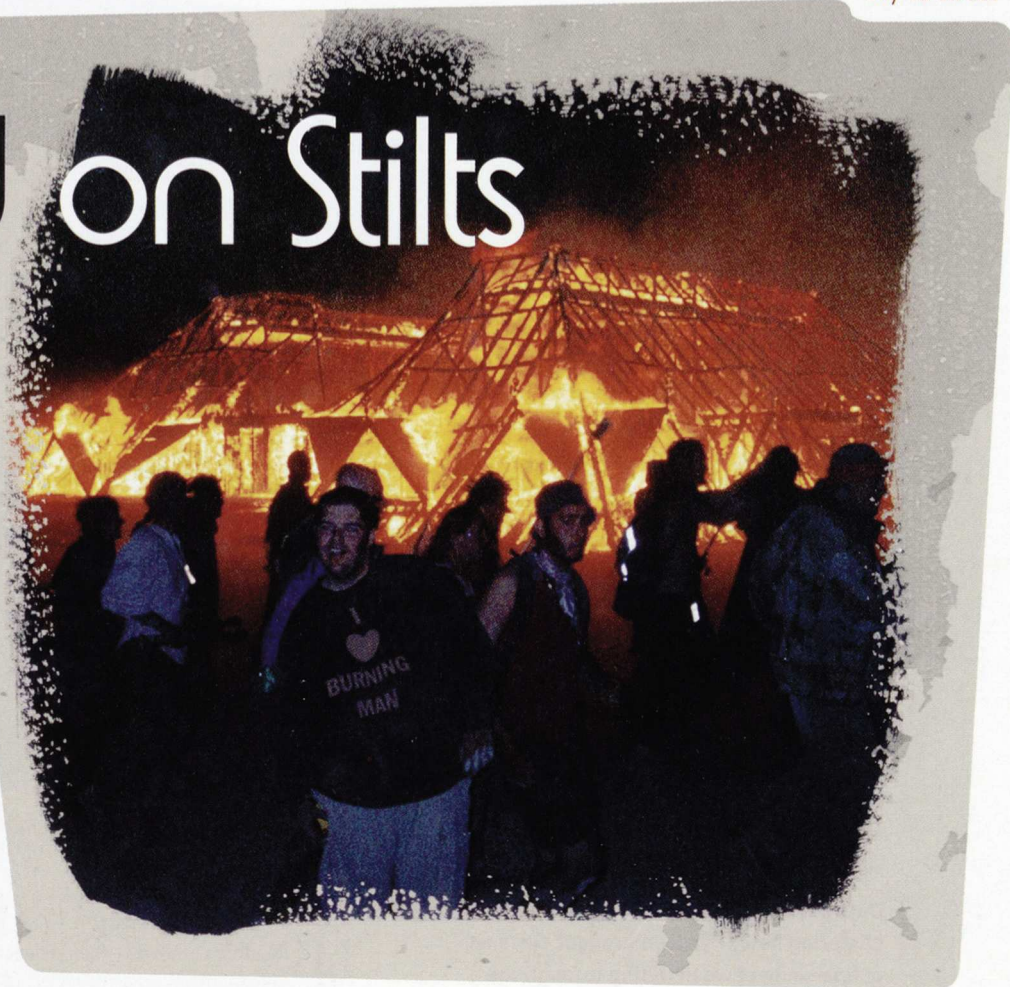
Whatever you've heard about Burning Man, it's probably true.

survive—food, water, shelter, glo-sticks—they were bringing with them. All their waste, they'd carry out. Radical self-reliance, they called it. Radical self-expression. In layman's terms, that means Mad Max was about to kick Woodstock into high gear.

Arriving at our camp, I couldn't help wondering what I was doing there. You might be asking yourself the same question: What does a week-long summer hoedown have to do with enlightenment for the twenty-first century? Well, that's what I went to learn. I'd be lying if I said

concert, the anti-consumptive experience. You couldn't buy or sell anything. You weren't even supposed to barter with people. If you had something, you gave it away: your time, your ideas, your spiffy hat. Black Rock City was built on one simple principle—participation—and its entire infrastructure was designed to serve that purpose alone, to foster spontaneous involvement between its temporary citizens.

By all accounts, this kind of coming together is a rare thing. In spite of inhospitable conditions, thousands of





people give countless hours and dollars to the realization of a collective vision. As I learned when I got there and had the chance to interview founder Larry Harvey, that vision has everything to do with the future. What was once simply a yearly event, oriented around the traditional burning of a wooden effigy, is rapidly becoming a cultural movement. And its sights are set on nothing less than an ethical revitalization of modern life. "Every society must have at its core a sphere that is noncommodified, that is spiritual," Harvey said. As he told it, the seeds of that new social core are already in the wind.



Daytime in the Black Rock Desert was blistering hot; afternoon brought curtains of fine white powder riffling through the air—the notorious alkali dust blown from the playa floor. As advertised, the sheer energy of involvement was extraordinary. Hundreds of theme camps lined the central esplanade, presenting a cornucopia of opportunities to all—contact improv to rope bondage, speed dating to body painting, Advaita Kabbalah Evangelism to Sacred Monkey Tickle Healing. Each day, the frenzy of activity amplified as the week marched toward its Saturday night zenith, when everyone would gather for the customary burning of the Man. Art installations popped up, parades and processions crisscrossed the playa, herds of bathers chased after water trucks spraying down the roads.

"People come out here and they just enlist," Burning Man's art curator, LadyBee told me. "We get people who just drop in and say, 'Can I help?' And they do shifts every day, and they own it, and they become devoted. It's interesting, because you'd think, 'Who wants to work here? We just want to run around and have a good time.' But people *do* want

## FOUNDER LARRY HARVEY

"What we do here is rather like consumerism. What does consumerism tell us every day of our lives? It says to us, as we sit entranced in front of a TV, 'Be all that you can be. Be real. Be authentic. You can be yourself.' It's a simulacrum of being. It's the unhallowed trafficking in sacred things, in which things have been substituted for states of being. Here, we offer people the same thing, but it happens to be authentic, it originates in their soul. It doesn't blind them to their inner resources; it doesn't make them empty and lonely and hungry. Oh no. It allows them to realize for the first time in their life that they can create a reality out of themselves.

"We're creating a national organization, a network. I think that a great discourse is beginning, and a value system has emerged. But the reality of it naturally generates out of this spontaneous interaction between people. So instead of an ideology, what we're creating is an internalized ethos. Now that may sound idealistic, but if through spiritual rituals you renew that ethos—not only at this event but repeatedly,

hundreds of times—then it becomes the basis of a new kind of spirituality that can begin to inform the lives of people. Without being bidden, our community is already forming its own regional gatherings. And the next phase is coming. We're going to say, 'Go out into the world and do interactive art in civic spaces. We know how to do it, and we can show you how.' The numbers of people affected by us will be far greater than the ones who ever come to this event, or even regional events. And ultimately, then, I think that will become a new kind of basis for democracy, which will be value based, community based, and can more than countervail the forces that are corrupting it."



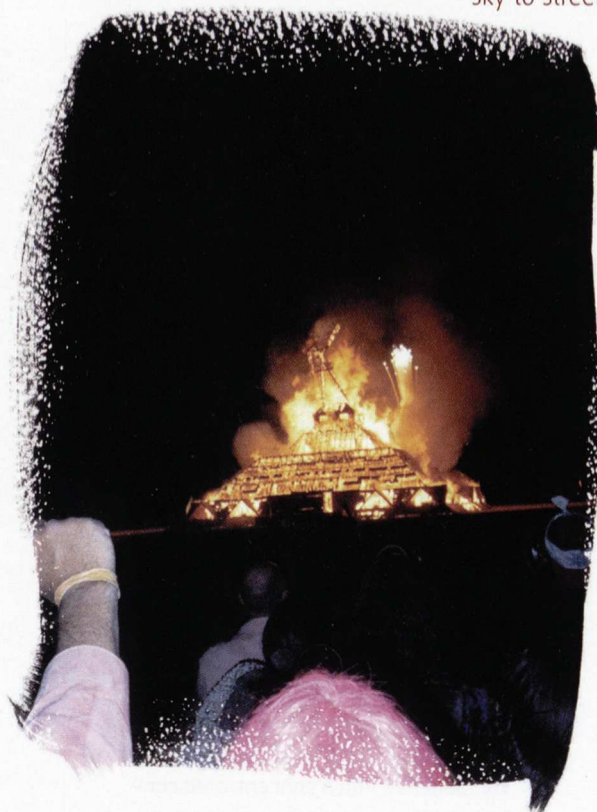
to work, because by working here they become more embedded in the event and more connected to everything." Plainly, she felt the same way herself. "Who would have known?" she said, starting to cry. "Who would have known ten years ago that I would be here doing this, and that it would be so gratifying?"

Larry Harvey and LadyBee conveyed both a genuinely infectious enthusiasm for Burning Man and a wide perspective on its significance. But what about

the people on the street? I wondered. I wanted to find out why they had come, what it meant in their lives. So, notebooks and recording gear in tow—along with the requisite dust mask and ski goggles—I set out on my bike to interview as many as I could. Everyone seemed to have at least one project going; this was mine. As I cruised the streets, camps, and crowds for people to talk to, I also explored the open desert surrounding



Opposite: *La Contessa*, the great Spanish galleon, appears at Burning Man for the second year running—complete with crows nests, four wheels, and a full bar; Left: Dancing into oblivion at one of Black Rock City's ubiquitous laser-lit dancefloors; Right: The Man topples over at Saturday night's burn.



the Great Temple, atop which stood the eighty-foot-tall figure of the Man himself. It was pregnant with art and strangeness. The theme this year was "Beyond Belief," invoking the Ground of Being beneath all rational ideas. But more of the art tended toward the hard-to-believe: a breathtaking replica of a Spanish galleon built around a school bus; five 13,000-pound granite slabs hanging from the Temple of Gravity.



"So, I decided to come out, and, like, this is, I love the desert, and, like, this is the best thing in the world," my first subject told me. "This is the best thing in the fuckin' world. Whatever. I enjoy it, that's all. I enjoy like, when things are not qualified, and they just become completely . . . quantified, that's when I like it. I like, enjoy it, it's perfect, whatever." The girl beside him commented under her breath, "He's a freak." "Yeah," he said, "Freak, *freak*, FREAK." They sat on the stairs of the Great Temple; some women in saris and snow boots walked the labyrinth at its base. "It's the whole city," the girl concluded, watching it all go by. "The whole temporary city of *just being*."

I went to Sanctuary Camp—where "just being" could mean guided meditation or group hula hoops—to get the spiritual perspective. Walking past a line of people jumping into glitter-filled bathtubs, I ducked under a large parachute where a bunch more lounged, away from the heat of the sun. "This is a place of peacefulness and rejuvenation, and chilling out from surviving the desert," one of them explained. "It's about enlightenment. The stripping away of all the good and the bad that you're used to so you can look at it from a better perspective. It's about self-expression without in any way being self-conscious, because everything is accepted and applauded here, no matter what you do or how far out it is. The only judgment that's allowed is, 'That's really cool.'"

Hmm. That reminded me of a notice I'd seen about the Tower of Enlightenment—"We'll incinerate self-help books provided by the citizens of Black Rock City, who will be able to rid themselves of various junk psychology texts, diet books, and spiritual quick-fix programs." Now this I had to see. Visions of a grand New Age Alexandria danced in my head as I pedaled hard toward what looked like a standard tower for high-tension wires. Expecting heaps and piles

of books—enough for a real bonfire—I was disappointed to find only a single measly strand of yellowed trade paperbacks strung around the tower's skeletal girth.



Nightfall brought Burning Man's true colors to light. Literally. Like a miniature (but very awesome) Las Vegas, Black Rock City lit up with neon, lasers, videos and projections, mirrors and discos, and more fire than rightly belongs outside a volcano. Everywhere I turned, fire-breathing art-cars, backpack- and bicycle-mounted flamethrowers, and industrial-strength propane cannons shot off erratically. During the day, many people had sheltered in their camps; now, as the temperature dropped, they donned their costumes, got high, and filled the streets. The zones and contours of a citywide mesh of parties were defined as much by the flow and friction of competing sound systems as they were by the bright beacons of the theme camps. An old-timer took it all in stride. His reason for coming: "Well, I'm off work right now, so I have the time. I have a knee injury

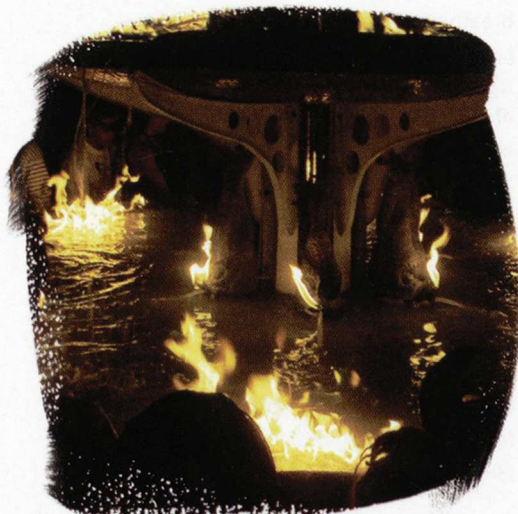


I'm recovering from. Plus, the costumes are cool."

My campmates put together an art installation called High on God. It was topped by a golden guitar with golden angel wings, with a quote from the Bible: "It is not the amount of faith we have, it is who we have faith in." Three pedestals held televisions with painted screens, lit from within. The third word of the neon title, "God," switched periodically to a fourth, "You." High on God. High on You. I found myself drawn to the weird, echoing music it emitted, as though a pair of distant jet engines were hidden inside. High on God. High on You. Two bright-eyed twenty-somethings wandered over. We launched into a concentrated conversation on anarchism and spiritual liberation; before we knew it, two hours had passed. "Did you take anything this week?" one of them asked as we walked together back to their camp. "You should have. It makes it so much better."



As if all that had come before was merely a prelude, Saturday night brought the Man's final detonation. Three hundred fire-jugglers performed for the crowd; rockets went up to rival any Fourth of July. Then, the explosions began, subsonic. Catherine turned to me and



said, "I have a word for your story: Overstimulation." My cheekbones were rattling so loud I had a hard time hearing her. "Overstimulation," she said again. While the 2,500-square-foot Great Temple was nuked to the ground, the crowd closed slowly in. For the first time, everyone at Burning Man was together in one place. Some people ran in a circle around the pyre; a few jumped in the coals. Most just milled around.

I remembered a conversation I'd had earlier in the week with an artist, Mark Grieve, who built a beautifully detailed scale model of a traditional Japanese temple. He called it the House of Godzilla, because, of course, it housed a shrine to the famous dinosaur at its center. "I believe in the profound nature of the ridiculous," he'd said. "And I tried to present something that was ridiculous, like a big rubber monster with a

"I believe in the profound nature of the ridiculous."

jewel-like quality. So you wouldn't come to this thing and think, 'Oh wow, somewhere to pray.' You'd come to it going, 'Oh, wow, that's made with some love and some care, but it's dedicated to something ridiculous.'"



I got up early Sunday to beat the traffic back to the Bay area. "It's easy to let go of something you just slapped together, but it's even easier to let go of something you really put a lot of time into," Grieve had commented, reporting his plans to burn the House of Godzilla. Driving through the camps on the way out, it struck me: All of this would disappear in a matter of days. Teams of volunteers were going to scour the playa for every last vestige of Burning Man. Then they too would vanish, leaving the desert empty. ■

(Left) Fire you can play with: dip your hands into water with burning kerosene floating on it, at the fountain called *Egeria*.

(Above) Forty-five strands of mirrors make up the dazzling *Arc of Reflection*.





## voices from the edge

DUANE ELGIN

JOHN PETERSEN

JIM GARRISON

ANDREW COHEN &  
KEN WILBER



### **DUANE ELGIN** **The Gathering World Storm and the Urgency of Our Awakening**

**ALTHOUGH HUMAN SOCIETIES HAVE** confronted major hurdles throughout history, the challenges of our era are unique. Never before has the human family been on the verge of devastating the Earth's biosphere and crippling its ecological foundations for countless generations to come. We are now encountering the leading edge of a world storm whose fierce winds will tear loose many institutions from their traditional moorings. In turn, the awakening of a reflective consciousness at the scale of the entire species is fast becoming an evolutionary necessity if we are to avoid an evolutionary crash and a long detour leading to a new dark age for humanity. The circle has closed and there is no escape—the Earth has become a single, tightly interconnected system. To illustrate, here



are five powerful, driving trends that are reinforcing one another and seem likely to produce, within the next decade or two, an unyielding, global, whole-system crisis:

**1. CLIMATE:** Human activity has already begun to destabilize the global climate, as greenhouse gases reach levels that are higher than they have been for 20 million years. Experts predict that we will experience increasing climate fluctuations with more intense storms, droughts, and stress to all ecosystems. Dramatic changes in global climate patterns will require us to make equally dramatic changes in the patterns of human living.

**2. POVERTY:** There is a staggering level of poverty in the world, and the divide between rich and poor is rapidly increasing. In terms of real income, it is estimated by the United Nations that the majority of people on the Earth (approximately 60 percent, or upwards of 4 billion people) live on the equivalent of \$3 a day or less! Despite being effectively shut out of the global economy, they still see the American media's vision of "the good life," of material affluence, advertised each day on television.

**3. POPULATION:** Human population has grown from 2 billion people in 1930 to roughly 6 billion today and, although moving toward stabilization, is expected to grow to roughly 8 billion by the 2020's. In practical terms, human beings now occupy all of the land favorable for human habitation. We are continuing to add people to the Earth at a rate equal to another Los Angeles every month, with the majority living in enormous urban shantytowns in the poorer countries.

**4. RESOURCES:** Fresh water is becoming a scarce resource at a global scale. It is estimated that by the 2020's, 40 percent of the people on the Earth will not have enough water to be self-sufficient in growing their own food and so will become increasingly dependent on nonlocal food sources. In this same time frame, we are expected to see an end to the era of cheap world oil. Much of the world's easily accessible oil has already been pumped out of the Earth, so that at the same time that the demand for oil is skyrocketing, the cost of supplying that oil is also increasing. The net result is that within a decade or so, world demand for oil will grow beyond what can be cheaply supplied, and we can expect the price of oil to permanently increase with reverberations throughout the global economy.

**5. SPECIES EXTINCTION:** There may be no greater measure of the integrity and resilience of the biosphere than its biodiversity. Yet

scientists estimate that 20 percent of all plant and animal species could be extinct in the next 30 years, and 50 percent could be extinct within the next 100 years. Human activities are causing a massive, rapid, and worldwide extinction of both plant and animal species that is unprecedented in human history. Indeed, the last great extinction of the current magnitude occurred with the die-off of dinosaurs and other life after an asteroid impact roughly 65 million years ago. We are tearing at the very fabric of life.

If the human family stumbles into the future inattentive, half asleep, and mesmerized by its mass media, then children alive today will surely inhabit a planet filled with monumental conflict, destruction, suffering, and despair. The urgency of our awakening as a species was made clear in the historic 1992 *Warning to Humanity*, where a majority of the world's living Nobel laureates in the sciences, as well as 1,600 other senior scientists, signed a cautionary statement declaring that "human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. . . . A great change in our stewardship of the earth and the life on it is required if vast human misery is to be avoided and our global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated." Pushed by the harsh reality that the Earth might be wounded beyond repair, the human family is being challenged to realize a new level of identity, responsibility, and reflective consciousness.

We no longer have the luxury of centuries for a gradual awakening. A world storm is gathering and we have only a decade or two in which to begin to genuinely mobilize our *collective* capacity for reflective consciousness. We are being challenged to pay attention to *how* we pay attention as an entire species. There is no necessity for us to go down this path and hit an ecological and evolutionary wall. We do have the time and opportunity to design ourselves back into nature with ways of living that are in harmony with the Earth and our evolutionary journey of awakening. The question is whether we have the collective wisdom to mobilize our collective attention on behalf of a sustainable and compassionate future. ■

Duane Elgin is an author, speaker, educator, and activist for media accountability. His website is [www.awakeningearth.org](http://www.awakeningearth.org), and it contains his writings as well as information about his upcoming talks, telecourses, and workshops.







## Eye on the Future JOHN PETERSEN

**WIE:** John, your think tank, *The Arlington Institute*, was established to monitor the emerging trends in human culture that will most profoundly affect the future of our civilization. What recent developments have you been keeping your eye on?

**JOHN PETERSEN:** In the last few months, there have been several emerging changes that will affect the most fundamental aspects of human life and human interaction. One of them is in biotechnology, one in technology, one in energy, and one in geopolitics. And the fact that all of these events have occurred in such a short period of time is significant.

First, let's take biotech. In biotech, there are a number of things occurring, with the most significant one being cloning—the ability to replicate human beings. For the first time in all of history we have the ability to engineer and replicate humans, not just plant life or animal life, but *human* life. And it is hard for us to even begin to understand the implications of that from a sociological point of view.

Significant events are also happening in the arena of technology. Recently, there has been a breakthrough in figuring out how to teach a monkey to control a computer using *only* its thoughts. The monkey thinks “up” and the cursor goes up, and it thinks “right” and the cursor goes to the right. This whole notion that you could interface with computer technology using nothing but thought has profound implications downstream. For example, what if you marry that new capacity with the ability to automatically translate languages, which we're going to have in about four or five years? Suddenly, we have a combination of technologies that allows a person to control computers with their thoughts, and they can do that across the boundaries of any language.

Then in the arena of energy, there are recent discoveries of whole new ways to potentially generate electricity—things that happen once in a lifetime or once in a century. For example, there is the recent discovery of a way to generate and harness electricity just by directing water at a metal plate. This could be the beginning of the ability to power small devices such as Palm Pilots or calculators with water batteries, or maybe someday to contribute electricity to a national power grid from a clean, renewable source. And if you couple that with the recent announcement that a research group has figured out how to decrease the cost of photovoltaic cells for solar power by a factor of twenty, then we suddenly have capabilities for generating electricity anywhere around the world in ways that are cheaper than any of the capital-intensive, centralized ways that we produce electricity right now.

**WIE:** What type of time frame are we talking about for this kind of change in energy production?

**JP:** I think two or three years.

**WIE:** You also mentioned geopolitics?

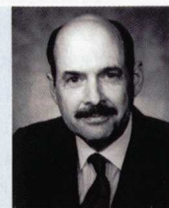
**JP:** Yes. On the geopolitical front, there is the situation in Iraq, and the Middle East in general. Right now, Saudi Arabia is coming apart. It's coming apart from the inside—so much so that the Saudi leadership was recently trying to pick up the passports of all of the foreign workers, those people who actually run the industry in the country. In the worst case, you have the possible collapse of the government of Saudi Arabia, which could turn into a huge disruption of the energy markets and cause a global depression. It's a big, big deal.

So we have these huge, significant events that are all occurring in different dimensions and are all converging at the same time. And we don't understand what it all means ethically. We are essentially kind of hanging ourselves out over a cliff, using the ethics and the values of the past to try to make sense out of these events and these new technological capabilities of the future that are so different than anything we have seen before. And the best that human social systems do is try to juggle all of this. But they don't anticipate it; they don't put fundamental stopgaps in place to help deal with it. Indeed, the real possibility created by the problems in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, for example, is a long-term low-grade global war between Islam and the West—if we don't handle it right. Now that's a serious issue. And to effectively anticipate that and deal with it, you would have to not only deal with the symptomatic issues and problems that show up every day, such as terrorism and so on, but you also have to deal with the underlying issues, the fundamentals. And with all due respect, I don't know of anybody in our government who knows how to deal with the fundamentals. But that is what is actually required here—a kind of enlightened perspective that responds to the underlying issues in a comprehensive systems way with a long view to the future—a perspective that is proactive and not just reactive in the traditional way we do things.

**WIE:** Do you see this more enlightened perspective, this kind of systemic thinking, in any of the U.S. presidential candidates? Do you see potential there?

**JP:** Yes, I do. You don't see it right now, because they're trying to win the primary. But I think we will start to see it in Howard Dean and one or two of the other candidates as we work our way into the spring and get nearer to the general election. ■

John Petersen is the founder and president of The Arlington Institute, a Washington, DC-area research institute. He is the author of *Out of the Blue: How to Anticipate Big Future Surprises*.





# america as empire

The founder of the State of the World  
Forum examines the way American  
power is shaping our geopolitical future

by Jim Garrison

**PEOPLE USED TO THINK OF AMERICA** as a global leader. Now a majority of the world thinks of America as a rogue power. Why? The answer to this question has to a large degree to do with what America has become. America has made the transition from republic to empire. It is no longer what it was. It was founded to be a beacon of light unto the nations, a democratic and egalitarian haven to which those seeking freedom could come. It has now become an unrivalled empire among the nations, exercising dominion over them. How it behaves and what it represents have fundamentally changed. It used to represent freedom. Now it represents power.

It was when I began to realize that my country had crossed the threshold from republic to empire that I began to study the history of empire. It was the only concept large and dynamic enough to explain what was going on, providing a larger framework, a more complex metaphor with which to understand America and the

Whatever qualms people may have about it, America has become an empire, and there is no turning back.

world. Republics imply single nations democratically governed, which was what America was founded to be. The very essence of empire is the control of one nation over other nations. While America remains a republic within its own borders, it has become an empire in relationship to the rest of the world.

The inordinate power of the United States disturbs people on the American left and excites people on the American right. Liberals are uncomfortable with the notion of an American

empire because they are uneasy with the fact that America has so much power, especially military power. They would prefer that America simply be part of the community of nations, perhaps a first among equals but an equal nevertheless, and use its power to further human welfare. Conservatives, on the other hand, are jubilant that America is finally breaking out of multilateral strictures and is unilaterally asserting its imperial prerogatives abroad. For them, national self-interest, enforced by military supremacy, should be the guiding principle of U.S. policy.

The liberal notion that America confine its power within multilateral frameworks and the conservative desire to apply American power unilaterally for narrow self-interest are both inadequate. There is a deeper and more complex reality going on. Whatever qualms people may have about it, America has become an empire, and there is no turning back. As Heraclitus taught us, one can never enter the same river twice. The transition from republic to empire is irreversible, like the metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly. Once power is attained, it is not surrendered. It is only exercised. The central question before America, therefore, is what it should do with all the power it has. How should it assert its authority and for what end?

This means that America should acknowledge, even celebrate, its transition to empire and acquisition of global mastery. What began as a motley band of colonies 225 years ago is now not only the strongest nation in the world but the strongest nation in the history of the world. Americans should be justly proud of this achievement. It has been attained with enormous effort and at great cost.

The world, too, should modulate its antipathy against America with the consideration that America has become so powerful in





part because it has been so benign. This might be a little hard to take if one has experienced the boot of American strength, but consider the three other national attempts at empire in the last century: the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and Imperial Japan. What if any of these empires had defeated the United States and established global hegemony? What would the world be like today if Nazi Germany and Japan had won the Second World War, or if the Soviets had won the Cold War? We should all breathe a sigh of relief that these eventualities never occurred and that a democratic nation committed to universal values triumphed and established global dominion.

Having prevailed in the competition against these other empires and having achieved what they were denied, Americans should be aware that there are now enormous responsibilities that must be undertaken both in relation to the United States itself and in relation to the world. The fate of empires can be long or short, noble or tragic, depending on how astutely leadership is exercised and decisions are made. The exercise of power is highly unstable, especially the near-absolute power that empire represents. It provides opportunity; it also corrupts. It demands wise action; it also seduces to the dark side.

There are thus all sorts of dangers inherent in the exercise of power. Internally, the transition from republic to empire is almost always made at the cost of freedom. Power and freedom are contradictory and do not coexist comfortably. Freedom requires the limitation of power. Power demands the surrender of freedom. This is something the ancient Athenians and Romans learned at great cost: democracy was the casualty of their empires. Americans must heed this ancient experience and painful truth. American freedoms are not eternally bestowed but must with

each generation and circumstance be reevaluated and preserved. Freedom is lost far more easily than it is gained, especially when it is surrendered for the sake of more power.

Externally, empire incites insurrection. No nation wants to be ruled, especially those that have just been liberated, such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Maintaining dominion is therefore a very tricky challenge, especially in a world of instantaneous communication and porous borders, in which information and people can move about virtually unimpeded, and small actions can have large and unexpected effects. This was the lesson of September 11. There are many enemies of empire and few

**What began as a motley band of colonies 225 years ago is now not only the strongest nation in the world but the strongest nation in the history of the world.**

friends. Americans must know this as they rule, especially in obscure places far from American shores.

To achieve greatness, an empire needs a transcendental vision that can unite all the disparate elements within it into an overarching purpose. It must aspire to a mission that the entire empire can join in building. It must be fundamentally constructive, not destructive.

Americans at their point of empire are called to articulate a vision for the world worthy of the power they now hold over the world. This vision must transcend self-interest and embrace the whole. In order to do this, America must remember that even





America must consciously view itself as a *transitional empire*, one whose destiny at the moment of global power is to midwife a democratically governed global system.

though it now represents power, it has historically been a shining light to the international community, symbolizing freedom. Can the vision that built the American republic now guide America as it consolidates its empire?

History teaches that great empires are constructed, not simply by using military might but by building institutions that are perceived by the governed as just and fair. The common interest of the empire as a whole must supersede the national interest of the dominant state in order for the empire to endure. The great paradox of empire is that stewardship is far more powerful than force in maintaining imperial control.

Sixty years ago, Presidents Roosevelt and Truman achieved this level of greatness, as did Woodrow Wilson in the generation before. They defeated world fascism and contained communism by ensuring that the United States had the strongest military in the world. At the same time, they founded the United Nations, established the Bretton Woods institutions, implemented the Marshall Plan, and established NATO, thereby ushering in a new postcolonial international system. They blended American interests with the interests of the common good to create a new world order. American strength thus served political aspirations that were welcomed by the international community.

Six decades later, the forces of globalization have made the institutions built then anachronistic to the needs of an integrating world. The world is therefore in a new state of crisis, both in terms of the magnitude of the problems pressing down upon us and in terms of the inability of the prevailing national and international institutions to cope with these challenges.

The major difference between now and sixty years ago is that Roosevelt and Truman redesigned the international order within the context of an acute and undeniable crisis: a world at war. Today, we are in a crisis of similar magnitude, but the crisis is more like an accident in slow motion. The old Cold War system and the system of nation states are dysfunctional and no longer capable of coping with global problems ranging from global warming, deforestation, and water scarcity, to persistent poverty, dealing with failed states, and HIV/AIDS. All these crises are pressing down upon us and the prevailing system of international institutions is simply incapable of effective response. The planet is thus quite literally on a collision course with itself. Yet strangely, the totality of the danger is not yet apparent. World leaders thus do little more than talk about it. Most are simply in denial.

The opportunity in this situation is for America to ask itself anew what it can do about the needs of the global commons. How can America proactively lead the world out of the present crisis? How can it revitalize the international order and lead in the development of innovative ways to solve global problems? What global institutions need to be established to ensure that democracy and prosperity, along with American primacy, prevail in the twenty-first century?

What both Americans and the world must internalize is that no one is even remotely capable of leading this effort but the United States. The United Nations is weak and bureaucratically paralyzed. Other powers that could one day serve as regional sources of stability and order, such as the European Union, Russia, China, India, or Brazil, are themselves either unformed, unstable, or not sufficiently coherent. The myriad number of new international initiatives and institutions coming from the nongovernmental sector have high aspirations but remain fragile, underfunded, and only marginally effective.



Until there is a sufficiently strong matrix of global institutions to ensure global stability and prosperity, there is literally no one else to lead the world but America.

This situation may be completely different in a few decades. But right now, it is only the United States that has the capacity, the traditions, the reach, and the will to lead at the global level. Until there is a sufficiently strong matrix of global institutions to ensure global stability and prosperity, there is literally no one else to lead the world but America. This means that the highest vision for the American empire is to serve the global need for effective global governance.

The greatest temptation at the moment of power is to be seduced by the dark side, or in arrogance, to dispense with "the vision thing," as President George Bush, Sr., put it, and to use one's power not for the common good but for the sake of gaining even more power. The question before the United States is whether the magnitude of its power will eclipse the light by which it was founded, or whether it will use its power to serve greater light. Does it seek mastery to dominate or mastery to serve?

This is a crucially important distinction and question. If it uses its power to build democracy at a global level with the same genius with which it built democracy at the national level, the United States could leave a legacy so powerful that the world will become knitted into a singularity of democracy and freedom. The possibility for a successor empire could then be superseded by the demands of a single global system.

To achieve this task, America must consciously view itself as a *transitional empire*, one whose destiny at the moment of global power is to midwife a democratically governed global system. Its great challenge is not to dominate but to catalyze. It must see its historic task as that of using its great strength and democratic heritage to establish the integrating institutions and mechanisms necessary for the effective management of the emerging global system such that its own power is subsumed by the very edifice it helps to build.

Wilson established the League of Nations. Roosevelt and Truman established a new world order during and after World War II. It must now be done again. If it attains this level of greatness, America could be the *final empire*, for what it will have bequeathed to the world is a democratic and integrated global system in which empire will no longer have a place or perform a role.



This is the challenge before America: to manifest a destiny of both light and power at the level of global affairs. It is ultimately a challenge about how high it will cast its sights, about what kind of vision it will manifest as it leads in an integrating world fraught with crises. The deep question is whether Americans have the political and moral intention to rise to this occasion and whether the world will accept the leadership that America then provides. ■

**Jim Garrison** is president of the State of the World Forum, which he cofounded with Mikhail Gorbachev in 1995. Garrison has written six books on various aspects of philosophical theology and history, including *Civilization and the Transformation of Power* (2000). His most recent book, *America as Empire*, from which the above article is excerpted, is due out in January 2004.





# the GURU and the PANDIT

Andrew Cohen  
& Ken Wilber

dialogue IV

THE LEADING EDGE OF EVOLUTION can be a pretty lonely place. How many are willing to step out where the crowds thin, reaching for potentials barely forming on the brink of the future? How many have the courage to ask the kind of questions that open doors to tomorrow? Pioneers of consciousness have always been few—that just seems to be the way it works. But if the past has anything to teach us, perhaps it is that those few have made all the difference. "This hour in history needs a dedicated circle of transformed nonconformists," Martin Luther King, Jr., declared almost half a century ago. And the same undoubtedly holds true today. Radical shifts happen, as he understood, "not through the complacent adjustment of the conforming majority, but through the creative maladjustment of a nonconforming minority." This is the spiritual challenge



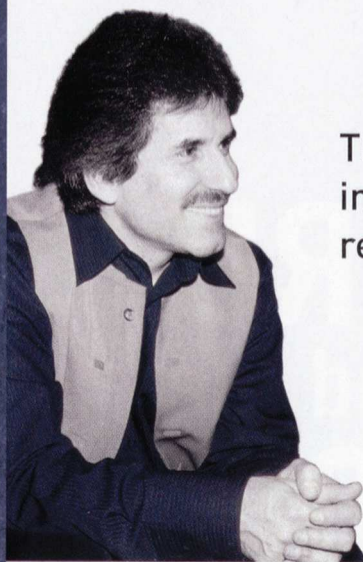
## IN SEARCH OF A NEW MORAL COMPASS



to each one of us, the gauntlet thrown down by a future that really does depend on individuals changing—and changing fast. And this is why *What Is Enlightenment?* is dedicated to finding those voices on the edge, asking them the questions that matter and bringing them together.

In our last few issues, the potential inherent in such an inquiry has come alive most vividly in the ongoing series of dialogues between “the guru and the pandit\*”—Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber. Cohen, founder of *WIE*, is also, as many of our readers may know, a spiritual teacher deeply committed to and engaged with the hands-on business of transformation. Wilber could perhaps most simply be described as the definitive integral philosopher—architect of an elegant and ever-expanding “theory of everything” that provides an unparalleled synthesis of the world’s wisdom. United in a passion for the possible and sharing a refreshing intolerance for sacred cows, these two independent thinkers take spiritual and philosophical discourse into new dimensions each time they meet. In this, their fourth dialogue, guru and pandit explore the moral predicament of our time, illuminating the pitfalls of the postmodern landscape in which we find ourselves and challenging us to engage in the creation of a new morality for a new world.

\* In Sanskrit, a scholar who is deeply proficient and immersed in spiritual wisdom.



There’s an evolutionary or moral imperative connected to spiritual realization. It’s not a free ride.

Andrew Cohen

**ANDREW COHEN:** What I want to explore with you today is the *moral* predicament of our time, and how that relates to our spiritual aspirations.

**KEN WILBER:** That sounds great.

**COHEN:** Here in the West, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, there is a profound lack of moral context, not only for us boomers, but also for the X and Y generations. And I think this is perhaps the biggest issue that all of us who are interested in development, transformation, and enlightenment need to come to terms with.

We have all emerged in this world in the postmodern cultural context—a time when there is no traditional moral, ethical, philosophical, or spiritual framework for our own existence. Indeed, we entered the picture when the old structures were being rejected. And to a large degree, we have set ourselves free from them, but as of yet, we haven’t really found anything to replace them. Our generation and those that have followed have experienced more freedom—personal, philosophical, political, religious—than any group of people ever, anywhere. There have never

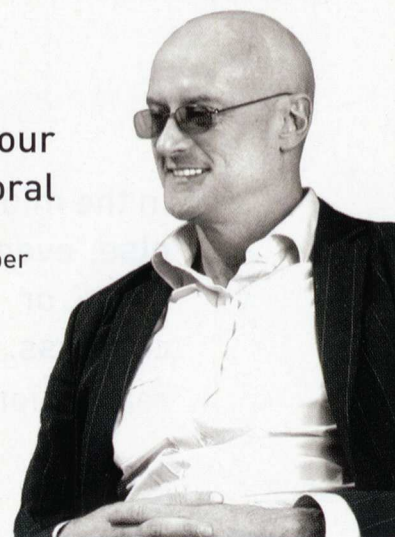
been so many who have had this incredible liberty to experiment—to *think* in whatever way they want, to *do* anything they want, to *say* anything they want. But the significant issue here, I think, is that a human being has to have reached an unusually high degree of maturity to actually be able to handle the kind of freedom that so many of us were given simply because of the time in which we were born. And most of us haven’t handled it very well because we haven’t had enough maturity. So we’re in an incredible time when the largest group of individuals at the highest level of development is in a transitional phase. The old has been rejected, but as yet, we haven’t really found a new narrative, a new moral, ethical, philosophical, and spiritual context in which to live our lives—one that will enable us to handle the freedom that we’ve been given and help us to make sense of our own experience.

Now, there have been many of us who responded to this lack of context in our own lives by pursuing Eastern philosophy and its promise of higher consciousness. And as a result, many



## An experience of the absolute can reinforce your narcissistic inclinations if you don't have this moral context in which to hold it.

Ken Wilber



have tasted higher states, glimpsed nondual awareness, experienced moments of enlightenment. As you yourself have said many times, dramatic spiritual episodes like these have a very profound impact on a soul level, especially if the experience is a deep one. But, as we have discussed in the past, pure experience in and of itself is not what's most important. What matters is how we *interpret* these experiences.

**WILBER:** Yes, that's right—what's important is the interpretive context in which the experiences are occurring.

**COHEN:** So here we are in postmodern America, up to our necks in a culture of narcissism, devoid of an authentic moral framework for making value distinctions. What happens when an individual has an enlightenment experience in this context? Let's say they taste nonduality, glimpse emptiness, are overwhelmed by fullness, see that *all is One and One is all*. They experience the truth beyond good and evil, beyond opposites. But how is that extraordinary experience going to help them navigate this complex, ever-

evolving, ever-changing world system that we are all a part of?

**WILBER:** In other words, if the ultimate truth is beyond good and evil, how do we navigate in the world of good and evil?

**COHEN:** Exactly. Now, this is what has happened for so many of us, and I think it's obviously going to happen to the younger generations if something doesn't begin to change: When we had these enlightenment experiences, when we experienced the nondual state, we concluded, "Oh, the ultimate truth is beyond differences, is beyond good and evil." That's what our most profound spiritual experiences reveal to us. But *because* they occur in the context of a culture that is having a lot of difficulty making value distinctions anyway, these experiences end up lacking any kind of moral weight and, therefore, lack the power to create a real moral framework for our lives.

**WILBER:** They end up reinforcing the postmodern cultural narcissism that I call "boomeritis"—bizarrely.

**COHEN:** That's the whole point. In the past, when these experiences were being pursued in a premodern, traditional context, there was *already* a very strong moral, ethical, philosophical, and spiritual framework in place that told us how to interpret them. Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, because we have not created new maps, it's confusing as to what the moral, ethical, and philosophical context for the highest spiritual experiences actually is. Because of this, as you said yourself, enlightenment experiences inadvertently reinforce the plague of boomeritis.

**WILBER:** Yes. Rampant relativism, rampant pluralism, inability to make choices—all of that gets reinforced for all the wrong reasons, and it appears to have the sanction of Buddha dharma!

**COHEN:** I think this is one of the reasons why a lot of people are very confused about higher-state experiences.

**WILBER:** Yes, I agree. And I agree very strongly with what you said earlier, that,

\*Characterized by its "strange mixture of high intelligence and self-absorbed narcissism," *boomeritis* is Wilber's term for the cultural and psychological disease typified by the baby-boom generation. As the first generation to implement a multicultural, egalitarian worldview, the boomers created a postmodern context in which the beliefs and freedoms of the individual were given utmost respect, often indiscriminately—making it a welcome home for egotism and self-indulgence.



In the midst of saying that nothing is better or worse than anything else, even on a relative plane, if you *then* have an experience of *satori* or *kensho* or oneness, it reinforces your broken moral compass. And this broken moral compass, combined with your realization, is what you call spirituality.

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to put it crudely, there's *satori* [awakening] and there's how you *interpret satori*, or your experiences. What interpretive context do you have to *hold* this experience? Because after all, you might feel that you're one with everything, and that's fine—in a very profound sense that's your always-given condition, and a *satori*, a *kensho*, an awakening is a recognition of that ever-present state—but once you recognize that, how do you *carry* it? Charles Manson said, "If all is one, nothing is wrong." Now, is that how we are going to carry our *satori*?

**COHEN:** Some teachers *do* say that kind of thing.

**WILBER:** That's exactly the problem. So the general approach that I take, and that you and I share a similar view on, is that we want realization plus an *integral* interpretation of it. Almost every time you and I talk, we come back to this—the extraordinary importance of the context, the interpretation, that you frame these experiences in. Because as rare and precious as the experiences are, if you don't have an adequate unfolding of them, they can lead to just as much harm as they can good on many occasions.

**COHEN:** Yes. So we have to recognize that spiritual experience alone is not enough. Because the context for personal experience for our generation is narcissism, a personal psychological context in which there simply is no moral imperative. And most of the people who are teaching this stuff are products of our own generation and so are stuck in this position themselves. Or, if they are Easterners, they usually represent a premodern cultural context with a moral worldview that has almost nothing to do with the postmodern, twenty-first-century world we're living in.

**WILBER:** And they're often a little naïve—they assume we're going to share the same moral background and then they're shocked when things fall apart.

#### A BROKEN MORAL COMPASS

**WILBER:** Another important thing to talk about is: What does moral judgment mean, especially in this postmodern era—the era of what I call "aperspectival madness," of rampant pluralism and relativism, where nothing can be said to be better or worse than anything else. The traditions are pretty

straightforward. There are three pillars of spiritual growth and development, and they're *silā*, *dhyāna*, and *prajñā*. *Silā* is moral foundation, ethical foundation, that's number one; then *dhyāna*, meditation; and then *prajñā*, awakening or realization. It's the calamity you've discussed, the calamity of our generation, that we've come to think that you're morally good if you don't make judgments. But that's *exactly* wrong. You're morally good if you make the right *kind* of judgments. And you have to learn how to make wise judgments in order to make moral decisions. But what we do, because we understandably don't want to marginalize anyone or unfairly judge, is to say, therefore, don't judge at all. And so we stand back with no moral compass, no judgments, no discriminating wisdom, and basically the whole show goes to hell because of that. So in the midst of saying that nothing is better or worse than anything else, even on a relative plane, if you *then* have an experience of *satori* or *kensho* or oneness, it reinforces your broken moral compass. And this broken moral compass, combined with your realization, is what you call spirituality.





**COHEN:** It's a profound point.

**WILBER:** Oh, it's a *nightmare*.

**COHEN:** This is a point I've been trying to make for years—that *satori* can be an anti-evolutionary event unless it takes place in an appropriate ethical, moral, and philosophical context. It can literally retard or stunt development and growth.

**WILBER:** Yes, it tends to—unless it's part of an ongoing transformative practice, and that means an integral practice. Because without a decent interpretation, context, or understanding, it sort of cements you at wherever you are.

**COHEN:** Precisely.

**WILBER:** So you have to be very careful about that. And we have a lot of semi-enlightened schmucks running around because they got sealed in their schmuckiness when they got this sense of oneness. A great deal of certainty comes with that experience, a kind of unshakable foundation—all of which is just great! It's an opening to understanding this ever-present, literally absolute condition. But there's a relative condition as well, and human beings

are a mixture of both radical emptiness and relative form. And the traditions are really clear that you have absolute truth and you have relative truth and you have to honor both of those.

**COHEN:** Right.

**WILBER:** And so absolute truth is beyond good and evil, but relative truth has good and evil. And in the relative world, you're supposed to *choose* good and avoid evil—Buddha was very clear on that one. In the absolute world, you transcend both of them. Now, what we've done is to confuse the two, and we think that because the absolute is beyond good and evil, therefore in the relative world, we should make no judgments at all. And that is already to capitulate to an *immoral* action in the relative world. You're *already* reinforcing immoral action when you do that.

**COHEN:** That's true. And that's occurring in a consciousness where the degree of narcissism—self-obsession and self-concern—is probably unprecedented in human history.

**WILBER:** The narcissism is the scary part. It might be the worst part because as we've discussed before, when people say, "You shall make no judgments

whatsoever," what it really means is, "Nobody's allowed to judge *my* egoic self-contracted activities as being bad or wrong or inadequate." And so that gives the ego the ultimate safe haven against spiritual realization.

**COHEN:** Right. And that extreme narcissism is too often the only compass by which we are actually making judgments.

**WILBER:** Yes. Because "what's true is what's true for *me*." And that's unchallengeable.

**COHEN:** It's the last stand of the narcissist.

**WILBER:** We can take a simple scheme of human moral development from the work of Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg found through very extensive research that human beings go through three broad stages of moral development or moral evolutionary unfolding. And they're called preconventional, conventional, and postconventional, or egocentric, ethnocentric, and worldcentric. For example, an infant doesn't have the capacity to make moral decisions in any articulate way—so it's egocentric. "What's right is what's right for me, and to hell with everybody else." That's the classic narcissistic stance. Then the



When we discover this evolutionary context and recognize what a big part our individual and collective transformation could potentially play in the larger scheme of things, a higher conscience awakens in our own consciousness.

Andrew Cohen

child grows and enters a peer group, so now “what’s right is what’s right for my group”—that’s ethnocentric. Now, ethnocentric, of course, has become a dirty word, but it’s actually a move up from “what I say is right” to “what my group says is right.” As individuals continue to grow and develop, they move from ethnocentric to worldcentric. They try to judge people regardless of race, color, creed, sex, and so on. They try to make their moral judgments more evenhandedly, more fairly, and more compassionately. And these stages emerge in an order that can’t be reversed and each one is higher than its predecessor. Each one is a wider sphere of care and concern and responsibility.

Now the problem is, as we were saying earlier, that even if you’re at a worldcentric stage of development but you’re caught up in the postmodern pluralistic misunderstanding that nothing is better or worse than anything else, it leaves you open to egocentric invasion. In other words, if nothing is higher or lower, then *anything* I do is right. There can be no challenge to what I’m doing. That leaves us without any traction whatsoever. That is a broken moral compass in the

worst possible sense, and that’s kind of what we have in this cultural creative, rampant pluralistic, rampant relativistic orientation. And it’s even inherently self-contradictory, because when people apply this pluralism, which claims there are no hierarchies, they’re making a hierarchical judgment—they’re claiming that their judgment is better than others’. So that’s the sort of rampant self-deception that is called morality in our culture.

**COHEN:** It’s called *higher* morality!

**WILBER:** It is called higher morality. So what we’re trying to do, in a sense, is to say, “Yes, lower forms of judgments, judging people based on ethnocentric criteria—is wrong. We *should* strive for this higher, postconventional, or worldcentric stage of development.” That lends itself to an evolutionary, integral moral understanding. And *that*, I think you and I would agree, is the *sila*, the moral foundation, upon which both meditation and realization rest.

**COHEN:** Right.

**WILBER:** And without that moral foundation, you’re not going to get true meditation and true awakening. You could have a quick *satori*, but it’s going to degenerate into an egocentric or narcissistic self-promotional expressive

truth. That’s the absolute catastrophe that passes for spirituality in so much of our present age, which is just what we’ve been saying—an experience of the absolute can reinforce your narcissistic inclinations if you don’t have this moral context in which to hold it.

#### THE BIG PICTURE

**COHEN:** In our culture of narcissism, the majority of the individual’s attention is focused on the emotional or feeling state of the egoic self-sense. And when that’s the case, it’s almost impossible to authentically relate to the idea of a larger moral, ethical, philosophical, and spiritual context that exists outside of the individual’s subjective field of experience. If someone is intellectually sophisticated or cognitively developed, they have the capacity to recognize these larger truths, but because of where they are *developmentally*, they will probably find it difficult to have a direct emotional connection to them. And without the emotional connection, these truths won’t really carry much moral *weight*. I’ve found out the hard way that unless a truth—whether it’s absolute





Ken Wilber and Andrew Cohen, Colorado, 2003

or relative—has a moral weight to it, its power to actually evoke any permanent transformation or evolutionary development is going to be severely limited.

**WILBER:** I'm with you all the way.

**COHEN:** We have to be emotionally connected to truth, whether it is absolute or relative truth. And the lack of this kind of development is like an illness in our generation—I can see it in many of my own students. It is this emotional capacity that I'm trying to help them to develop. Maybe they had a deep experience or recognition of truth on an absolute level, but because of a big investment in narcissism, emotionally they're not really connected to it. And I've found that until they are, an individual is never going to change in the most important way.

**WILBER:** How do you handle that in students?

**COHEN:** Oh my God!

**WILBER:** Sorry to bring up such a thrilling, fun topic for you, but how do

you handle this reluctance; how do you handle this lack of connection?

**COHEN:** Well, through confronting the individual with the BIG picture. And trying to get them to face their own refusal to take responsibility for the larger truth that they have recognized for themselves—which, when acknowledged, becomes *the moral context for the spiritual experience*.

You see, the big picture that I'm talking about is the evolutionary context, which I am convinced is the most important factor in awakening to a new moral framework for our own time. When we discover this evolutionary context and recognize what a big part our individual and collective transformation could potentially play in the larger scheme of things, a higher conscience awakens in our own consciousness. And if we have the courage and audacity to face this larger picture, suddenly what we're doing and why we're doing it has

big moral, ethical, philosophical, and spiritual implications. Now there's a very real and ultimately demanding context for our own presence here. The choices we make and our reasons for making them suddenly take on incredible significance, and not just for ourselves.

#### WHATEVER HAPPENED TO KARMA?

**COHEN:** You know, times sure have changed. In the old days, in the premodern era, the context for the search for enlightenment was the understanding that our own presence and participation in the world system, however big or small that looked, was part of a karmic scheme.

**WILBER:** Yes. That seems to have somehow evaporated!

**COHEN:** It really has. In premodern times there was a healthy fear of immorality or sin. In the East that meant bad karma and having to suffer through a terrible rebirth,



It used to be hard to get rid of karma. Now all you have to do is be born a boomer. We don't have karma—we don't believe in it.

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and in the West that meant going to hell. The karmic context was the Eastern version of, "If you're a good girl or boy, you go to heaven; if you're a bad girl or boy, you go to hell." But in our postmodern context, we've outgrown the traditional narratives, and because we have yet to invent new ones, we lack such a moral imperative. We're not afraid of going to hell, and we're not concerned about the unwholesome karmic consequences of our own present choices.

**WILBER:** Right. It used to be hard to get rid of karma. Now all you have to do is be born a boomer. We don't have karma—we don't believe in it.

**COHEN:** If only it were that easy! But the fact is, once someone has seen the big picture for themselves, and *acknowledged* it, there is a natural obligation to make the effort to live at a higher level, to manifest, at least to some degree, what one has seen. And if one refuses to make that effort, in light of one's own realization—if one insists, for whatever egoic reasons, on avoiding the implications of the experience of one's own higher potential—one *does* begin to create an enormous amount of karma. Karma, in the way I understand it, is the accumulated emotional and psychologi-

cal weight of fear, doubt, inertia, and self-concern, which keeps us endlessly stuck in the mud of delusion and semiconsciousness. You see, there's an evolutionary or moral imperative connected to spiritual realization. It's not a free ride. But when we find the courage to begin to embrace the totality of our own karmic predicament, real evolution occurs in real time. And even more importantly, when we make the effort to see our individual karmic predicament in light of the big picture, the evolutionary context, we begin to create a moral fabric for postmodern spiritual development.

**WILBER:** Well, yes. But *if* people will listen.

#### AN EVOLUTIONARY OBLIGATION

**COHEN:** As we were saying earlier, one can have developed a cognitive capacity to appreciate a truly integral perspective and intellectually recognize the need for an evolutionary moral context but emotionally still not have moved beyond the postmodern pluralistic, narcissistic stance. And I personally think that this is what a lot of thinkers at the cutting edge, including people who are enthusiastic about your own

work, really need to get. When one authentically awakens to the evolutionary context, one discovers a sense of urgency. Often, when you and I speak together, underneath your clarity I feel this kind of urgency coming through you—a passion that just screams: *We've got to wake up!*

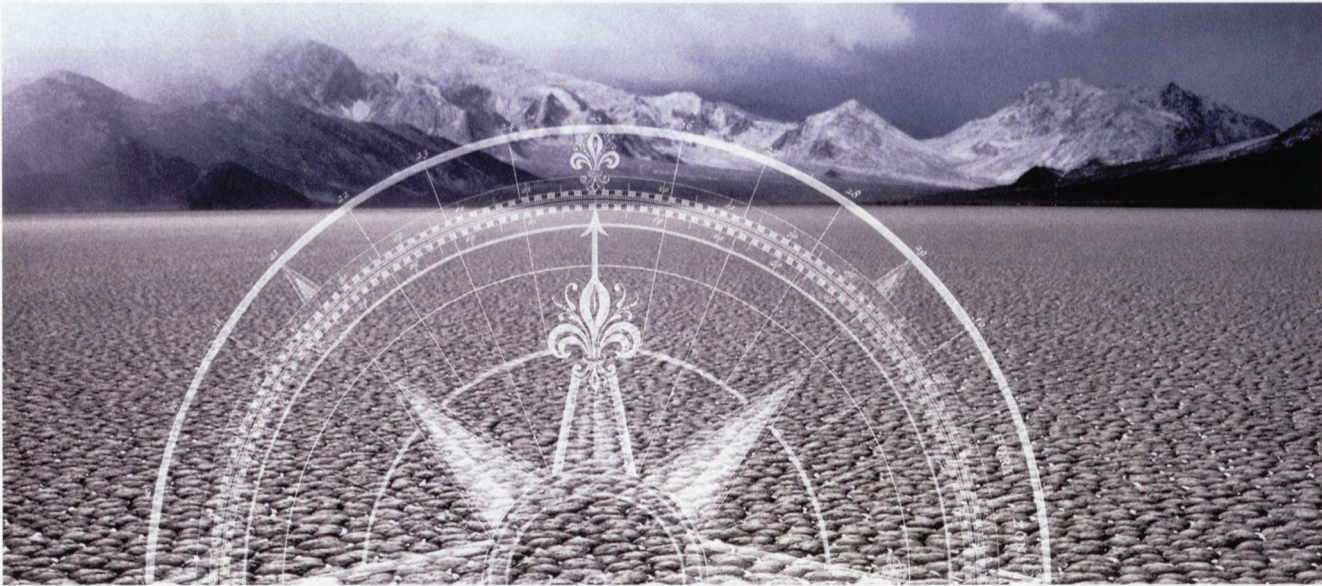
**WILBER:** Yes.

**COHEN:** This urgency is an emotionally felt one. It creates a kind of imperative, almost like a "should," God forbid!

**WILBER:** Well, if you have a moral compass, you're allowed to have a should; that's the thing. And you're allowed to have it in a conscious way. Even the pluralists have a should; they just don't admit it.

**COHEN:** Well, one "should" that emerges when we awaken to the evolutionary context is the moral imperative of development itself. In other words, the recognition that our own evolution as an awakening human is a moral obligation rather than a luxury. And that obligation is to use our God-given power of personal choice to consistently catalyze ongoing transformation, not just for our own sake, but for the sake of the evolution of consciousness itself.





**WILBER:** Yes, absolutely. And you said that people who are using my work need to understand that as well, and I totally agree. I think you and I would agree that people are *misusing* my work if they don't get the sense of moral and evolutionary developmental unfolding.

**COHEN:** Definitely.

**WILBER:** And as you were saying, a lot of people cognitively get the worldcentric integral view, but because they have come from this sort of pluralistic mushy boomer background, their cognitive understanding is really infected with ego-centric remnants. So they're not living up to their own cognitive understanding. And even as they talk about it, they're really sabotaging the integral view.

**COHEN:** Or their potential to manifest it.

**WILBER:** Exactly. And that's become a real problem because we have a lot of people talking about this, but they're not really acting on it. Their moral center is not as high as their cognitive center, so there isn't the urgency that you're talking about. There's none of that passion

coming out of them. They're actually afraid of passion because passion for a view means you're making a judgment that one thing is better than another. And of course the "sensitive self" says, "Oh, no. I can't make a judgment." So that basically jams the entire process of their own growth and development because you can't get passionate unless you can *believe in* a certain direction—

**COHEN:** And in its rightness.

**WILBER:** And this is where people also get confused. In the relative world, you're making these judgments and they're always judgments of increasing holism or wholeness. So the reason worldcentric is better, is *more right* than ethnocentric, is that it's bigger, it's more encompassing, it includes more—it's bigger care, it's bigger consciousness, it's bigger compassion. Ethnocentric is better than egocentric for the same reason. So there's a gradient of better, of *more right*, in the manifest world, and *that* is what you have to engage passionately. But you can do that, as

you well know, in the context of the vast emptiness or vast impartiality in which all of this arises moment to moment. So you're holding both the nondual one taste of equality where everything that arises is a perfect manifestation of the great perfection *and* the fact that among those things that arise, some are better than others. So therefore you get passionately involved in that directionality but as a manifestation of the absolute in the world of form.

**COHEN:** Which is real nonduality.

**WILBER:** Absolutely. All of that gets jammed when your moral compass is broken because you just sort of sit there spinning, going nowhere, and you think that that's *one taste*, you think that's *sahaj* or equality consciousness. But actually, it's just a meltdown. It's a complete paralysis of action in the relative world where you're supposed to be unfolding this higher and deeper understanding as a duty and dharma of your realization. ■



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# Shifting Moral Ground:

The Dilemma of Ethics  
in an Out-of-Control World

by Elizabeth A. Debold

**HAS GOD ABANDONED US?** Left us on our own now that we've reached up and grasped the secrets of creation—cracked the genetic code, split the atom, invented new forms of intelligence and life, woven neural-like networks to connect us across the globe? I really wonder. We're constantly pushing the boundaries of the miraculous, expanding the limits of the possible. Did you hear about the paralyzed man who has his brain wired directly to a computer and can now move the cursor with his thoughts? *That's* a miracle. But then, so many things we now take for granted—like flying, or moving pictures coming through the air into your living room, or heart attack victims being brought back to life—were once miracles reserved for God alone. That's one of the thrilling and chilling things about being human: we're always pushing the edge, daring to know, tempting fate—and testing any limits that have been imposed upon us.





But can we go too far? Recently, I read an article that matter-of-factly noted that fairly soon, the wealthy will be able to genetically engineer their own children. The author wasn't even questioning this; he was simply wondering about its potential impact on the educational system! It really made me wonder: What will happen if we end up with two different human species—one that is enhanced by genetic engineering and nanotech robotics, and another that becomes increasingly obsolete or even disposable? And that's not even the least of the frightening futures that may be on the horizon. A friend shocked me the other day by pointing out that very soon we may have to make moral choices that, in the last century, would have been considered unfathomable crimes. What if we realize that the earth cannot support us all, and we have to choose who has to go? No one's talking about these kinds of things, he said. No one's looking at the real moral issues facing us.

It's true, isn't it? There are so many things in our rapidly changing, out-of-control world that make me uncomfortable, that I don't know what to do with, and that raise profound moral questions. Even in seemingly small day-to-day encounters with the fact of our global interconnectedness, I don't feel confident that I am alert to the implications that spin out from my actions. Do I take thirty seconds to respond to an email petition about the woman

being stoned in Afghanistan? Do I stop long enough to think about what it means that the new sheets I just bought with the tag, "Made in Pakistan," were so unbelievably cheap? I often guiltily wonder: Does being concerned about these things really make a difference—or is this an avoidance of the deeper moral implications of being a privileged Westerner in a globalizing world?

I see how easy it is to skim the surfaces of the many fleeting images that surround us. Clicking from one thing to another on the internet, the bizarre and the poignant and the horrible create one smooth, nearly impenetrable veneer. Today's top story concerns the sensational rape trial of a popular athlete; tomorrow it's Iraqi retaliation against U.S. troops; the next day it's J.Lo's breakup with her latest. Everything is equivalent, equally important or unimportant—what matters depends on what you want. Something difficult or unpleasant pops up on the screen in front of me—one click and it's gone. Why not just go shop on eBay? So I become the center of it all, picking and choosing what is significant and what is not. It's so easy for the human power of choice, the ground for moral action, to become worn out by its constant use as a mechanism to fulfill desire. What happens to us when everything that gives meaning and significance—our principles, our purpose, our relationships—becomes one more set of choices



that we make? Gradually what is true and right gets reduced to our own subjective preferences, a hall of mirrors where everything reflects back on us and exists for us.

But this is a lie, a strangely lulling and narcissistically numbing lie. And no matter how lost I may become in that world of my own creation, there is always a nagging sense that can never be quelled by shopping or the next new experience, a sense that knows that how we all are living is not right, that it is urgent that something changes—and changes *fast*. Because beneath or behind these self-reflective surfaces, something really big is happening. We're reaching a critical choice point. Indeed, humanity may only have a fifty-fifty chance of making it through this next century, according to one of England's most distinguished scientists, the Astronomer Royal Sir Martin Rees, in his most recent book, *Our Final Hour*. Many of the new technologies that scientists are experimenting with not only have extraordinary potential to improve human life, but they also might cause devastation to a degree that we have never seen before. Rees feels we are too often cavalier about the power we have and ethically unprepared to use it responsibly. We have no ethical framework to prevent new forms of increasingly destructive terrorism, to stop environmental devastation, or to restrain the hubris of a scientific culture willing to take unbelievable risks with life itself.

We're at an impasse. Our moral frameworks, which are our guidelines for distinguishing right from wrong, are woefully inadequate for a world that is becoming more technologically sophisticated and more globally interdependent. The effect of these technological, economic, social, and political changes has been completely unpredictable and unprecedented—bringing us face-to-face with different life circumstances and conflicting worldviews around the globe. In the process, almost without being aware of it, we've come to the point where the moral teachings of the great religious traditions, which have guided humanity for centuries, no longer seem to have the scope to help us cope with these global complexities. Most of us also recognize that an unquestioned belief in the promise of modernity—the belief that science and technology will fix everything—is not really going to resolve the moral dilemmas we now face. It should be no surprise, then, to realize that the vast majority of us spiritually-minded persons in this postmodern age don't have an ethic to tell us how to do right by an ever-accelerating world in conflict. How could we? Humanity has never been at this point before where we have the power to determine the fate of life itself. The context in which we make choices has become so much bigger, so much more complex; it demands that we develop some new way of determin-

ing right from wrong that takes us beyond the safety of tradition, beyond the promise of modernity, and even beyond the hard-won freedoms of our postmodern culture.

#### OUTGROWING THE PAST

How would one even begin to think about creating a new morality? It's not a question that has ever concerned many people. Historically, one's views were either handed down from God (or someone like the Buddha) or were developed through philosophical debate in the dusty halls of the academy. One's moral perspective didn't really exist separately from one's religious, spiritual, or grand philosophical worldview, because they were seen as two sides of the same coin. The sense of what is right or wrong—Is it okay to marry more than one person? Is it ever justified to lie?—came from how God's word or the great philosophy of the time

**We find ourselves being ironic about ourselves, too wise to take ourselves seriously and yet not wise enough to risk taking life seriously.**

was interpreted and translated into guidelines for daily life. One's moral code was grounded in the belief system of one's culture, cementing the bond of shared understanding within a particular community or group. As a result, moral frameworks both shaped the contours of personal relationship and marked the boundary around a group of people. But in our increasingly secular postmodern age, the spiritual has become divided from the moral. We've pulled the two apart as more and more of us create our own personalized forms of spiritual pursuit.

Where does that leave us with morality? These days, the very word seems outdated, a leftover from a more rigid and uptight time. Probably for most of us, morality still means nuns with rulers—all of those "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts" about our personal lives, particularly our sex lives, that we have struggled to free ourselves from. Our first moral lessons most likely came from memorizing and internalizing sets of rules like the Ten Commandments. And that can certainly conjure up some rather unpleasant memories—the "time out" corner, priests and confession, all of the ways that adult society tried to get us to conform when we were children. The point was to bring us into alignment with something larger than our childish impulses. We were being taught to distinguish between right and wrong so that we could live with other people and be part of our family and community.

But we've outgrown the morality of childhood. Just as each of us has grown up and gone out beyond the snug boundaries of



## Clicking from one thing to another on the internet, the bizarre and the poignant and the horrible create one smooth, nearly impenetrable veneer.

family and schoolyard to a wilder and woollier world, for us collectively, the moral teachings of yesteryear are at least two sizes too small. While they were radically new when Moses first brought those two stone tablets down the mountain, the Ten Commandments' guidelines for human relationship are now as familiar to us as our mothers' faces. Who could really argue with the basic principles of honoring one's parents, being truthful, taking care of one's neighbor, not stealing or killing? The moral codes of the great religious traditions provided a blueprint to guide the development of family and community life, articulating the premises for creating a peaceful, homogeneous enclave. Over time, they became the basis for the legal and social infrastructure of the modern nation by creating a shared morality that made possible a national identity beyond one's religious affiliation.

But we have moved on. The reality of diversity—that one nation needed to be home to many different identity groups—meant that we grew beyond a one-size-fits-all set of values. The experiment in liberation that started in the sixties and launched a new postmodern era has taken us beyond the buttoned-up ethos of traditional morality. This shift into postmodernism woke us from the dream that the ideal was to conform, to create a homogeneous culture. This new view valued the fact that our world is pluralistic, filled with persons who think and act differently than we do. And now, as the boundaries of community and country are disappearing into a larger and more complex global whole, we need a new way to determine right and wrong that can take into account that we live in a world that is a welter of differences and that is in danger of extinction by our own hands.

### A SHIFT IN MORAL GROUND

It's often difficult to see the ground on which we're standing. For many of us interested in spirituality today, the postmodern ground that we tread on is so familiar that we can barely distinguish the salient features of the terrain. But if we take a closer look at how we got here, at the transition from modernity to postmodernity, the ground of our current morality becomes easier to see.

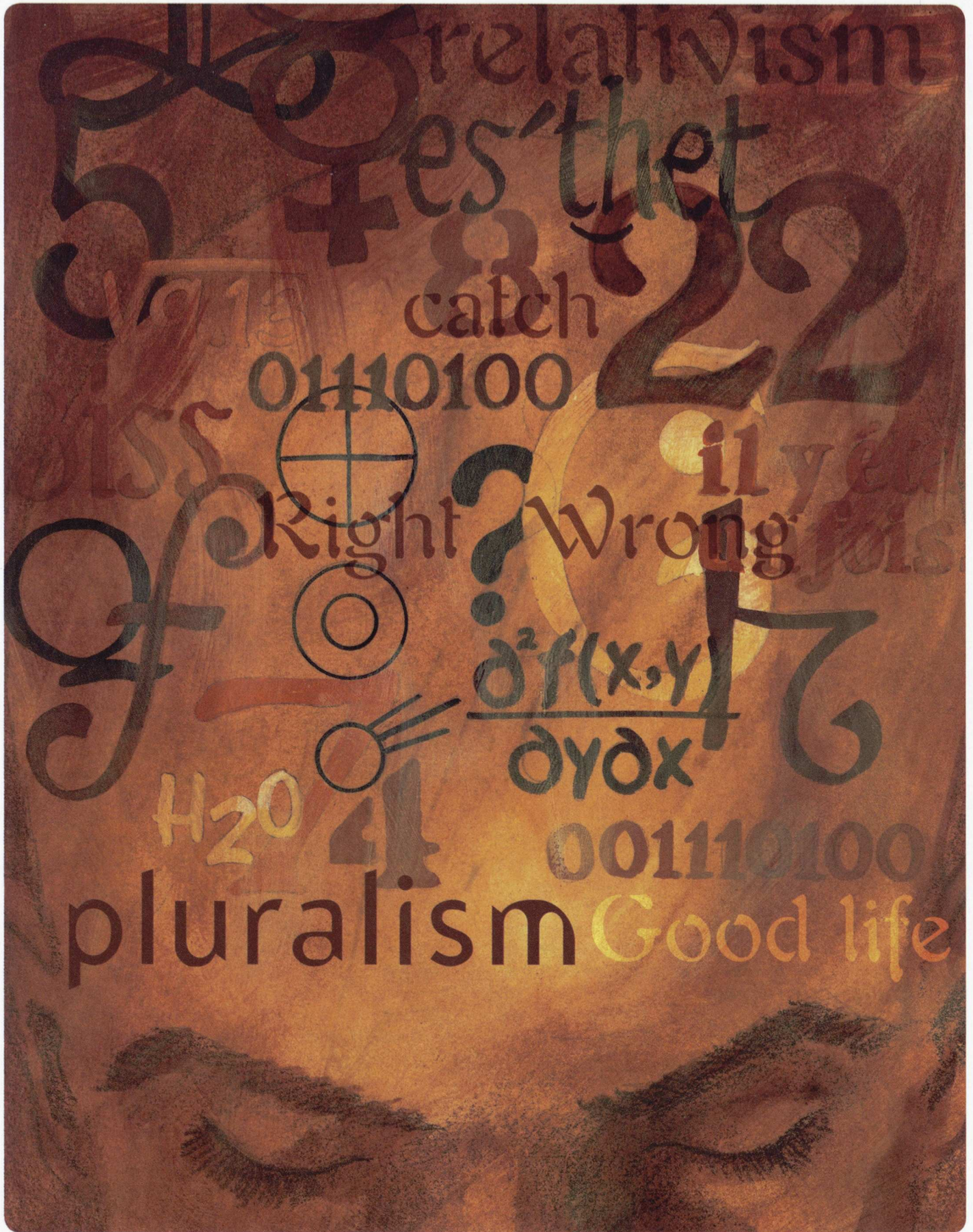
What was it like before the civil rights movement, Vietnam War protests, women's and gay liberation, and environmental and animal rights activism? Perhaps you remember, or you grew up as the transition was happening, as I did, or you have just wondered if the glimpses that you've caught in the weird light of black-and-white television reruns could possibly have any relation to reality. No matter what your vantage point, it doesn't take much to recognize that the first half of the twentieth century was a different world. Think about it: Did you know that television shows only allowed married couples to be seen sleeping in twin beds? Or that a "divorcée" was a woman of very questionable virtue?

Not long ago, homosexuality was considered a disease as well as a public menace. Negroes sat at the back of the bus; Chinamen owned hand laundries. This was just how things were—no harm intended. A man's home was his castle. Men wore hats and women wore gloves, girdles, garters, and hose. Trying to buy or sell a condom could get you arrested. And a woman needed her husband's permission to get her own credit. Everyone knew that science was producing wonder drugs that would cure cancer and the common cold, and that it was developing ways to feed the world by getting rid of pests and improving the soil—"better living through chemicals" was the slogan of DuPont, the company that produced DDT. It seemed so obvious that life was getting better and better every day. Science had even improved on mother's milk by inventing infant formula! If you did your fair share, worked hard, and raised your family to reach the promised "good life," then you were a good and moral person.

How far away now is that trusting moral universe in which policemen and politicians were considered public servants and everyone had his or her place? The liberation movements of the late twentieth century dramatically changed the ground beneath our feet. We really have been freed from those limiting notions of what it meant to be a good man or a good woman. In the process, we assumed the autonomy to create our individualized versions of the "good life." To steal a line from a seventies children's song, we became free to be you and me—not only psychologically or socially, but also morally.

And yet, strangely, this greater freedom that granted us greater autonomy and self-determination hasn't provided us with a way to discriminate between right and wrong in relationship to each other and to all that is happening around us. Why? Because postmodernity's moral ground is limited to the individual self. You see, the struggle for emancipation and equality in the sixties was inspired by a profound concern that the egalitarian ideals of democracy were being betrayed, denying the vast majority of people the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Postmodernity upholds a radical egalitarianism that values a plurality of views, where no one view is better than the rest. And so, our moral ground shifted from a shared belief that doing the right thing would bring about the "good life" to a shared belief in the sanctity of the individual to do and develop as he or she pleases. How, then, do we answer that all-important moral question: What is the right thing to do? The answer used to be simple: *Whatever is right for your family, community, or country.* Today the answer is: *It's up to you because no one can tell anyone else what's right for them.* What's right for me may not be right for you. Rather than holding some higher shared value, right and wrong become shape shifters as we each respond to the endless play of choices and perspectives that make up postmodern







life. Our moral evaluations then too easily become dependent on our often changing personal preferences, on what we want and how we feel.

Morality thereby became relative, no longer resting on universal principles or on some higher value, such as the good of the community. And without being grounded in some vision or value that brings us together for the sake of something larger than ourselves, our moral sense can be co-opted by narcissism. Ethics get confused with personal fulfillment: What's right is what's good for me. When preferences rather than principles guide our behavior and judgments, we find ourselves standing at the center of our own individual moral universe. The phrase "postmodern morality," then, is almost an oxymoron—because morality is not about the self in isolation but only about the self in relationship to others and the larger world. When care for the self is our most fundamental operating principle, then it is very hard to see clearly and respond to what is around us. The world in all of its glory and complexity becomes merely a reflection of what we're attracted to and repulsed by. And on this slippery slope of moral relativism, there is no way to make sense of the bewildering complexity facing us, which makes it more and more difficult to determine the right course of action.

Postmodernity attempted to solve the problem of inequality and injustice by creating a level playing field for all of us—and at

**“For most people most of the time, including intellectuals, the absence of credible universal principles leads to irony and apathy.”**

Thomas de Zengotita

the same time, it flattened any moral value higher than the desires of the self for us to be beholden to. No longer do most of us at the cutting edge of culture have the promise of God's salvation or the nation's "good life" as the frame for our choices and relationships. Fear of punitive fundamentalisms, the horror of ultranationalism, and a general mistrust of any ideology or theory that claims that it works for everyone have led us to value difference for its own sake, without having any way to unite in a common sense of purpose that would create a new ethic for action. Yet, as a result, "the most striking feature of contemporary culture is the unslaked craving for transcendence," writes Andrew Delbanco in *The Real American Dream*. In other words, we are desperate for a vision that would connect us to some value beyond ourselves. But the Catch-22 is that it is exactly this larger purpose that has been rendered suspect by the postmodern mindset.

Longing for something bigger to give life purpose and yet suspicious of the very thing we long for, we find ourselves caught in a pervasive sense of irony that is the hallmark of postmodern

culture. And by irony, I'm not simply referring to a sarcastic tone of voice or a particular kind of humor. More than just an individual attitude, it is a culture-wide expression of this literally self-centered moral relativism. "For most people most of the time, including intellectuals," philosophy teacher and *Harper's* magazine contributing editor Thomas de Zengotita told me, "the absence of credible universal principles or apprehensions leads to irony and apathy." In fact, he noted, "This is a deep cultural manifestation of profound vacuum." The individual experience of that vacuum is the ironic stance. Being gun-shy about any larger meaning makes having an investment in *any* meaning suspect: "You have quotes around everything you say to distance yourself from everything you mean." The painful irony, though, is that even in seeking individual fulfillment, which is the only purpose that moral relativism legitimizes, we never reach anything that is truly fulfilling. Because we each know that our small-minded desires are too flimsy to engage us deeply in life, we find ourselves being ironic about ourselves, too wise to take ourselves seriously and yet not wise enough to risk taking life seriously.

#### FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Where do we go from here? In the tension and tumult of our globalizing world, finding a higher perspective from which we can make sense of differences is key to discovering how to do the right thing. Living with a pluralism of perspectives and views, we have developed an expertise at taking different positions, understanding their relative value. But we rarely go deeply into anything—the restless seeking of experience doesn't let us linger long—so we stop at a superficial understanding, thinking that we get all there is to know. The fact that our facile postmodern minds can understand

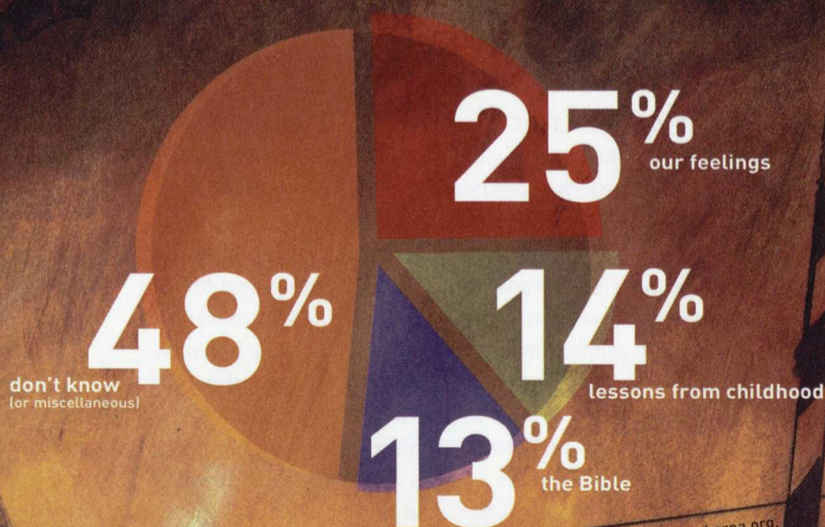
and appreciate so many different views makes it difficult to distinguish between a passing familiarity and a real understanding that translates into a new way of thinking and acting. "That's a difficult thing to do, you know, to distinguish between what you know and what you don't," Yasuhiko Kimura, evolutionary philosopher and chairman/president of Vision-in-Action, told me. "But that is what is necessary. The most difficult transition in consciousness, I think, is from this pluralist, egalitarian perspective to a more integrative one because those of us who have reached this pluralistic consciousness are so intelligent, so well-educated, and so clever." And he concluded that we "actually are so clever that we outsmart ourselves," assuming we have already attained the higher perspective that we so desperately need to develop.

Hyper-aware of the irony of our own condition and readily believing that we're more developed than we are, we're too smart by half. Postmodernity has brought us to a kind of cultural adolescence: self-involved, sure of ourselves, ironic, and thinking that



# How do Americans make moral choices?

1,010 American adults were asked what they use to guide them in making moral and ethical decisions.



From the Barna Research Group, Ltd., *How America's Faith has Changed since 9/11*, November 26, 2001. [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org).

we know a lot more than we do. We need to reach a real moral maturity—to discover a way of determining what is right and wrong that is not based in our small-minded needs and desires. That takes being honest about where we are and what we're doing. So, first, can we stop, temporarily put aside our overactive minds that grasp everything too quickly, and pause long enough to realize that we may not be quite as evolved as we'd like to be? Slowing down, there's often the strange recognition that holding ourselves at the center of our own moral universe creates a seamless and impenetrable film between ourselves and the rushing reality around us, making everything seem at a slight distance, not quite real. By giving so much weight to our personal experience, we alienate ourselves from the larger whole that we are a part of. But maybe a new morality can start with this, grappling with the ironic unreality that we've imposed on a very real and increasingly dangerous situation. "Irony is not really an attitude," said Zengotita. "Irony's a kind of cultural condition. If you want to get past postmodernism, you have to go through the irony." What does that entail? Perhaps it starts by being willing to engage with the actuality of the enormous changes that are happening in the careening, chaotic world beyond the small sphere of our personal concerns.

"All the religions and all the peoples of the world are undergoing the most radical, far-reaching, and challenging transformation in history," writes Ewert Cousins, Fordham Professor of Theology, Emeritus. "The stakes are high: the very survival of life on our planet; either chaos and destruction, or creative transformation and the birth of a new consciousness. Forces, which have been at work for centuries, have in our day reached a crescendo that has

the power to draw the human race into a global network. . . ." We are at the edge of peril, but the same dynamics that have brought us too close for comfort also offer the potential for a moral vision that's based on our interconnectedness and that gives us a way to make sense of the significant differences among us. Riane Eisler, author of the classic *The Chalice and the Blade*, spoke of this potential transformation as the fulfillment of the "human yearning for caring connection, for freedom. By freedom I don't mean the freedom to do whatever you damn please. I'm talking about freedom to flourish, freedom to develop, freedom to have mutually caring and satisfying relations." And, she emphasized, "If it isn't global, it isn't going to work."

Two enormous forces are at work: an evolutionary movement toward a freely developing global humanity and the continued momentum of destruction, isolation, and narcissism. But this isn't only a problem that exists out there in the world—it's also a dilemma that we each carry within us. Those of us living in such privileged circumstances in this care-torn world have been brought to this crux: Do we choose to continue setting our moral gauge according to our own desires, or do we look outward and struggle with the enormity of the situation we are facing? The karmic weight of human history bears down on each of us now as we postmoderns, with our extraordinary capacity for thought and reflection, have to make a choice to take us beyond the selfishness and conflict that has been so much the story of human history. But *how* do we choose? What do we do? We have to use all of the capacities that we uniquely possess as human beings: our power to think, to care, and to choose—to reach for a mature moral perspective.



## "The more evolved you are, the more of the universe is in your view."

Yasuhiko Kimura

### AN EVOLUTIONARY ETHIC

Reaching for a higher moral vision, striving to take more into our view and to become more conscious, implies a recognition of our evolutionary potential. "The evolution of the universe produced what we call life," Kimura said. "The evolution of life produced conscious beings like humans; the evolution of conscious beings is by nature the evolution of consciousness." As he observed, "Thinking is the prime mover of the evolution of consciousness" because it literally transforms our understanding of reality. And to create a new moral vision, we privileged postmoderns need to develop a new way of thinking to meet our changing reality because we are now left with a moral view that idealizes diversity but has no way to take action and discriminate within that diversity. The conflicts unleashed by a changing and globalizing world are demanding that we stretch to think in new ways and that we embrace a larger, global context for our actions. Such a global moral context would involve the fullest recognition of our profound unity in the most extraordinary project there is—the evolution of consciousness through the continued development of all human beings.

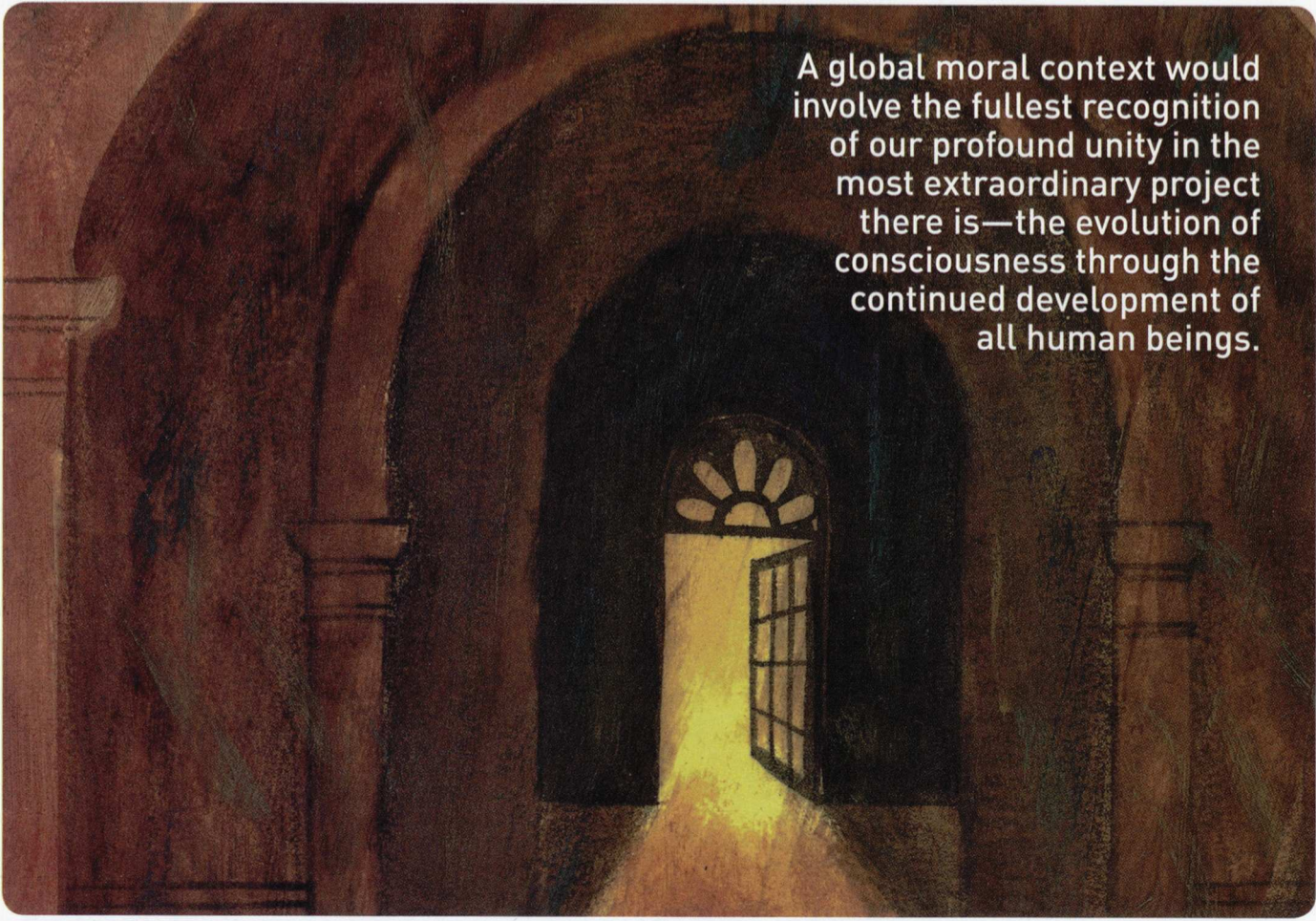
In this Kimura finds the ground for a new morality, for what he calls an "evolutionary ethics" that gives us a new capacity to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil. "What is good is a way of living, of thinking and acting, that is conducive to evolution," he said. "And what is bad is counter-evolutionary—that way of living, thinking, and acting that causes evolutionary stagnation, truncation, or devolutionary reversal." This critical distinction is not based upon individual preferences; in other words, it is not morally relative. Instead, the idea is to root the ethic in an empirical reality that comes from "scientific research into human development and the spiritual traditions." This research shows "an unmistakable pattern of evolution in psychology, behavior, value systems, and what we call consciousness." As Kimura explained, this pattern reveals that "'more evolved' means that your consciousness, your recognition and awareness, includes more of the universe than others' do. The more evolved you are, the more of the universe is in your view." In other words, the more encompassing one's worldview, the higher one's level of development. And for a world at the edge of crisis, this is critically important. Perhaps an evolutionary perspective gives us a ground for making moral choices because it can help us to distinguish right action from wrong by determining what best supports individual and collective development.

Kimura stressed the importance of bringing this evolutionary view into a "mainstream conversation." The more of us who appreciate how this perspective can bring order to the plurality of views that are so much a part of our lives, the more we can use evolution/development as an overarching framework to determine the right course of action when faced with competing interests and

possibilities. "Humanity at large does not know how to dialogue together, how to work together, or how to develop together in the face of disagreement," he said. "This is one of the major problems of the world. The dynamics of an evolutionary co-development requires a sufficient degree of disagreement, of diversity, as well as an alignment in the quest for coherent, continued development."

What might such a developmental perspective look like in practice? How does it help us to evolve beyond our postmodern view? "The cure for postmodern narcissism is activism," Darcy Riddell, an environmental activist with ForestEthics and leadership trainer at the Hollyhock Leadership Institute in British Columbia, told me unequivocally. I spoke with Riddell to get a sense of how an evolutionary ethic enables us to confront the complexity we face in the world. Riddell and her colleagues worked for years to bring about a miracle in the Great Bear Rainforest—preventing logging in some of the last pristine rainforest in North America. Grappling with the competing interests of corporations, loggers, union representatives, local government officials, and other ecologists demanded that the environmentalists change from being "bell-ringers of doom to architects of transformation." So, rather than simply taking a morally superior position about the dire necessity to protect the environment, they recognized the need for each party—including their traditional adversaries, the logging concerns—to be able to develop and transform. Riddell insisted that "saving the planet was the priority *and* that everyone's real needs be met. So, for example, we would not allow the loggers to cut the first-growth forests, but they had to have a way to live, so we negotiated for them to have access to second-growth forests." Riddell explained that she brings an evolutionary ethic "undercover, in a covert way" to her work, recognizing that there are differences in the values held by individuals and groups, characterized by varying degrees of inclusiveness of perspective. The point, she said, is "not to use this knowledge to pigeonhole people but to be able to truly stand in their shoes and understand their needs." As a practicing Buddhist, Riddell noted that "a strong spiritual ground is a necessity for real transformation to be part of the process." She called her integral evolutionary perspective "heart-centered with strategy" because it brings together the deepest spiritual recognition of Oneness with a knowledge of development to create the potential for trust and understanding between the environmentalists and their opponents. While this was far from easy or quick—often requiring governmental and market pressures to force movement—the results were surprising. Not only were eighty-eight valleys of pristine rainforest in B.C. not logged, but a senior vice president of a logging company quit his job to join a wildlife organization. A higher moral outcome was the result: the rainforest was saved, and a context was created within which all of the parties had the opportunity to evolve.





A global moral context would involve the fullest recognition of our profound unity in the most extraordinary project there is—the evolution of consciousness through the continued development of all human beings.

Recognizing the desperate urgency of our global situation can move us out of the ironic world of self-centered isolation—“taking the mind out of the head and literally investing it in the world,” as Zengotita sees it. Whether or not we are activists, we can still grapple with the crisis that we collectively face. To do this only depends on our capacity to care, to look beyond the small enclosed space of the separate self, and to engage intellectually and emotionally with the full complexity of our current situation—its potential for doom or deliverance. “You know, it’s a blast furnace of complexity,” Robert Richards, former Vice President of the Integral Institute, declared. “And I’m not talking about my little life. I’m not talking about that. I’m talking about rain forest disuse, or AIDS in Africa—when I zoom out to there, I go, ‘Holy God! This is almost unthinkable!’” But the fact that it is literally unthinkable and ungraspable opens the potential for something new, something evolutionary that is beyond what we can know or imagine. Richards heard an insistent call from the depth of himself, from his conscience—“mutate or die”—which very well could be a motto for our times. “I don’t know who’s doing the urging,” said Richards, “but I feel the insistence of it. Viscerally, there’s nothing quite so insistent as this impulse to evolve.”

What is this impulse to evolve? What is this that awakens in the heart a concern for the unthinkable tragic and glorious whole that we are a part of? Sri Aurobindo, the twentieth-century

philosopher and sage, had an intuition of this when he wrote: “There is in the cosmos, in the collectivity, in the individual, a rooted instinct or belief in its own perfectibility, a constant drive towards an ever-increasing and more adequate and more harmonious self-development nearer to the secret truth of things.” This is what we each have to find—the drive of the truth within us, an inner imperative that calls us to act for the sake of something far larger than ourselves. The power of our postmodern moment is that, despite the fact that we have been squandering our extraordinary capacity to think and to reflect by being so self-focused, we are beginning to glimpse the tremendous evolutionary potential of human consciousness. Even just in that dawning recognition, a new moral view can be awakened. A world at the breaking point calls on each of us to stretch, to reach for the mind-boggling possibility that human consciousness could give birth to a new morality that will show us the way to literally transform the world. And facing the enormity of the task—the sheer impossibility of it, the absolute necessity that it happen, the cry from the heart that says it is, in fact, so very real—brings us to the edge of that new morality itself. While as yet this is a morality we do not know, it can be kindled within us to continually evolve to meet the transcendent demand of the human spirit for greater freedom and higher unity, realized on this earth in our bodies and through our souls. ■



# Conversations with



The author and her father, 1961

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# my Father

## Postmodernism, morality, and the evolution of a father-daughter relationship

by Jessica Roemischer

### EMBRYONIC JOURNEY

In one of my earliest memories, I was standing in my crib in the bedroom of our beautiful Tudor home, just north of New York City, from which I overlooked the vast Hudson River and from which I overlooked the driveway. It was late afternoon and the familiar crunching sound of tires on asphalt and gravel released the joyous response of fulfilled anticipation: my dad was home. A buoyant happiness flooded my body as I began shaking the crib to the bounce of the music coming from the radio down the hall: "Double your pleasure, double your fun, double your flavor, Doublemint gum." It was 1961.

The handful of idyllic years following my birth were often the subject of my mother's reflection: "Your father really loved you and gave you everything during those first few years. You were his first-born." It was the only thing she recounted about him that was free of bitterness. And indeed, those early years were the times I remembered with him that were free of disappointment. I always felt my father and I were close, connected at some deep human level, some a priori dimension that was subtly present always—the simple and immutable expression of the fact that I was his daughter and he my father and that, as it would later turn out, we shared much in common. Yet, as those early years gave way to the mid-sixties, he became elusive, and the sense of joy,

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fullness, and completeness I experienced as a toddler gave way to a gnawing hunger and a haunting uncertainty: I couldn't grasp him, hold him, rely on him.

I had just turned six when one afternoon, my mother came down to the kitchen crying. When I asked why, she said, "I've got a stomachache." It didn't quite add up—she never cried. But shortly following that puzzling episode, she sat my brother and me down and explained that my dad would be living somewhere else, although he'd come to visit every week or two. And he did, sleeping on the living room couch, a prized piece of modern Danish furniture that we all knew was uncomfortable, despite its value. What we didn't learn until years later was that he had left to start a new family with the young woman who had been our nanny.

It was 1969. The day prior to my tenth birthday, I watched on a small black-and-white TV as Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first humans to stand on soil beyond our planet. But what I remember more vividly from that summer was standing alone on the exposed dirt in the open field parking lot of the girls' summer camp I attended in the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts. One by one, the parents were arriving for Parents' Day, meeting their daughters, and walking off to spend the rest of the afternoon together. I kept waiting, but my dad still didn't arrive. Minutes and hours went by, and I was the last one left, accompanied by one of the counselors, watching forlornly as the last few girls and family members disappeared from view. Finally my father drove up, but by then it was late afternoon and most of the Parents' Day activities were over. I couldn't help but be happy to see him . . . and sad.

"Jesus Christ, Jess, I think that's your father!" exclaimed my mother one morning later that year. Sure enough, there he was on the front page of the *New York Times*. Bearded and pony-tailed, he was pictured marching in an anti-war demonstration in Washington, D.C., carrying a casket, which, the caption said, was filled with the names of the Americans killed in Vietnam. By this time, I was beginning to realize that my dad was unlike most of my friends' fathers. He was *cool*. I would invite friends to come with me to the house he had recently purchased and was fixing up in the rural far reaches of upstate New York. There, in a small, picturesque town on the shores of Lake Champlain, in a community that shared few (if any) of his progressive values, he planted his new family, his left-wing lifestyle, and what proved to be the best home-grown marijuana he'd ever smoked. "It's the fertilizer I made from chicken shit," he proudly declared.

Commuting long distance, he split his time between his new family and his classes at Brooklyn College, where he taught. Sometimes he would pick up my brother and me on the way back upstate. Whenever we'd leave my mom in our beautiful suburb to drive the five hours north to his rambling old home, she would stand in the frame of the front door, beyond consolation—partly from the loneliness that she knew would follow and partly out of disdain for my father's new life and growing family. "Your father needed four more kids like he needed a hole in the head" became one of her favorite quips, delivered with predictable and scathing bite. And while that wasn't an unreasonable response, all things considered, life at home with my mother could be suffocating. So, despite the lack of sustained human connection with my dad, I was always relieved and happy to go visit him. In the midst of





it all—my mother's overbearing nature and my father's elusiveness—I began to fill the loneliness by being hip, being popular, by enfolding myself into the haunting melodies I improvised on our grand piano in the stillness of the evening, and soon thereafter by enfolding myself into guys.

#### TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL

About the same time that I realized my dad was cool, I also realized he was brilliant. A philosophy professor with an exceptionally broad-ranging knowledge, from the Greeks to the most contemporary philosophical trends, his specialty was the school of American pragmatists that included George Herbert Mead and John Dewey. His doctoral thesis, a full sixteen hundred pages of original research on the little-known Scottish philosopher Thomas Davidson, was the definitive statement on that man's life and work, far superseding all previous explications of Davidson's philosophical contribution. My mother kept a copy of it in the basement, all five volumes. We joked that my father's thesis must have been used to argue the decision to ultimately cap thesis size at three hundred pages.

As I grew older, my father became a resource for my mind, for that part of me that was compelled by ideas, a part not entirely dissociated from, but also not entirely connected to, my heart. "Jess, before you graduate from Princeton, you have to have the invaluable experience of reading Plato's *Apology* in ancient Greek," my dad advised me one afternoon as we were driving up to his home on Lake Champlain. In the end, I did enroll in Ancient Greek, but was disappointed by the professor, who was far less inspiring than my own father on the subject.

Indeed, in the times he and I spent together as I went through my late teens and early twenties, we would invariably speak about philosophy, about the history of ideas, about the evolution of Western thought. Together with him, I roamed the vast terrain of the Western world's great philosophical traditions, touching down on Socrates, St. Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, and Dewey. Actually, my father's specialty was the pragmatic *application* of those ideas, particularly in the field of education. He taught teachers how to teach. And for him, education was important because it was anchored in the real world and in the realm of human learning, human transformation, and most importantly, human relationship.

I was nourished by his exuberant love of life and by his insights into and appreciation of human nature, which spanned the spectrum of race and culture, touching the lives of the young pupils of the inner-city student teachers he supervised. He did everything he could to help those teachers-to-be recognize the raw energy and potential of the children in their classes, simultaneously revealing how so much of the standardized educational process stultified them. One time, a student teacher from a predominantly black school in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn presented my dad with the test paper of a particularly tough fifth grader. In every box on the mindless rote exam, the boy had carefully penned "Fuck you" in large, clear letters. My dad's eyes lit up as he said to the young teacher, "This kid hasn't been beaten down by the system yet! There's something here you can work with!" I deeply appreciated his appreciation.

At the same time, my father seemed like a walking contradiction, fueled by a formidable intellect and a genuine love for





human beings but driven by his own compulsions—compulsions that were more than accommodated, indeed encouraged, amid the new freedoms of the time. As I was to discover years later, in some important ways he exemplified the culture that emerged during the sixties. Because, despite the progressive ideologies of those who participated in and defined that era, the personal lives of so many during that period pulled free from the moral principles that had tethered uncountable generations before.

And so it was with my dad. His unusual passion for life, his generosity of spirit, and his prodigious intellect were offset by a failure to take responsibility in his personal life, and this continued to create an existential rift within me. My mind and heart split in order to accommodate it. Sifting through the contradictory experiences, my mind fed on the inspiration and knowledge he transmitted while my heart tried to reconcile my long-standing hunger for his attention and love. Indeed, he continued to be unreliable and distracted, and he continued to be late. It was simple: as it did for many of his generation, the loosened morality that buoyed the emerging culture freed him, and a whole society, from the traditional social rules and roles. But in the process, it also despoiled those qualities that form the very fabric of human relationship—trust, commitment, authenticity. And as my own life unfolded over the years to come, I would realize firsthand that the lack of moral constraint left both freedom and a legacy of narcissism in its wake.

#### FURTHER ON UP THE ROAD

"You threw him out?" my dad asked in disbelief when he discovered that I had packed my husband's belongings and deposited them on the porch of a friend's home. "Yes, I felt I needed to have my own space again," I responded. "He wasn't a bad guy, Jess," he

said. "I know you were dissatisfied with the marriage, but I don't think he deserved *that*." "You're right, Dad, but nonetheless, it was time to move on." I was thirty-one and had become a teacher in my own right—of both music and photography. And devoting my life to pedagogy was not the only thing I had in common with my dad—I was into my second marriage by my early thirties, having escaped the deficiencies of my past by moving to Australia straight out of college with a young Australian photographer, marrying him, divorcing him, and then marrying an artist who I met partway through my six years of expatriation Down Under, and who accompanied me back to the States. And finally, like my dad, I had developed a reputation for being chronically late.

"Jess, I think having a kid would be good for you," my dad said one afternoon shortly following my return home. "It would encourage you to think of someone besides yourself." Considering his past with my brother and me, the irony of his advice did not escape me, and I shrugged off the suggestion, entirely happy to live free of the responsibilities of parenting. Even the responsibility of marriage, or long-term relationship, proved to be too stifling and too demanding, and for a good chunk of the nineties I remained untethered from traditional societal roles, wifehood, motherhood. I didn't have a bumper sticker that said "Question Authority" or "Vote for the Equal Rights Amendment," and I didn't spend my time fighting the system—I didn't have to. The work had already been done and the ground already laid for me to live (almost) entirely free of responsibility except for the demands of making a living, which I managed to do with the minimum of inconvenience and the maximum of free time. It wasn't a coincidence that I ended up living in what is arguably the most progressive, most uniformly postmodern state in the country—Vermont. There, I enjoyed the



# Religion Community Fellowship INDEPENDENCE Tradition



fruits and freedoms afforded by all the postmodern movements: the women's movement, the human rights movement, the tenants' rights movement, the gay rights movement.

In fact, amidst the cultural leniency, I took a sabbatical from men and, for the first time, entered into a relationship with a woman. This suddenly materialized in my awareness an entire subcultural identity, replete with its own bumper stickers, rainbow flags, and righteous agendas. It also materialized shock and horror from my mother. My father, true to form, accepted the whole thing. "You and Melanie are welcome to visit any time you like; I love seeing you both," he often reassured me. My comfortable lifestyle became even more comfortable with the help of my partner's assets, and I basked in being able to be ideologically progressive and perfectly luxurious simultaneously. I worked even less, and then, not at all. In retrospect, my father was probably right about having a child—it certainly *would* have shaken things up.

My ongoing interest in spirituality added spice and a taste of *samadhi*, of blissful inner peace, to the mix. My own meditation practice had officially started back in 1976 when my best high school friend, Cirsten, who had just attended a Transcendental Meditation course, taught me how to meditate. One summer evening, in the quiet of her attic bedroom overlooking the broad dark expanse of the Hudson River, Cirsten instructed me: on each out breath, say silently to yourself, "One." And so I did, my breath merging with the stillness of the night, and my mind dissolving into the silence.

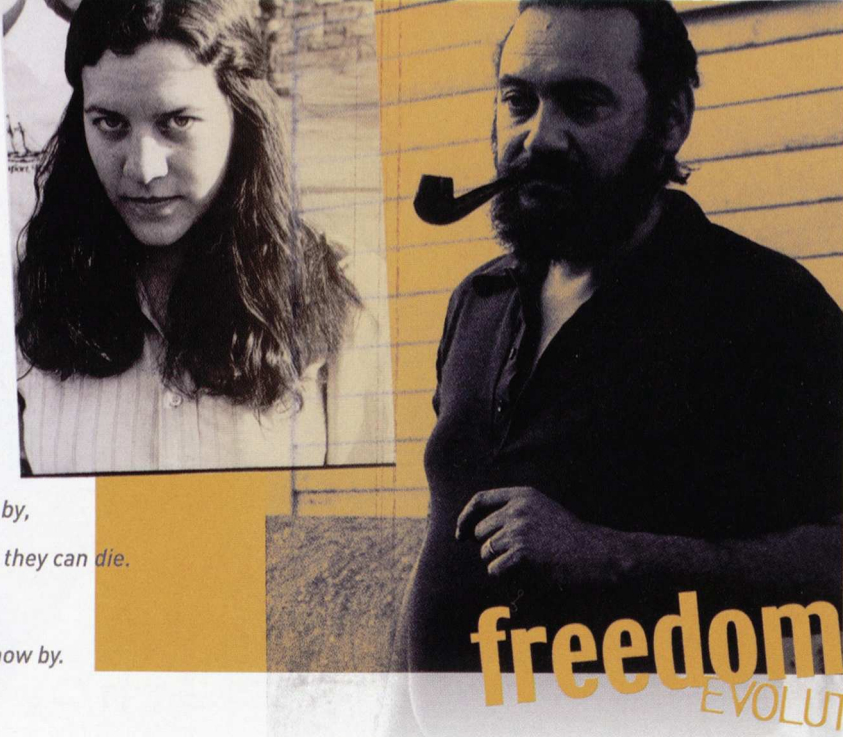
Ever since that night, true to my generation, I had a strong attraction to transcendent spiritual experiences, as well as to the menu of new "spiritual" options that became available, from rebirthing to shamanism to past-life regressions. There was even

a period when I sought the channeled guidance of a local psychic, who I would pay to tell me if my latest love interest was, in fact, worth pursuing. In short, whether it was rolling on the floor in the fetal-position throes of a particularly powerful rebirthing session, dissolving into the shaman-induced depths of the netherworld, or soaring out into cosmic expanses and inner realms populated by beings of celestial light, as the years passed, my life became more and more about the spiritual and, well, a lot more about me.

Various incarnations of spiritual experience and spiritual practice wove in and out of my life across two decades, two continents, two husbands, and one lesbian lover, finally leading me to the mountains of South Korea. There, perched at the edge of a precipitous incline, in a small flimsy building filled with fearsome Buddhist imagery, dozens of white candles, and a steady turnover of edible offerings, under the direction of a Korean Zen master, everything became vibrational energy, full and empty at the same time. All reference points were subsumed into a field of undifferentiated bliss. But when, at the end of my initial training period, he suggested I become a nun, I balked. The weight of centuries of Korean tradition, cultural and spiritual, suddenly filled the broad highway of the remaining lifetime that stretched out before me. And even bliss couldn't override what I realized was my stubborn attachment to the freedom to reinvent myself, to travel that highway in ways that I couldn't yet imagine.

When, in 1997, I told my dad that I had just discovered a spiritual teacher who was American and who emphasized responsibility and integrity over inner experience (no matter how profound or blissful that experience may be), and who was entirely skeptical of the so-called New Age spiritual world, he immediately responded positively. And then he added something that, it seemed, he had been waiting a long time to say to me: "You know, Jess, the thing





And you, of tender years can't know the fears that your elders grew by,  
and so please help them with your youth, they seek the truth before they can die.  
Teach your parents well, their children's hell will slowly go by,  
and feed them on your dreams, the one they pick is the one you'll know by.  
Don't you ever ask them why, if they told you, you would cry,  
so just look at them and sigh and know they love you.

From "Teach Your Children"  
by Graham Nash

that's always bothered me about most of these so-called spiritual types is that they often seem more selfish and self-involved than people who don't even think of themselves as 'spiritual.' They actually think *less* about others, not more."

My father, his own past notwithstanding, was right. As I considered my spiritual career, with all those transcendent, transpersonal experiences, I couldn't honestly say they had made me a *better*, more honorable person or had resulted in deeper, more enduring relationships, despite the bliss. And it wasn't just loneliness that began to irk me. Emerging from somewhere deeper than even my desire for profound states of meditation was a growing sense that what was most spiritually significant happened *between* human beings. As I reflected back, I recalled that my earliest spiritual inspiration had actually come, via my father, from the great Jewish theologian Martin Buber, whose philosophy pointed to a depth of human relationship beyond all separation and self-concern, beyond ego—*I and Thou*. All real living is *meeting*, my Dad had quoted from Buber, years before I knew what a *mantra* was.

#### PROMISED LAND

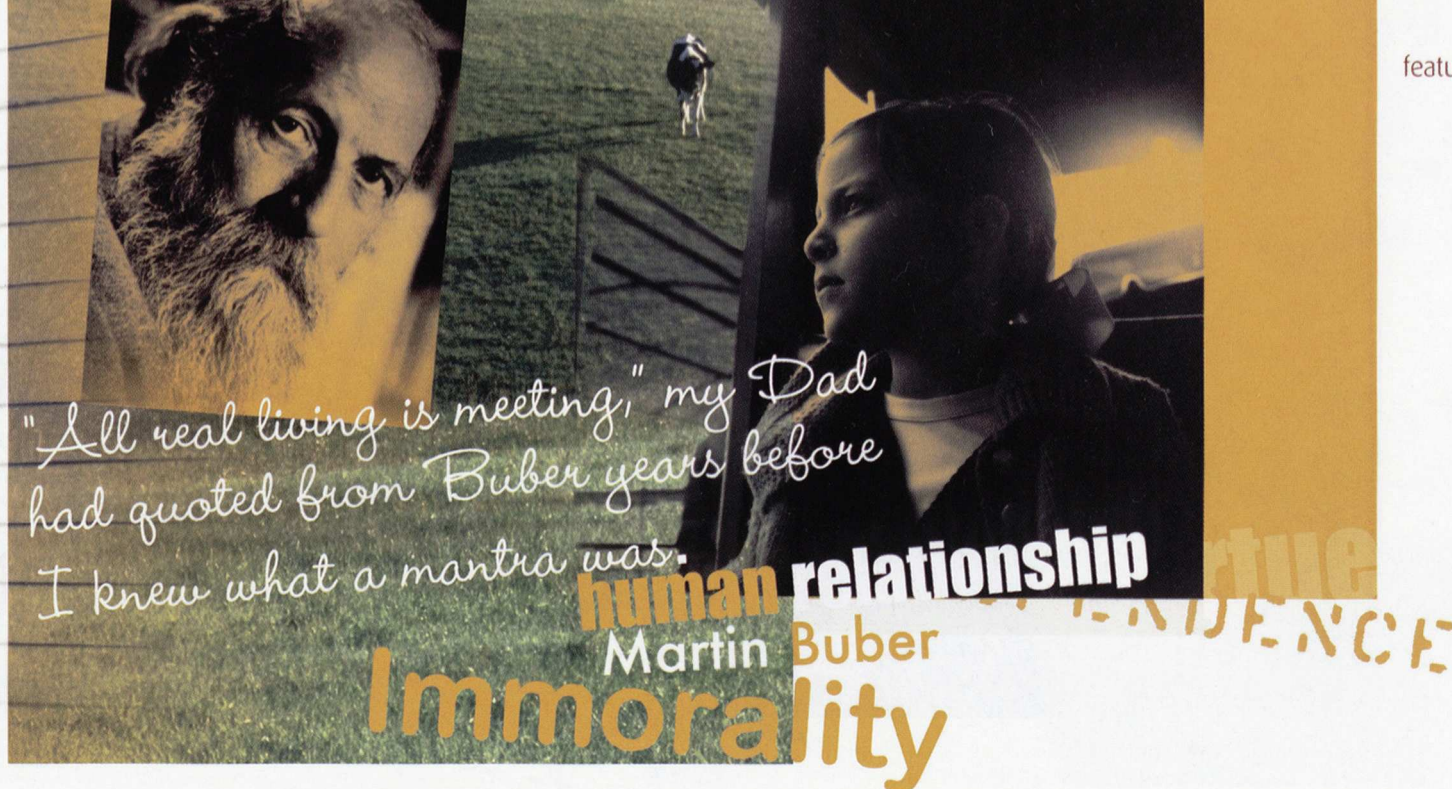
"I think I'm going to leave Melanie with the farm in Vermont," I told my dad one morning in early spring. "But, Jess, *you just bought it!*" he exclaimed. And he meant "just." Three months after the turn of the third millennium and three weeks after purchasing a property so picturesque it could easily have graced the cover of *Vermont Life* magazine, I was antsy. I had never owned property before, and here I was, with my name on the deed of the most beautiful bit of topsoil I could imagine. "Something's calling me, Dad," I explained to him. "Something's always calling you, Jess," he retorted lightly. "I mean, of all my kids, you're the one who's always kept

me guessing." But whatever it was that kept me moving and kept my dad guessing, I was haunted. Having just turned forty, the awareness of my own mortality was overriding what would otherwise constitute the fulfillment of most peoples' life dream.

"Are you sure you're not just going through the same motions as when you threw Steve out?" he asked. "Dad, for one thing, this time I'm throwing *myself* out. And all I can say is that my life has to *mean* something," I told him emphatically. And even though I didn't know exactly what that would look like, I knew it had something to do with the *meeting* that Buber spoke of. And I knew that that meeting was about more than having *I-Thou* experiences with the cows in the neighborhood (who far outnumbered humans), or even with my partner. "Dad, to be honest, it's lonely up here. And more important than that, I long to be a part of something bigger than myself, a movement or community of some kind, something that models a vision of the future. I dream that an entirely new world is possible, manifested between human beings, '*between man and man*,' as Buber says." In fact, that vision was welling up inside me, pulling me ever more strongly. And although I had absolutely everything I had ever thought I needed, nothing could substitute for what I dreamed was possible—to be part of a fellowship based upon real relationship, real trust, real goodness, *real meeting*. Buber on a grand scale.

In what seemed like an interminable moment, I paused to reflect on the magnitude of the decision I was about to make. Then, quietly and thoughtfully, my dad responded: "I think I understand what you're speaking about. And what's compelling you has driven many throughout history to seek a new life, particularly during the last 150 years or so. The Bloomsbury Group in England, the people who went out west to form utopian kinds of enterprises, the Fellowship of the New Life in America, right up to





the communes of the sixties and seventies. Thomas Davidson, on whom I wrote my doctoral thesis, actually started the Fellowship of the New Life in London in 1883, and it was a model community of independent individuals which then moved to the United States and spent summers in upstate New York.

"Wasn't Davidson's community close to where you live, on Lake Champlain?" I asked. The memory of a warm summer afternoon in the early seventies suddenly flooded my awareness. During one of our visits to see my father, he decided to drive all of us kids west into the Adirondack Mountains. We drove as far as we could up a narrow dirt road and then walked the remaining distance up the mountain to a handful of small abandoned cabins in Keene, New York. We found one cabin that was open, and we had a picnic on its front porch, overlooking the most gorgeous mountain panorama I had ever seen. I recall the distinct impression that the cabins hadn't been used in years. In fact, that modest enclave, nestled amidst woods and wild flowers, was what remained of Davidson's Fellowship of the New Life, which at its height in the late 1800's had included such luminaries as William James and John Dewey.

Then it suddenly hit me. *My dad had been driven by a passionate interest in the same possibility that inspired me!* "Gosh, Dad, I hadn't put it together until this moment—you've been intrigued by this same ideal yourself!" "Yes, I have. There have been any number of efforts over the last century and a half to form a nucleus community, to build an entirely new model for the rest of civilization beyond the old and limiting social, religious, and moral structures. But in the end, none of them succeeded." "Why?" I asked. "Well, nearly all of them died because of their inner difficulties." *Their inner difficulties*, I mused. He proceeded to explain that, for the most part, it had to do with ideological differences and person-

ality struggles. And I knew there was something significant about these so-called inner difficulties. I kept wondering: What is it that keeps human beings from truly coming together to create a model for the future? What comes between us, *really*?

#### SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

Conversations with my father often traversed the spectrum from the sublime to the ridiculous and back again, and this one turned out to be no different. I had left Vermont to follow the calling to be a part of a forward-looking community. And now, working as an editor for a magazine inspired by the same ideals, I was phoning him to find out if he'd give me input on an article I was writing. "In our next issue," I explained to him, "we're exploring why, at the threshold of the new millennium, and in the midst of our postmodern culture, we need a new morality, one that can help us move forward into the future, one that by necessity is beyond the traditional, millennia-old moral structures." He suddenly apologized about having to interrupt me and took an incoming call. "Sorry about that, Jess," he said after a minute or so. "That was your Aunt Mary. We're going on a lox expedition in preparation for a visit from your cousins Mickey and Shirley." "A lox expedition?" I inquired. "What else is there to look for, Jess? You know, there's something about salmon and Jews. They were connected in Genesis. God said, let there be salmon. And the Jews said, let there be lox. This is a recreation of the Genesis story. And the Jews asked, well, God, what about light? And God said to the Jews, first let there be lox, and then there will be light! And lox *has* to be smoked!" When I asked him if he was making this up on the spot, he replied, "Yes, this is called narrative philosophy." "And as a philosopher, you're rewriting the narrative," I added. "Yup."

I always knew that my father was a philosopher, but in all





honesty I had never bothered to ask what a philosopher actually was. “Dad,” I asked, “this may sound like a silly question, but what exactly is a philosopher?” He explained that a philosopher is someone who is a pioneer, who is on the frontier, and who is often in the position of turning back to look at a society that is in decline and then coming forward to formulate a position that would rectify that. And if they’re not charting the next philosophical and cultural paradigm, they’re studying the philosophy of the past, which, by definition, is the expression of important transitional periods in history. “Dad, that’s perfect, because that’s the context for this new piece I’m writing—looking ahead to see how we can create a new society, one that can serve as an antidote to the enormous difficulties and divisions inherent in the human condition that now threaten the planet. And, I’m realizing how we may need a whole new morality to make that happen.”

“So you’re trying to come up with a new *narrative*, a new definition of human life, based upon a new moral context,” he observed. “Exactly!” I said. “Well, you know that huge crucifix above my office desk?” Of course I remembered it, but surprisingly, had never asked my Jewish father why he had it there. “It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” he went on. “It’s handmade and quite old. I got it in an antique store in Boston. And I love having it up there. Some of my Catholic friends came to dinner one time, and one of my colleagues said, ‘Well, John, you’ve got a crucifix up there.’ And I said, ‘Yes, it has a special meaning for me.’ They asked, ‘What’s that?’ And I replied, ‘It depicts what happens when a Jewish guy talks too much.’” “Oh Dad, can we speak seriously for a minute?” “That was serious.”

“Basically,” he continued, “Jesus was rewriting the narrative of his era by creating a new moral framework. He was redefining

the very ground of human relationship and, by extension, human society.” When I thought about it, I realized my dad was right. From what I had recently learned, the moral, religious, and societal context, or “narrative,” of that historical period and place was dictated primarily by well-to-do Roman families adorned with golden crowns, holding marvelous dinner parties with marvelous food and drink, indulging in love affairs and acts of war. Then along came Jesus Christ, with the belief that every human being is created in the image of God and should abide by the moral ideals of “love your neighbor” and “give to the poor” and even consider that celibacy “for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven” may in fact be preferable to marriage. And while we now take for granted that at least the first two of those three prescriptions are true and virtuous, they were a radical and revolutionary departure from the social norms of ancient Rome. As a result, Jesus provoked violent reaction.

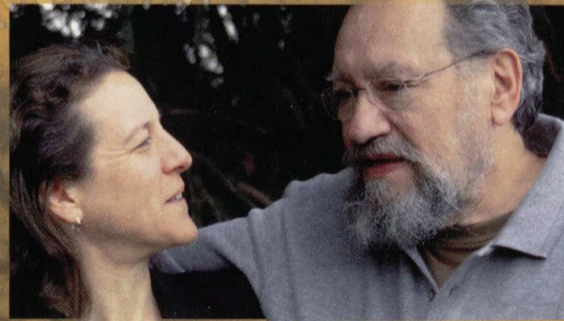
“You know, Dad, it seems to me that in our culture we’re not all that far away from the decadence and immorality of the Romans of that time. I mean, have you watched cable TV lately?” I asked. “No wonder all the social indicators reveal the devastating effects of this decline, measuring huge increases in divorce, school violence, widespread use of antidepressants, you name it.” He couldn’t help but agree. “And Dad, despite the positive impulses of the sixties and seventies, a time fueled by experimentation and the quest for freedom, this period seems to have degenerated into a culture of narcissistic indulgence.” I reminded him of one of my first visits to his new home in upstate New York back in the early seventies. He often invited his college students to visit, and on this particular weekend, a few of them arrived, replete with the usual variety of psychotropic substances. The local police had caught wind of the fact that illicit drugs were on the premises.



# Philosophy

## RECONSTRUCTION

CS  
nce  
sm



# Insight

# Communion

When they showed up the morning following an all-night party, they found students strewn everywhere, one of whom had the unusual characteristic of sleeping with his eyes fully open, which made him appear dead. This so utterly unnerved the local cops, who were hardly used to handling more than the occasional traffic infraction, that they gave my dad a warning and hurriedly left without further inquiry.

My mind traversed the past three decades, flooded with images of my own excesses, my own live-for-myself narcissism, a self-absorption that over time became more pervasive and entrenched, and ran progressively deeper than the surface manifestations of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. "Narcissism is the cult of the individual," my dad interjected. "And it takes many different forms, all of which erode human relationship. In that light, egoism and narcissism have become the critical problems in social living, and their elimination is now an evolutionary matter. The moral quest always has been, and continues to be the elimination of whatever stands as an impediment to the enlargement of human community. Actually, this has been the core issue in American philosophy. The narcissism that is so pervasive in our culture today is both a disruptive force and a source of social evil, and the imperative to move beyond it is first and foremost a moral quest. And we'll all have to grapple with our own narcissism in order to succeed because the egoistic self cares nothing for others, or for the future. And more than that, it has the one-pointed intention to preclude the possibility of its own transformation, its own evolutionary development—not to mention the development of others."

"That's absolutely true, Dad. And that's why everything you're saying is so clarifying and so valuable, both on a personal and a

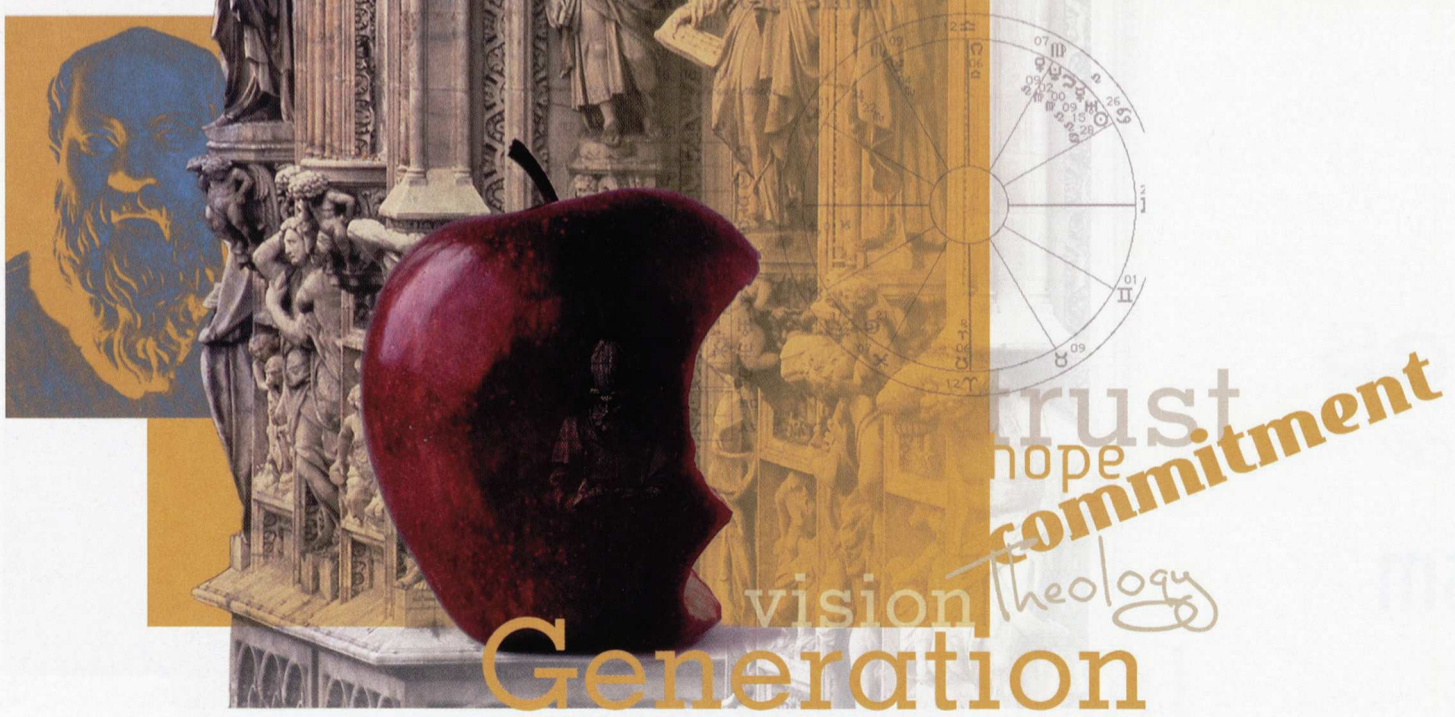
philosophical level." "Well, Jess," he responded, "I'm very interested in what you're writing about. But to be honest, expounding on this is relatively easy. The real challenge is *actualizing* the kind of new social reality, new community that we've been speaking about, one that is guided by a new moral framework. And this task is certainly gargantuan. Because as history has shown, and as all these failed movements have proven, the most difficult thing is to enter into the arena with other human beings. 'Morality' and 'ethics' mean engaging in such a way as to manifest change—to manifest goodness, humility, *real fellowship*. And, as Plato recognized, human beings aren't easily disposed to change." "That's the perennial challenge, Dad." "Yes, honey, it's perennial."

### MAYBE I'M AMAZED

"Dad, I know it's late, but I have something to tell you. I'm in a relationship, and we'll probably be getting married within the year." "Really?!" "He's passionate about all the same things as I am. And you're not going to believe this . . ." I added hesitatingly. "Go ahead." "He's Australian!" "Are you kidding me, Jess?! Does he know he's going to be number three?" "Not yet," I admitted. "I mean, at this point," he remarked laughingly, "you should get compensation from the Australian government." "I think I got the compensation in advance when I was on the dole there years ago!" I retorted.

"Congratulations, honey; I look forward to meeting him. And since we've been talking about morality, it's interesting to see this new development in your life in terms of how we view moral principles in the postmodern era. Because getting married for a second time, let alone a third, would have been unprecedented two generations ago—you would have been branded. People would





have thought that there was something wrong with *you*, not with the institution. The traditional belief, which informed marriage for centuries, was that it was a sacrament that could not be violated; it was a God-given imperative. These days, we go through the process of getting married, but it's no longer seen as a sacrament. Therefore, it's easy enough to break and redo, and do again and again and again. So now you're on your third marriage."

It was true. My mind flashed back to 1977, the year I left home, and it was clear that nothing remotely like God-given moral prescriptions had ever governed my life. That year marked the beginning of the meandering succession of choices I would make over the next nearly three decades. Connecting the dots in my mind, I came up with a constellation that had formed out of the unprecedented freedom, the seemingly infinite possibility, which had replaced the clearly delineated boundaries of traditional life. But, in reality, what that traditional "narrative" was superseded by was a life determined, more than at any previous time in history, by my own impulses and preferences, many of which were blatantly self-serving. That was my father's legacy, and that's what has proceeded to define an entire generation—my generation.

As silence descended on our conversation, I absentmindedly rummaged through the file drawers near the phone. What I'd collected over time spoke for postmodernity itself: expired passports full of entry visas, marriage certificates (no longer valid), divorce certificates (valid), property deeds, expired rental agreements, love letters, photographs and addresses (probably no longer current) of long-lost friends, photographs of ex-lovers (some taken in far-flung places), photographs of long-gone pets (taken in familiar places), diplomas, astrology charts, grade cards for courses taken toward an advanced degree (never completed), car registrations (expired).

I realized, as I reflected back in that long moment, that I had been able to meander through life as I wished, choosing this and that, all seemingly important and justified choices at the time. But while they had gotten me to where I was, the threads of those choices had not coalesced into the supple fabric of sustained human relationship. Postmodernity is nothing if not episodic, precisely because it is, for the most part, governed by self-interest, by narcissism. Moral fiber is about more than the ropes that bind and constrain us. It is also about the common threads in a warp and weft that tension and make possible human relationship, that connect human beings across space and time. And it is this that we've lost in our postmodern freedom. At the same time, I also realized how much the newly won freedoms of postmodernity really meant. I suddenly blurted out to my father, whom I had almost forgotten was still on the phone: "Dad, I could never imagine giving up the freedom that we now have. But, on the other hand, we human beings have lost touch with each other, and with life itself, to such an extent that the future of the planet is now literally at stake! Our immorality, as expressed in our lack of *real* human connection and care, now has *global* repercussions."

"Jess," he responded after a long silence, "we do have extraordinary and unprecedented independence, which has been built upon the developments of the past, developments that represent a breaking through into greater degrees of freedom, and that have gotten us to where we are. Human beings are so constructed that they move toward certain ends and ideally, these ends manifest appropriate ethical being and ethical becoming toward freedom, which is a driving human impulse.

"The great symbol of ethical conduct," my dad continued, "is the index finger pointing, giving direction to the human person to actualize the goodness that's possible, which means that such





choice  
action  
NEW  
reconstruction

## moral code

*Moral fiber is about more than  
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possible human relationship, that connect  
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a thing as goodness is possible. But it's important to recognize that today our relationship to ethics and morality has changed because, rather than being governed by pre-given moral prescriptions, we now have an independent and volitional relationship to morality—a *choice*—as in our redefining, for example, of what fidelity or marriage is. So now, the ends and the means have become one, because the very *act* of redefining morality is itself the achievement of the freedom we are seeking to manifest. And this whole human drama is about moving humans to something that is commonly human, to something higher, which at this point in history must bring us together beyond all separation, a real 'fellowship for the new life.'

"And that means," he concluded, "that, in an evolutionary context, morality becomes about what supports the possibility of our own reconstruction. And in that reconstruction, through the redefining of the moral code, we can actualize a new order of being and a new society. But what I'm speaking about is not just a *state* of being. It's grounded in action and choice. Our hard-won freedom has become the ability to define morality *volitionally*, for the highest possible cause, for the sake of freedom itself, and for the sake of a new world."

"Dad, that means that at this point in time we have an even greater moral responsibility because we are actually responsible for creating the next social order and determining the moral framework that will make that possible. It's now up to us to express the human impulse and imperative toward real meeting, toward freedom, and toward a new future." "You're right, it is a huge responsibility," he responded. "But this responsibility is what will make us truly human, beyond the rigidities and limitations of what was believed to be the God-given, traditional morality of the past."

"It's actually very moving to be able to share these things with you, Dad. And it has been invaluable. Over the last few weeks and months," I continued, "we've been in touch more than I can ever remember." "Jess, I feel like an old farmer who's been given a piece of fertile soil to tend." It was a beautiful image. "I feel empty when we don't speak," he added. I could not remember him ever having said anything like that before, or spoken in quite that way. He continued a little more slowly, and with gravity, "Well, maybe in a very small way what we are sharing now can begin to help make up for all those years I neglected you, those years of disappointment." "It does, Dad, it definitely does," I said softly. "And how about this," I proposed. "Let's make a pact that neither of us is going to keep anyone waiting ever again!" "That's a deal!" "I love you, Dad." "Good night, honey."

I hung up the phone. It was nearly midnight. Time had flown by, as it always seemed to do when we were speaking. The years had flown by. I was once again absorbed by that earliest memory, my infant experience of ecstatic fulfillment upon my father's arrival home. In those early years, the momentum of tradition, of stability, of family life, had yet to give way to the unstructured realms of newfound freedom, replete with disappointment, hunger, and spiritual yearning. Now, on the other side of those decades, I realized that two generations—my father's and my own—had moved on, matured, evolved, depositing us at the threshold of a new life, a new millennium. And I had glimpsed the possibility of a new moral order, one which arises organically from the depths of our own humanity, and our passion for freedom, and which I realized I was experiencing firsthand in the love that now came naturally, and unbidden, from my own father. ■



# Throwing Water at the Clouds

The Mysterious Powers  
of Pilot Baba

by Craig Hamilton

WHEN IT COMES TO MIRACLE-WORKING, the wisdom traditions of the East never seem to be able to make up their minds.

Take the last century. On one side, there was Paramahansa Yogananda. Bursting onto the scene in 1946, his now classic *Autobiography of a Yogi* captured the imaginations of a generation of Western seekers with thrilling tales of living spiritual supermen whose miraculous powers suddenly made our comic-book heroes look a bit less fantastical. Mysterious sages who could control the weather at will. Great masters who could fly through the air and walk through walls or appear in multiple places at once. Austeres yogis with the power to read and control men's minds, muster herculean strength, and tolerate insufferable pain without flinching. Along with a few other landmark books like Baird Spaulding's *Life and Teachings of the Masters of the Far East* and Lama Govinda's *Way of the White Clouds*, Yogananda cast in our minds a vision of spiritual enlightenment in which the attainment of a kind of supernatural omnipotence was not only



When an individual goes into *samadhi*, a tremendous power is released which can uplift, inspire, heal, and transform all who come into contact with it.

possible but the destiny of anyone who would take up the path of meditation in earnest.

On the other side was Sri Ramana Maharshi. Hailing from the Advaita Vedanta, or nondualist, school of Hinduism, he insisted that any interest in the attainment of *siddhis* [supernatural powers] was not only misguided but a distraction on the path to the Ultimate Realization. “Occult powers will not bring happiness to anyone,” he claimed. “They are not natural to the Self . . . and . . . not worth striving for.” Supported in this view by such luminaries as Nisargadatta Maharaj and Sri Ramakrishna, who declared that the *siddhis* are “heaps of rubbish,” he carried forward the legacy of a long tradition of mystics including even the Buddha, who warned against any attempt to work miracles.

If the wisdom coming to us from the East was split on this topic, here in the West, at least initially, the picture wasn't much different. On one hand, many psychologically and rationally inclined Westerners naturally seemed to ignore the supernatural dimensions of Indian spirituality, giving more attention to the psychological and emotional benefits of meditative practice. But on the other hand, owing mostly to the power marketing of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation (TM) Siddhi program and Yogananda's Self-Realization Fellowship, as well as to the uncanny popularity of the miracle-working Indian God-man Sai Baba, the promise of attaining miraculous powers did find many converts. Not least among them was a growing cadre of scientifically minded seekers for whom the *siddhis* represented a thrilling research potential—an opportunity to prove to the scientific establishment the existence of God.

A brief survey of the East-meets-West spiritual landscape today, however, suggests that of late, the Western interest in superordinary powers has been losing some ground. Perhaps the mystics' warnings have simply had their intended effect. Perhaps the fact that Sai Baba was caught several times on film faking some of his “miracles” made former believers cynical. Or perhaps we've

all just waited too long for our TM-practicing friends to actually demonstrate something that remotely passes for “yogic flying.” But whatever the cause, here in the modern West, the promise of the miraculous seems to be losing its allure.

Interestingly enough, on the far shores of India, some similar trends are under way. With an increasing secularism sweeping the nation, and the Indian Rationalist Association's “Guru Busters” actively working to debunk every miracle-touting charlatan they can, anyone claiming to be able to defy the laws of nature is in for a fight. Fortunately for the faithful, at least one Indian yogi is not the least bit daunted. He calls himself “Pilot Baba,” and for the past three decades he has been working to uphold the dignity and integrity of the yogic *siddhi* tradition by demonstrating in some very public places his miraculous powers over the world of matter.

A decorated Indian Air Force fighter pilot who saw combat in two wars and also served as personal pilot for Indira Gandhi, this military-man-turned-*mahayogi* regularly attracts tens of thousands of devout Hindus to witness his performances of what is traditionally known as *bhugarbha samadhi* or *jal samadhi* or *Asht Lakshmi Maha Yagna samadhi*. In English, what this means is that he buries himself underground, encases himself in an airtight glass box, or submerges himself under water—for days or even weeks at a time. Employing an ancient yogic technique that could best be described as a sort of human hibernation-plus, Pilot Baba is purported to be able to voluntarily shut down all bodily functions to the point that he is clinically dead, only to return to life at a pre-specified date and time—a feat that has withstood the scrutiny of at least some Western scientists. And if all this sounds like something you saw on “That's Incredible!” back in the eighties, remember that the great Yogi Kudu only spent one hour at the bottom of the pool before being fished out to much applause by John Davidson and Cathy Lee Crosby. Pilot Baba's record under water is four days, a figure which itself pales in comparison to the thirty-three days he's spent underground.





**Dewas, India, April 2003.**

As desert temperatures climb to 110 degrees, a motionless Pilot Baba remains enclosed in an airtight glass case. During this yogic feat, which he has performed dozens of times, he claims to be able to entirely shut down his vital functions to the point of being clinically dead, only to return to life at a predetermined date and time.

How did a celebrated air force pilot end up deciding to carry this ancient yogic tradition into the third millennium? During his visit to New York last September, I asked Pilot Baba to share his story.

As he tells it, although he never planned to be a yogi, there was a yogi who apparently had plans for him. Guiding him throughout his childhood, and miraculously saving his life more than once during his time in the air force, this mysterious holy man eventually provoked him to renounce the world and, in 1973, with the help of a group of four other sages, initiated him into the mysteries of yoga. But it wasn't until three years (and a several-thousand-mile Himalayan trek) later that those mysteries would begin to unfold in his own experience. During a period of intensive spiritual practice in and around his cave in the Himalayan wilderness, Pilot Baba made a sudden breakthrough that would change the course of his life forever. "I had been sitting on a large, exposed stone in the center of the river for several days, when I had the thought, 'Why doesn't the water flow over me without touching me?' And then it started happening. It started flowing over me and all around me without touching me." As he continued to "play with the water" over the days that followed, people from the nearby village started to gather on the shore, in awe at the spec-

tacle they were beholding. Before long, news began to spread of this mysterious yogi who could control the flow of the river.

Some of us, upon discovering that we had the power to control the forces of nature, might be tempted to use it to improve our lot in life (or at least to rig up some supernatural plumbing for our cave). But for Pilot Baba, the effect was quite the opposite. Realizing that the human will can work wonders "if it is clear, positive, and free from desire," he began to use his newfound powers to heal the suffering people in the villages throughout his region. And as tends to happen around anyone who gains a reputation for healing, in a matter of weeks, people were lining up in droves to receive his blessing. But the miracles didn't stop there.

Indeed, as he began to test the limits of this miraculous power he had stumbled upon, it soon became apparent to him that, for all practical purposes, there were no limits. Over the course of our conversation, he shared one story after another that seemed so far beyond the reach of reason to explain that I soon felt like I was starting to occupy the world Yogananda had written about so many years before. Like the time when he was walking with a group around Mt. Kailash and a giant boulder came careening down the hill toward them and he deflected it by merely holding up his arm. Or the time when he walked on water, all the way to





the center of a large lake. Or the time when a storm threatened to rain out one of his *samadhi* demonstrations and he used his will powers to “throw water at the ominous clouds” and send them away. Or the time he walked barefoot to the summit of one of the Himalayas’ most treacherous peaks—in six hours—in order to assist a climbing party that had taken eighteen days to cover the same ground.

In all of Pilot Baba’s miracle stories, it was clear that these powers are not something he takes lightly or uses frivolously. To

**A decorated Indian Air Force fighter pilot who saw combat in two wars, this military-man-turned-*mahayogi* regularly attracts tens of thousands of devout Hindus to witness his performances.**

the contrary, it seemed to almost go without saying that they should only be employed to help others or when a greater good requires it. In light of this, the fact that he has taken to publicly demonstrating *samadhi* seemed on the surface to be a bit of a paradox. How had these public demonstrations become so central to his work? I asked.

And how had he gotten the idea to do them in the first place? As it turns out, this too had come about in response to a need, albeit a different sort of need than he had previously faced.

The year was 1978, and in a rare departure from the Himalayas, Pilot Baba had traveled to Delhi to attend a large science and yoga conference convened by the great kundalini master Gopi Krishna and attended by a handful of political leaders, a group of scientists, and many of the brightest lights in the Indian yoga world. At some point in the conference, the question of

bodily control was raised. Could any of the esteemed yogis assembled demonstrate the mastery of vital function needed to survive in an airtight glass case?

And when no one in the illustrious gathering volunteered, Pilot Baba, who claims he had never before attempted the feat, raised his hand. “For how many days would you like me to do it?” he asked. Wired up with vital-signs monitors, he crawled into the case, brought his heart to a stop, and for the next three days, an eager assembly looked on.



He was walking with a group around Mt. Kailash and a giant boulder came careening down the hill toward them and he deflected it by merely holding up his arm.

Then, thirty minutes before his scheduled return, a faint heartbeat began to register on the monitor. His emergence from the case—hailed by many as a return from death—was announced in newspapers across India, and as offers to donate land, buildings, and money began to pour in, he disappeared late one night and returned to the peace of the mountains.

But he didn't stay there. In the years since that dramatic event, Pilot Baba—and more recently, his disciples—have been regularly performing public *samadhis* at events as well attended as India's largest spiritual festival, the Maha Kumbha Mela. This has earned him such notoriety and respect among the Hindu faithful that he was recently elected to the lofty position of Mahamandaleshwar, spiritual head of India's largest and most prominent order of renunciates, the million-strong sect of naked, ash-smeared, trident-wielding "warrior-ascetics" known as Naga Babas.

The purpose of the *samadhi* demonstrations, according to his organization's literature, is to promote world peace. And if you find you have to stretch to make the link between returning from the grave and creating peace on Earth, remember that it was a similar demonstration by the "Prince of Peace" two thousand years ago that kick-started one of humanity's most enduring, if not altogether peaceful, religious movements. For Pilot Baba, the connection is unambiguous. When an individual goes into *samadhi*, he told me, a tremendous power is released which can uplift, inspire, heal, and transform all who come into contact with it. Moreover, through the exertion of will by the yogi before entering the *samadhi*, that power can be directed toward a stated goal. And for Pilot Baba and all of the disciples who have dared to join him, that goal is always to generate harmony and peace between human beings.

Now, there are miracles and then there are *miracles*. And for most of us, the ability to shut down and restart one's vital systems, however mind-bending and miraculous, does not fall under quite the same category as flying unaided through the air or controlling the elements. If Pilot Baba really can defy all physical laws, one might ask, why doesn't he do something more dramatic just to put the skeptics to rest once and for all? In response to such questions,

Pilot Baba has always insisted that the *samadhi* demonstrations are not about proving anything to anyone. But if the unexpected turn of events at his most recent *samadhi* is any indication, it does seem that of late, he has decided it might be worth sending a slightly stronger message.

It was the middle of last April in the central Indian town of Dewas, and Pilot Baba had again entered into an airtight glass case where he was to remain motionless for four days. In order to prevent the 110-degree desert heat from causing the case to explode, it had been surrounded by curtains which would be drawn back for brief *darshan* [viewing] periods several times each morning and evening. On the third evening, everything seemed to be proceeding as usual. But at 8pm, when the curtains were drawn open for the third time that night, "a quick hush went over the crowd." As filmmaker Andre Vaillancourt, who was there to document the event, describes it, "I squinted . . . in order to catch a glimpse of Baba. As the words [of the crowd] came to my ears, the picture came into focus: *Baba is gone! Vanished! Dematerialized!* Only his orange *dhoti* [robe] lay on the spot where he sat." Most of the journalists had gone home for the evening, so Vaillancourt was the only one to catch the event on film. But the next evening, the camera crews were all there, along with an unusually large crowd, when Pilot Baba again vanished for the 8 and 9pm *darshans*.

If not to prove anything, then why had he done it? "I wanted to surprise people—particularly the intellectuals," he explained to me as our conversation was drawing to a close.

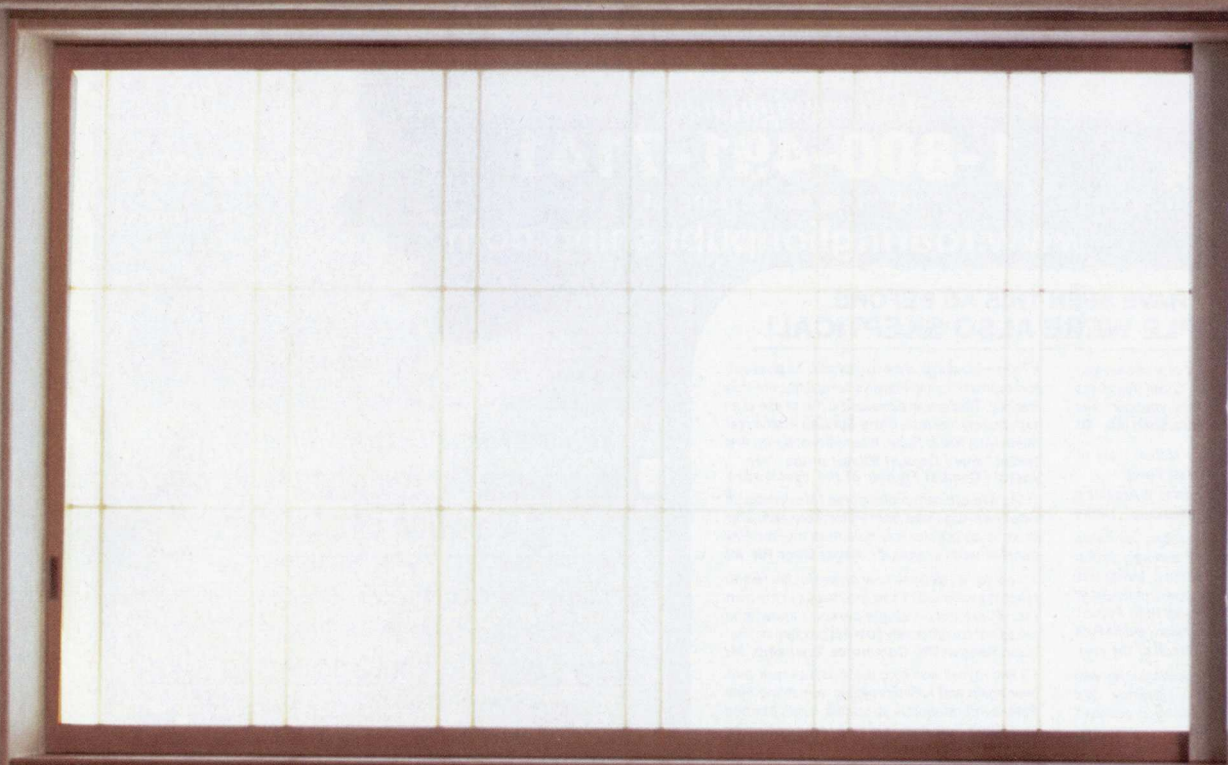
The Indian Rationalist Association, of course, is unimpressed and says it won't be satisfied until Pilot Baba, or any other yogi, performs this demonstration under its supervision. And although Pilot Baba has made it clear that he is certainly not about to stoop to trying to prove God's existence to the rationalists ("Atheists have their religion, too," he states), it may well take just that for his feats to begin making headlines in the West. Whether even a "supervised" demonstration would begin to make inroads against the rationalistic leanings of contemporary spiritual America, however, is anybody's guess. And if Pilot Baba has his way, we'll all be kept guessing for a bit longer. ■



# ENLIGHTEN

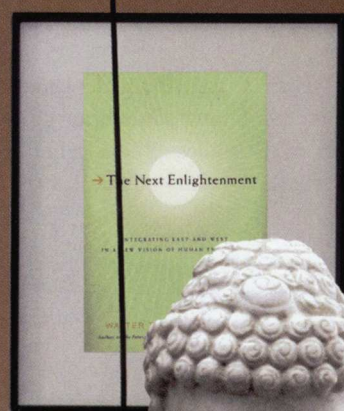
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## UNPLUGGED





# MENT



## Not just a book review of

*The Next Enlightenment: Integrating East and West in a New Vision of Human Evolution*

by Walter Truett Anderson

by Carter Phipps

**ONE OF THE THINGS ANY GOOD** hard scientist can't stand is when spiritual people start talking about the soul. Just put yourself in their shoes for a moment. What is it? Where is it? Show me the data. It just smacks of anti-empiricism. Give a little space for a soul and the next thing you know, someone will start trying to save yours. And it's not just the soul, it's all of those esoteric religious words that point to something nonphysical, immaterial, ineffable, transcendent—you know, words like God, emptiness, the Absolute, the Beyond, the timeless, enlightenment . . . Enlightenment? Well, wait a minute, not so fast. Enlightenment, traditionally considered to be the highest goal of the spiritual life, is actually undergoing a change in our contemporary culture, and the guys in lab coats are beginning to take an interest in this mystical ideal. That's right—put away *The Power of Now*, stop watching your breath, break out of that downward-dog pose, and pay attention. There is a new movement under way in the culture, a new philosophical/spiritual strain that is a powerful and seductive mix of modern science, postmodern philosophy, and Asian mysticism. And it is starting to catch the attention of an intelligentsia curious about matters spiritual but long suspicious of any new paradigm not grounded in a rational, scientific, and empirical view of the world. *Celestine Prophecy*, move over. This is a new spiritual anti-theology that even



intellectuals can love. We could call it “enlightenment unplugged”—unplugged from its religious, spiritual, and moral roots and repackaged for secular, individualistic culture. With a little backup from biology and brain science and some inspiration from evolution, hosts of new theorists are discarding all nonessential baggage—ritual, belief, devotion, morality, even God—and trying to get at the core of the individual enlightenment experience.

So what really is going on here? Are we witnessing the birth of a new era of spiritual development, finally discovering a vision of enlightenment truly fit for life in our twenty-first-century global society? Or are these new purveyors of enlightenment missing the point entirely, merely subjecting the mystery of consciousness to

these new theorists deliver a genuinely workable spiritual vision for our globalizing world? And even more importantly, could they do it without falling too far under the spell of a contemporary intellectual ethos that has little understanding of, or appreciation for, the ways of the spirit?

#### MODERN ENLIGHTENMENT

Even the fact that a book by Walter Truett Anderson should address the question of enlightenment says something quite important. A longtime chronicler of the philosophical trends at the leading edge of culture, Anderson's reputation as a journalist

*Celestine Prophecy*, move over. This is a new spiritual anti-theology that even intellectuals can love.

the limited perspective of the microscope, taking God out of the picture, pandering to a materialistic culture that wants spiritual sustenance with no strings attached?

Last summer, when an advance copy of *The Next Enlightenment: Integrating East and West in a New Vision of Human Evolution* by Walter Truett Anderson showed up on our doorstep, it became clear to us that the concept of enlightenment was indeed breaking into new territory, and that the question that adorns the cover of our magazine was being asked by a broader cross-section of the culture than ever before. In the offices of *What Is Enlightenment?*, the book turned some heads. Here was a broad, rational, and inclusive new spiritual vision that was leaving tradition far behind. Here was an intriguing enlightenment philosophy that was incorporating insights from psychology, cosmological evolution, and cognitive science—many of which we have long championed in the pages of this magazine. Here was a book that seemed at first glance to reject traditional religion, reject much of contemporary spirituality, but at the same time embrace the mystical dimension of the spiritual life. In a world filled with enlightenment paradigms either stuck in the strictures of ancient traditions or languishing in the I'm-okay-you're-okay, be-here-now world of self-help spirituality, Anderson's book was a step forward, and his work seemed representative of this emerging philosophical movement in the culture. Moreover, it raised a crucial question. Could

with a unique sensitivity to the ebbs and flows of modern life is well established. With a bio that is both impressively eclectic and simply impressive, he has tracked the emerging edge of human thought in the last decades with books ranging from *The Upstart Spring*, his look at the saga of the Esalen Institute, to *Evolution Isn't What It Used to Be*, a wide-ranging journey through the new worlds of evolutionary science, to *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be*, an introduction to postmodern thinking. He holds PhD's in both political science and social psychology, and has not just observed California's human potential gold rush but participated deeply in it—going so far as to lead his own encounter groups in the late sixties and early seventies.

Anderson begins *The Next Enlightenment*, his tenth book, by describing a new “enlightenment project,” as he calls it, emerging in our culture, and he walks the reader through the basic elements of this new project. This endeavor, he tells us, is just now coming into focus, and it will need to draw upon a wide array of humanity's scientific and spiritual knowledge, East and West. It will need to build on the achievements of the European thought of the past few centuries and incorporate a number of recent developments in science and psychology that Anderson feels are crucial to understanding where the notion of enlightenment is currently headed. In a book that follows the bouncing ballpoint of his pen through cosmology, history, psychology, biology,



existentialism, the human potential movement, religious tradition, and back once again to enlightenment, it's understandable that he wants to set a big context at the outset. Indeed, Anderson's enlightenment project will need, as he puts it, "enough breadth of vision to encompass both the core concepts of the Asian enlightenment traditions and the rational/scientific heritage of the European Enlightenment." While the Asian enlightenment traditions do get fair mention in Anderson's work, the European Enlightenment is clearly where his deeper loyalties lie. Anderson is truly a child of the scientific age and feels little philosophical obligation to the religious traditions of our past. "I want to explore in these pages," he writes, "a view of enlightenment that is illuminated by science and rooted in the rational traditions of Western thought."

Perhaps the most exciting result of this new illumination by science is Anderson's incorporation of the cosmological sweep of our evolutionary heritage into his enlightenment project. In fact, he feels that the terms "enlightenment project" and "evolutionary project" are interchangeable. "Enlightenment," he writes at the outset of the book, "is an evolutionary project, one that was begun long before evolution itself was understood." Placing the next enlightenment within an evolutionary context, a context where the focus is primarily on the development of the species rather than of any particular individual, is a point that cannot be overstated. Given the near-crisis state of affairs in today's world, we urgently need a culturewide discussion of human development and human potential that lifts our attention beyond the narcissistic norms of our society—one that has relevance both west of Hindu ashrams and east of the California border. Linking the spiritual questions of enlightenment to the pragmatic questions of our collective evolutionary future provides just such a context, and it is heartening to see Anderson picking up the theme and playing it so prominently.

Still, Anderson's refreshing science-friendly outlook and his emphasis on Western rationalism also have a disconcerting side, particularly as it becomes clear that he is doing much more than

just adding a dose of science and rationality to the contemporary spiritual smorgasbord. In fact, if you read between the lines, a subtext begins to emerge in *The Next Enlightenment*, an underlying theme that goes something like this:

Enlightenment, the evolutionary breakthrough crucial to the development of our species, has been captured and is being held hostage in a prison of dogma and superstition by an evil force called religion. In this narrative, Anderson sees himself as a liberator, and the rational disciplines of science, postmodern philosophy, and psychology are his weapons

of freedom. Like Voltaire and Diderot battling the priests of the Catholic Orthodoxy, Anderson is intent on freeing the higher reaches of human development from their association with the dogmas of our religious heritage. There is some truth to this scenario, but like an overenthusiastic soldier, Anderson is so intent upon killing the bad guy that he accidentally harms the hostage in the process of liberation. He releases enlightenment from the outdated religious structures of the past, only to subject it to a new, less obvious tyrant—a postmodern, secular ethos where scientific materialism and rampant individualism reign supreme.

This is the scenario that plays itself out over and over again in *The Next Enlightenment*. Anderson wants to bring enlightenment down off its religious pedestal and take away its elitist image as a secretive "religious experience," only

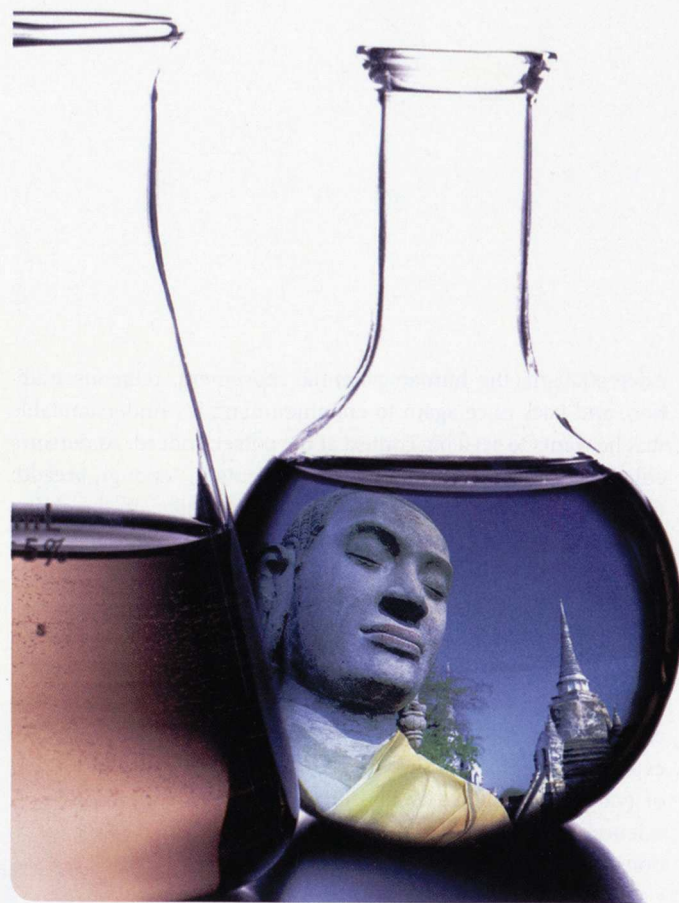
"achievable by limited numbers of people within the boundaries of certain ancient disciplines." For Anderson, religion is clearly a thoroughly unpleasant concept, and he spends a significant amount of time impugning the many failings of the wisdom traditions of humanity. Even the term "religion" itself, he writes, immediately brings to mind "so much hierarchy, so much mythology left over from dead cultures, so many doubtful dogmas, so many cranky old men bearing armloads of Thou Shalt Nots."

Now, you'll rarely find the editorial voice of this magazine going out of its way to defend the modern relevance of ancient tradition, and in many respects I appreciated Anderson's willingness to put himself out on a limb and state what so few





are willing to say directly—that the spiritual traditions are falling far behind the spiritual curve in today’s global, pluralistic society. But he overplays his hand. His criticism comes across as overzealous, and even more importantly, it lets him off the hook of the greatest challenge of his enlightenment project: How do we bring enlightenment into a secular age without compromising its transcendent dimension, the sacred dimension that religion, for all its obvious faults, has sought to preserve? How do we demystify enlightenment without desacralizing it? You see, Anderson, along with many of the philosophers, scientists, and academics who are helping to define the contours of this new enlightenment paradigm, is absolutely right that enlightenment must evolve, and evolve quickly, if it is to meet the demands of a twenty-first-century world. But given that reality, how do we update the premodern notion of enlightenment for a society firmly entrenched in the postmodern age and *not* throw the sacred baby out with the



The new forms of spirituality that will likely emerge from the ongoing collision of the ancient, modern, and postmodern worlds will be unlike any that this planet has ever seen before.

religious bathwater? For all of us Westerners whose spiritual sensibilities were weaned on a rational age, it is no small question. And in the end, the answer may come down to the way in which we understand enlightenment itself.

#### POSTMODERN ENLIGHTENMENT

“I see enlightenment as a growth process in which the restructuring of cognition takes place,” Anderson writes in the first chapter, outlining what is perhaps the core message of *The Next Enlightenment*. A “restructuring of cognition” might be a fairly technical definition for those who were expecting something more along the lines of God-realization or mystical absorption, but that is precisely the point. This is Anderson’s stripped-down version of enlightenment, and for him there is nothing uniquely spiritual about it. “The main argument of this book,” he explains at one point, is that “enlightenment is cognitive development, and the various approaches to that development, whether we call them spirituality or psychology, are just various ways of groping the same elephant.”

So what exactly does Anderson mean by cognitive development? Essentially, he is talking about freedom, about developing our freedom of cognition, our freedom to genuinely think independently of the many influences that make up our psyche. Most of us are imprisoned, Anderson tells us, by the structures of our culture, our religions, our belief systems, our self-images, our languages, and even our very own thoughts. This imprisonment stems from a fundamental cognitive illusion, explains Anderson, and enlightenment is liberation from this illusion, the sudden or gradual recognition that the structures that we create as individuals and as societies are just that—created structures. They are “socially constructed realities,” and not reality itself. “Once you have recognized—even glimpsed—that the way you had been experiencing the world and had accepted as reality itself was rather a social construction of reality,” Anderson declares, sounding like a cross between a Zen Master and a postmodern literary professor, “nothing is ever quite the same.” This kind of thinking is called constructive thinking, or *constructivism*, and for Anderson it is the essence of cognitive development. “Every step you take toward understanding how your mind takes an active part in the construction of reality is a step





along the path of personal growth," he states. "And every step that every person takes advances the evolution of humanity as a whole beyond the grip of the unyielding doctrines that have caused untold suffering in the world. For individuals and societies, constructivism is liberation."

Cognitive development then, or constructivism, is Anderson's working version of enlightenment unplugged. And from his point of view, there are no doubt many advantages to defining it this way. It fits well with the postmodern ethos, it is amenable to a scientific worldview, it is a way of defining enlightenment that is entirely free of religious or spiritual connotations, it contains little moral baggage, and it deconstructs the entire structure of organized religion in one fell swoop—all of which could be very good or very bad depending on whether your loyalties lean closer to the altar or the test tube.

On the good side, Anderson's cognitive enlightenment demystifies the spiritual path, makes it quite practical and pragmatic, providing something the reader can sink their teeth into, at least intellectually. The spiritual lives of most of us could no doubt use a good dose of Newton and a little bit of Nietzsche as well, and Anderson's book provides that. And he wraps it all around an idea that has appeal across the intellectual spectrum from transpersonal psychologists to research scientists to postmodern theorists—cognitive development as the liberating core of a new spirituality.

At the same time, his model raises serious questions about context. If we follow Anderson's lead and isolate the psychological dimension (cognitive development) of our enlightenment project and place that on our spiritual altar, can we still call it enlightenment? When an actress shows up on the cover of *Time* magazine touting ancient meditation techniques as the next big thing for stress reduction, can we still call it spiritual practice? And while there is nothing wrong with doing yoga for its physical benefits, as it proliferates across the health clubs of America as the successor craze to aerobics, can we still call it a Hindu spiritual path? Context is important, and however much we may want to escape the lingering dogmas of our premodern religious context, we must also realize that a secular context will inevitably act as a powerful filter. It will sift out the more transcendent dimensions of spiritual ideals and highlight their more secular, or in this case psychological, components. Anderson is no doubt aware of this dynamic, though he may very well see it as a net positive. And it is positive to a certain degree. Indeed, in what other age in history would we have the same kind of interest, knowledge, and cultural support to really pry open the psychological dynamics of spiritual development, free from the superstitions of doctrine and dogma? Those explorations have yielded fascinating insights into the nature of what it means to be human, insights that Anderson is well versed in. But enlightenment is more than cognitive development. And if we forget that, we may inadvertently let the deeper dimensions of the spirit drift toward irrelevance even as we construct a new spirituality. *The Next Enlightenment* shows signs of this drift. Perhaps it is just that Anderson is so deeply influenced by the secular sensibilities of the Western rational traditions, but one would have to work hard to find any transcendent principles at work in his universe, and his new, more psychologically oriented vision of human evolution left me scientifically and philosophically enriched, but spiritually wanting.

This is an issue with implications far beyond the boundaries of Anderson's own work. Indeed, as we stand in the early days of a veritable explosion of interest in the intersecting domains of science and spirit, there is little doubt that we are in the midst of creating a new spiritual context for tomorrow's world, and Anderson's enlightenment project is but the latest salvo in that larger battle to define the parameters of our emerging spiritual future. Even as I write these words, the Dalai Lama is giving a press conference a few hundred miles away, not at a religious organization, a theological seminary, or even a Buddhist temple, but at that bastion of Western science, MIT. He will be speaking



there at a conference exploring, among other things, the new cognitive science that is coming to be called “neurotheology,” a seeming oxymoron if there ever was one. And that is but the most striking among hundreds of recent examples. The new forms of spirituality that will likely emerge from the ongoing collision of the ancient, modern, and postmodern worlds will be unlike any that this planet has ever seen before.

Can the heart of the spiritual life survive this unprecedented immersion in secular and scientific culture? As Western scientists begin to pull enlightenment out of its religious box and poke and prod its material dimensions with the instruments of modernity, can they avoid reducing enlightenment to the material? As we map the fascinating and illuminating brain patterns of mystical experience, can we avoid reducing mysticism to the complex firings of neuronal movements in the frontal cortex? As we define the psychological contours of enlightenment experiences, can we avoid reducing the higher reaches of human development to fit within the boundaries of Western psychological theory? In other words, as we brave the waters of this new spirituality, how do we avoid the always dangerous trap of reductionism that has long been the shadow side of science, psychology, and in fact the entire Western rational tradition going all the way back to the French Revolution?

These are some of the questions that confront us as we attempt to update enlightenment for our twenty-first-century world, and it is good to remember that our track record is nothing to get excited about. *The Next Enlightenment* balances on the edge of these delicate issues. It presents a compelling, forward-looking vision of evolution that brings together the disparate worlds of science and spirit, Asian mysticism and Western philosophy, evolutionary theory and developmental psychology, but it also brings our new spirituality a bit too close to the secular guillotine of postmodern culture.

The cultural dynamics that confront new spiritual visions have changed dramatically in the last century. For example, when priest and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin said in the 1920s that “a religion of the earth is being mobilized against the religion of heaven,” he was speaking from within a heaven-dominated, traditional religious context, but his statement was prescient. Something important was emerging, a challenge to the status quo—an earth-based, science-friendly, evolution-inspired, nature-oriented spiritual sensibility. Today the landscape is different. Those same religions of heaven now

lie in retreat all around the margins of Western culture, and as this balance of power shifts, we must also take care that the transcendent dimension of the spiritual life is not cast aside. Indeed, the sacred dimension of spiritual experience, by whatever name, will not long endure in a new enlightenment culture overly conditioned by today’s secular climate. And with the sacred goes that extra spark of vitality that gives any new spiritual vision real transformational traction in individual lives.

The great evolutionary biologist E.O. Wilson recently added his considerable intellectual weight to this issue when he declared that “the choice between transcendentalism and empiricism will be the coming century’s version of the struggle for men’s minds.” Empiricism, he made clear, was his choice as the only sane way to move forward. No doubt Wilson accurately perceives one of the basic fault lines of Western society, but reading Anderson’s book prompted me to think about the issue a little differently. I wondered if the dichotomy between transcendentalism and empiricism is in fact the very thing that the twenty-first century will demand that we *transcend*. Indeed, as the eternal call of the spirit starts to resonate even in the ivory towers, think tanks, and research institutes of the Western intellectual world, it seems more than ever that we need a *transreligious* context that is broad enough to include the insights of evolutionary theory, developmental psychology, cognitive science, and postmodern philosophy; one that holds firm to the pragmatic and rational instincts of our scientific age and yet is deeply rooted in the transcendent, immaterial, ineffable mystery of enlightened consciousness. We need a context that can embrace the best of the new millennium without rejecting the best of the previous two. Perhaps *The Next Enlightenment* is itself a sign that the culture is moving in that direction. Maybe “enlightenment unplugged,” and all the interest it is now generating, is acting as a sort of gateway drug, a tempting taste of spirit that is slowly but surely leading our secular culture to the harder stuff—the deeper mysteries of spirit, of consciousness, of conscience, and perhaps even of the soul . . . “Yes, Dr. Dawkins, please go ahead and try it, but just make sure that you fully inhale . . .” ■

*The Next Enlightenment: Integrating East and West in a Vision of Human Evolution* by Walter Truett Anderson (St. Martin’s Press, 2003, hardcover \$24.95).

Teilhard de Chardin quote from Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 170.

E. O. Wilson quote from Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), p.193.





natural  
selection

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## THE RADIANCE OF BEING

UNDERSTANDING THE GRAND INTEGRAL  
VISION; LIVING THE INTEGRAL LIFE

Allan Combs  
Foreword by Ken Wilber



Second Edition

### THE RADIANCE OF BEING *Understanding the Grand Integral Vision; Living the Integral Life*

by Allan Combs

(Continuum Pub. Group, 2nd edition,  
2002, softcover \$19.95)

In his foreword to the recently released second edition of *The Radiance of Being* by Allan Combs, Ken Wilber points out that "for the first time in human history we of today have access to virtually all of the world's accumulated information about human consciousness and its potential . . . and it signals the possibility of being able to formulate—also for the first time in history—truly comprehensive or all-inclusive or 'integral' maps and models of human consciousness and its unfolding." What makes Combs's achievement so remarkable is that in little over three hundred pages he manages to synthesize, and make accessible to the uninitiated reader, the essence of so much of this accumulated information.

Combs tells us that his intent in *The Radiance of Being* is "to serve as part guide and part fellow traveler on a quest into the labyrinthine realms of science and traditional wisdom in search of the roots of consciousness." It is precisely this quality of open-ended curiosity that enables him to impart the considerable fruits of his erudition and research with such dexterity and ease. Indeed, if you are compelled, as I was, by the prospect of "understanding the grand integral vision" and have not yet found the time, as I hadn't, to digest the collected works of Hegel, Teilhard de Chardin, Sri Aurobindo, and Ken Wilber, let alone the perennial wisdom of the great religious traditions and the latest neurological research into brain dynamics, then following Combs's thread through *The Radiance of Being* will no doubt prove to be a captivating and educational journey.

A psychologist with a background in chaos theory and the newly emerging sciences of complexity, Combs begins by bringing his knowledge and insight to bear on the mystery of who we are,



with a fascinating investigation into the biological and neurological foundations of mind and consciousness. His description of the interwoven systems that have evolved over millennia to form the human brain, combined with his intriguing exploration of the dynamics and patterns that undergird the entire panorama of conscious experience, left me marveling at the complexity, fluidity, and impersonality of what goes on inside our heads. While it is one thing for the Buddha and other great teachers and wisdom traditions to tell us that all our experience is impermanent—that there is no enduring, static entity that can be held onto as “self”—it is quite another to begin to understand *empirically* how insubstantial are the states of consciousness and patterns of activity that appear to form the “solid ground” of who we think are.

What was even more awe-inspiring, though, was learning what this emerging understanding reveals about both our evolutionary potential and the “grand integral vision” of life as a whole. As Combs says, “We will begin to see ourselves, not as static organisms, but as living processes evolving into the future in a continuous dynamic event of self-creation.” Indeed, the most compelling aspect of the first section of *The Radiance of Being* is the way in which Combs illuminates how it is the *intentionality* inherent in consciousness itself that “like a polarizing magnetic field that draws iron filings into formations of multiple ellipses . . . aligns the processes of the mind into patterns with direction and purpose.” He conveys how the domains of science and spirit are converging to release the concept of “evolution” from the hold of the outdated Darwinian model of adaptation in the physical universe. In the context of the deepening integral understanding that he presents, evolution reveals itself to be the movement of the self-organizing and self-creating intelligence inherent in all that is alive.

Having established an overarching context of ever-evolving complexity and

creativity as the *raison d'être* of consciousness itself, Combs explores its unfolding through the minds of some of the leading pathfinders throughout history. Skillfully distilling the essence of Hegel, Teilhard de Chardin, Jean Gebser, and Sri Aurobindo, among others, he highlights the pivotal insights that shaped their endeavors to map the mystery of consciousness.

Particularly enlightening is the way in which Combs charts the development of an evolutionary spirituality in the West stretching from Plotinus to the present. We learn, for example, that late-nineteenth-century French philosopher Henri Bergson was the first to elevate evolutionary thinking to the status of a major philosophy that included both the outer dimension of biology and the inner dimension of consciousness. Bergson posited that evolution operates as a pressure that is constantly forcing its way toward higher levels of expression and demonstrates itself through an organism's power of choice.

In one of the most educational chapters, Combs introduces us to the still largely unknown Polish cultural philosopher, Jean Gebser. Gebser's great contribution to the “grand integral vision” was his attempt to conceptualize the dominant patterns of experience that have emerged during human history in his model of five major structures of consciousness—archaic, magic, mythic, mental, and integral. By elucidating how each of these structures is based on a specific perception of time and space, Combs imparts a fascinating experiential snapshot of the evolution of consciousness as we see through the eyes of each worldview.

Combs brings his synthesis of the “grand integral vision” right up to the present with a masterful appraisal of the prodigious, and still-unabated, contribution of contemporary integral philosopher Ken Wilber. In a chapter featuring an amusingly titled section, “The Whole Shebang; states, levels, stages, structures, waves, lines, streams and realms,” Combs gives us Wilber 101, in which he



delineates how Wilber has managed to incorporate virtually all major research findings on human development into his multifaceted integral model, the Four Quadrants. The cutting edge of contemporary integral inquiry is further augmented by the inclusion of the author's own recent collaboration with Wilber, entitled the "Wilber-Combs Matrix." Described by Combs as a "periodic table of consciousness," it melds the sheaths of traditional Vedanta (*physical, pranic, mental, subtle, causal*) together with Gebser's five structures of consciousness and the "value memes" of Don Beck's Spiral Dynamics, to represent how different "states" of consciousness are experienced and interpreted according to the developmental structure or "stage" through which they are perceived. And if that makes your head spin, then rest assured, Combs makes it all surprisingly accessible!

It was only toward the end of the book, as the focus shifted to the subject of the second subtitle, "living the integral life," that I felt Combs's narrative began to lose its fresh and adventurous character. I admired his critique of the popular psychological notion of an unconscious mind, "we shortchange ourselves when we appeal to explanations that lie hidden beyond the creative dynamics of our being" and his description of how integral consciousness emerges through an embrace of complexity resulting in an "enlargement of objectivity." But Combs's tentative forays into how we might actually begin to harness, and become expressions of, the "grand integral vision" ultimately amount to little more than a summary of various established paths and modes of practice.

Combs finishes his book by sharing his conviction that "each of us must find our own unique integral path. This must be a path that reflects our own needs and aspirations, which will change throughout our lives as our circumstances, opportunities, growth and aspirations also change." While what he suggests here appears reasonable enough, it does not seem to embolden us to inquire deeply into the implications

of what he has so generously presented to us in the preceding chapters. As Combs's thread wove the thrilling multi-dimensional tapestry of the "grand integral vision," I found myself pulled into a natural contemplation. What might this universal trajectory of evolving consciousness want of myself and all of us at such a critical juncture in our collective journey of Becoming? What would it mean, for example, to seriously consider the implications of the "quantum leap" envisioned by Teilhard de Chardin, which, as Combs tells us, "has its own emergent properties that go far beyond the individual minds"? If we are to sincerely grapple with the implications of "living the integral life," then surely it means daring to open ourselves up to a potential "radiance of being" that is so positive, all-encompassing, and infused with purpose that it may propel us far beyond the relativistic field of our personal "needs and aspirations." Indeed, if integral consciousness is to be truly *integral*, which implies whole, all-encompassing, and unified, then its genuine emergence would have to transcend the status quo of a postmodern culture that only seeks to foster the primacy of the individual's subjective experience.

However, despite this weakness in the overall coherence of *The Radiance of Being*, Combs's essential offering to us all shines through. What we might otherwise have to spend years gradually assimilating and distilling on our own from a pile of weighty books (in more than one sense of the word!), Combs makes available to us in a medium-sized paperback. So buy it, and as Ken Wilber says in his introduction, take "an exhilarating tour through the grand possibilities of our own being and our own becoming."

—Pete Bampton



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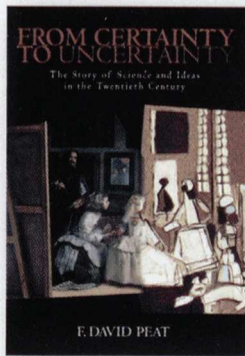
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**FROM CERTAINTY TO UNCERTAINTY**  
*The Story of Science and Ideas  
 in the Twentieth Century*

by F. David Peat  
 (John Henry Press, 2002,  
 hardcover \$24.95)

It is the year 1900. Albert Einstein has recently graduated from the Zurich Polytechnic Academy with a degree in mathematics. Sigmund Freud is casting light on humanity's nightly reveries with his *Interpretation of Dreams*. The German physicist Max Planck, struggling with unresolved problems in Newtonian physics, has proposed the existence of discrete units of energy called "quanta." These three pioneers, and many others, are pushing the edge of human understanding into unfamiliar territory at the dawning of the twentieth century. They're casting aside the limitations of the past and forging a path to an expanded future.

Fast-forward a hundred years. We're standing in that future, in all of its expansiveness, as a sophisticated, technologically advanced, global society at the beginning of a new millennium. We've come a long way in one century—through Einstein's breakthrough theories of relativity in physics, Freud's revolutionary interpretation of the inner workings of the human psyche, Planck's formulations of the strangely paradoxical quantum theory, and the work of trailblazers in the fields of art, mathematics, philosophy, and environmentalism as well, our understanding

of human beings and the world we live in has grown incalculably. As physicist, science writer, and Renaissance man, F. David Peat describes in his latest book, *From Certainty to Uncertainty: The Story of Science and Ideas in the Twentieth Century*, that this explosion of knowledge and understanding has been the result of a shift in the mindset of our Western culture. By moving from a stance of narrow mechanistic rigidity to a more expansive fluid stance, we discovered a perspective capable of handling the paradox and uncertainty of a universe far more complex than we'd ever imagined. In other words, in the span of a century we experienced "changes in human consciousness" that reflect the transition from a perspective of "certainty" to one of "uncertainty," and exactly what that means and the implications for us now are what Peat's book endeavors to explain.

From the outset, it is clear that he is an impassioned advocate of this perspective of uncertainty, building a progressively solid case for its significance over the previous limiting "arrogant" view. "As we move into this new century," he writes, summarizing his thesis, "we realize we have been guilty of oversimplifying the world in so many fields of knowledge. We have been looking at nature and ourselves through the convenient lenses of theories that present the cosmos to us in limited ways. Now we recognize that nature is complex in its details, unpredictable, and often uncontrollable." In chapter after chapter of historical analysis, he illustrates the limitations of viewing the world through an oversimplified lens and takes us on a grand tour of that same world liberated from such distortions and perceived in its natural complexity. He also makes it clear that this shift corresponds to the movement in our cultural consciousness from the worldview of modernism to that of postmodernism,\* which is no small point

because it indicates that the shift from certainty to uncertainty is the primary factor that has defined the contours of our contemporary society.

Throughout the text, Peat marvels at the postmodern view, detailing its emergence and advocating the necessity for humanity to fully embrace it, leaving "the dream of absolute certainty behind." To a large extent, Peat believes, we've already done this—at least in the West—leaving modernism and its overly simplistic view of the world to collect dust in the basement of our less sophisticated past. Innumerable discoveries and experiences during the twentieth century confronted us with our own arrogance, forcing us to open our minds to a wider and less rigid view of things. We realized that scientific rationality represents a very limited mode of understanding the world, and that other cultures, in the past and in the present, exemplify different forms of knowing that aren't necessarily better or worse than the scientific one. Rather, "they represent different possible glances at the universe and different ways of structuring knowledge. If we take these various stories together they provide a rich multiplicity of perspectives, similar to those of a Cézanne painting." This capacity for perceiving the relative context-dependent nature of what we consider "knowledge" and "truth" is the primary characteristic of postmodern thinking, and forms the basis of what Peat calls "uncertainty." For how can we be certain of anything if what is

\*For those unfamiliar with the terms, *modernism*, simply defined, is the collective worldview that dominated the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, characterized by an emphasis on scientific certainty, linear rationality, materialism, and universal truths. *Postmodernism*, on the contrary, is characterized by a recognition of the severe limitations of science and by its own complex rationality, its humanitarianism, and its emphasis on the universal *relativity* of truth in all domains.



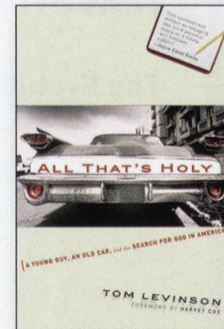
considered “true” in one context isn’t also “true” in another?

Peat continues by pointing out that problems arise whenever a particular culture “takes its own story as the absolute truth, and seeks to impose this truth on others as the yardstick for all knowledge and belief.” But while Peat recognizes that modernism got out of control, manifesting an overconfidence in itself, he doesn’t seem to realize the extent to which now, in our postmodern world, the same process appears to be happening again. Universal relativism is, paradoxically, becoming an absolute truth. We are stuck in a postmodern abyss, adrift in a realm of ambiguity, unable to see a higher or deeper “story” beyond it. When modernism was in charge—at least up to a point—everything was much simpler: there was basically only one universal, naturalistic, or scientific context to consider, and in that overarching context we could be sure that what was considered “truth” for us was also “truth” for our next-door neighbor. But nothing is that simple anymore. And now, it doesn’t take a quantum physicist to see that, isolated in our relative contexts, bearers of our individualistic truths, we are collectively suffering due to lack of certainty, purpose, and universal meaning.

In fact, in a provocative and insightful passage—one of very few in which he is actually critical of the limitations of postmodernism—even Peat himself admits that this “may be one of the reasons why ours is not an age of great art and literature. There are no all-encompassing statements to make. . . . Our world lacks the sense of confidence and certainty necessary for a Bach or a Michelangelo.” And while Peat coolly laments this state of affairs, he definitely does *not* encourage us to go back to the scientific adoration of modernism to regain a sense of universal certainty;

nor does he suggest that we should go even further back, to the *premodern* era when universal certainty was found in the doctrine of the Church. Both of those were limited perspectives that he feels we’d do well to leave behind. To his great credit, though, he does say that we must transcend this realm of total uncertainty at some point, for this is merely a “period of transition, when everything is open to question.” He proposes that by following the “dimly felt edge of where consciousness is moving,” we’ll be able to move forward, eventually creating a new context in which “new artistic endeavors are possible,” and in which, we might speculate, humanity will rediscover a universal purpose that can end the postmodern malaise and bring a shared meaning and conviction to our lives. Maybe. More likely, following Peat’s thinking, it will be different than anything we can presently imagine. For, true to the context of uncertainty in which he finds himself, Peat never suggests what our new cultural context will look like nor even clearly states how we might create it. His only certainty is that, whatever comes next, the responsibility for its creation falls to each of us—united in following that dimly felt edge.

—Tom Huston



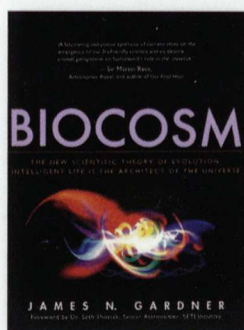
**ALL THAT'S HOLY**  
*A Young Guy, an Old Car, and the Search for God in America*  
by Tom Levinson  
(Jossey-Bass, 2003, hardcover \$23.95)

A few years back, Harvard Divinity School grad Tom Levinson climbed into his 1994 Nissan Altima and set off across America in search of faith—his own and that of people he met along the way. *All That's Holy* is the chronicle of that journey, a meandering documentary of his conversations with members of every major tradition and a host of minor ones, sprinkled with some fascinating lessons in religious history. Like a good academic, Levinson asks thoughtful questions. Like a good chameleon, he blends in courteously, meeting his interviewees on their own terms. And like a good postmodern seeker, he refuses to take a stand.

Because he shies away from value distinctions, Levinson’s analysis falls flat. Albeit unwittingly, he ends up revealing more of America’s superficiality than he does its spirituality. Immersed in an undeniably rich confluence of social, cultural, and religious diversity, he has a rare opportunity to investigate the significance of the meeting between pluralism and tradition. Instead, our hero insists on a small view, funneling everything he hears through the predictable melodrama of his love life. “It’s almost like I’m doing my own *Celestine Prophecy*,” he writes, as if all the suffering and discovery of others exist merely as a string of clues to lead him forward through his personal process. So if you’re going to get on the road with this self-styled Kerouac, be sure to bring a good book.

—Ross Robertson





## BIOCOSM

**The New Scientific Theory of Evolution: Intelligent Life is the Architect of the Universe**

by James Gardner

(Inner Ocean Publishing, 2003, softcover \$17.95)

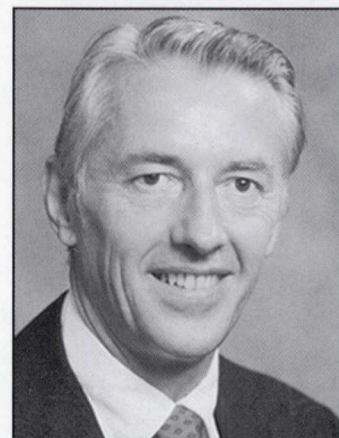
James Gardner has come up with a radical idea in his new book, *Biocosm*. The ultimate purpose of the evolution of the universe is to . . . create another universe. That's right, the purpose and destiny of evolution in the universe, according to James Gardner, is pro-creation, to make new "baby universes." Gardner foresees some future Omega-like point when a highly evolved intelligence will have the ability to reproduce itself in a cosmically induced birth process. It's a bold proposition, a teleology to end all teleologies, and to be honest, it's hard to feel that strongly about it one way or the other. In fact, it's hard to feel qualified to even comment on the veracity of the theory, and frankly, I'd be rather suspicious of anyone who felt they were qualified, so speculative is Gardner's proposition. But his book is a fascinating read for reasons that go beyond his own ideas about our evolutionary destiny. Indeed, *Biocosm* is an illuminating tour through the last couple of decades of cutting-edge physics and biology—from complexity theory to memes and genes to the Gaia hypothesis to the anthropic principle—and Gardner is an expert tour guide. Not a physicist by training, he is able to communicate to the reader in language simple enough for easy access, but with a depth appropriate to a serious

scientific undertaking. *Biocosm* is highly recommended on that count alone.

As for Gardner's hypothesis, I wonder if it is a sign of things to come. As our scientists grapple with the fact that the laws of the universe seem to be so bio-friendly—highly conducive to the emergence of life—it certainly begs the question: Why? Gardner's book is one attempt to answer this conundrum, as are a number of other new theories about the ultimate destiny of our cosmos. Of course, when we speak about the purpose of evolution, we are inevitably speaking about something that has spiritual implications. To his credit, Gardner doesn't shy away from this, including the ideas of spiritual visionaries like Teilhard de Chardin and Alfred North Whitehead in his canon. But for the most part, he stays firmly rooted in the world of science (if you can still call speculations about baby universes and cosmic progeny science). Whatever we call it, though, *Biocosm* is a unique book, and it is guaranteed to make you wonder things about this vast cosmos in which we live that you never, ever imagined before.

—Carter Phipps

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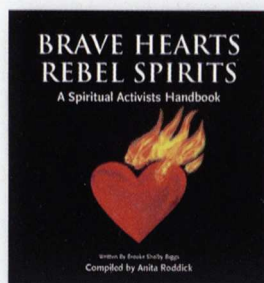
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## **Brave Hearts, Rebel Spirits**

### ***A Spiritual Activists Handbook***

Conceived by Anita Roddick  
Written by Brooke Shelby Biggs  
(Anita Roddick Books, 2003,  
softcover \$18.95)

*Brave Hearts, Rebel Spirits*, the latest release from Body Shop founder Anita Roddick, is a collection of stories about a generation of lesser-known spiritual activists, warriors on the front lines of an international battle for justice, equality, and peace. They may not be as famous as Mother Teresa, but they should be. Like her, they have a message for the world's faithful: *spirituality demands action*. Daniel Berrigan, whose account opens the book, announces, "The time is past when good men can remain silent, when obedience can segregate men from public risk." And the soulful soldiers whose tales follow his were anything but silent, or obedient.

John Trudell led the American Indian Movement through its most turbulent years, and he paid dearly for it: his wife, mother-in-law, and three children were killed by suspected arsonists. Bayard Rustin, who worked for years beside Martin Luther King, Jr., was later rejected by some of his peers in the civil rights movement for being openly gay. German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer reversed his allegiance to Gandhi's principles of nonviolence and tried to assassinate Hitler. He was hanged at age thirty-nine.

The only thing missing from Roddick's selection is more examples of activists for whom pacifism was insufficient; in fact, Bonhoeffer is the only one.

While categorical nonviolence has certainly made an enormous impact on the world, it would be naïve to assume that it is a panacea for our complex global situation. Would you and I even be here today if the British had laid down before the Nazi armies, as Gandhi advised early in the war? But tactics aside, the cumulative weight of nobility and nerve found in these pages plunges the reader, unprepared as in a skydive, toward a hard confrontation with the ground. Does spirituality distract me from the challenge of our times? I was drawn to ask. Or does it galvanize my willingness to participate? As these stories make clear, asking questions—and doing something about the answers—is what faith is all about.

—Ross Robertson





### RELEVANT magazine

[Relevant Media Group,  
6 issues/year \$12.00]

"God. Life. Progressive culture."

Three broad topics that define one of the most intriguing publications to hit the spiritual scene in years. Called *RELEVANT*, this magazine is devoted to an exclusive but rather large audience—namely, twenty-something Americans with a passion for Christ. With a hip design, provocative writing, and plenty of pop-cultural commentary, the Gen-X and -Y editors of this bimonthly mag are taking humanity's ancient, all-time most popular religion and attempting to make it, well, *cool*. But what is this young generation of Christians saying? "Perhaps we need to examine the end goal," writes contributor John Fischer in the July/August 2003 issue. "Is it to spread Christianity? To defeat Islam? To make converts? Or to glorify God? If we make the latter our goal, we will accomplish the other three in due order." Defeat Islam in due order by glorifying God? Uh... when were the Crusades again? Fortunately, the majority of *RELEVANT* expresses a more liberal, progressive perspective than that. But one gets the sense that it would become far more relevant to our increasingly complex, multicultural society if it could find a way to leave a bit more of Christianity's two-thousand years' worth of baggage behind.

—Tom Huston

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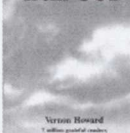


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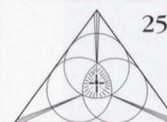
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Robert Wright, evolutionary psychologist and author of *Nonzero* and *The Moral Animal*, has been searching for the answers to “big, cosmic questions” for decades. Now he’s tackling those questions on TV for all the world to see. Actually, it isn’t really TV—rather just a series of nicely produced internet video clips—but it sure beats most of what you’d find on PBS. Stare in stupefaction as cosmologist Brian Swimme discusses, in full color and stereo sound, how fluctuating quantum fields gain the capacity for feeling once complex forms of matter (such as humans) come along. Smile as religions scholar Huston Smith explains, in awe and innocence, the nature of mystical experiences. Following the obvious thread of Wright’s own inquiry, topics range from the problem of evil to defining the Godhead, and the diverse interviewees expounding on these topics include scientists such as Freeman Dyson and meditators such as Joseph Goldstein, with a few theologians thrown into the mix. Compelled by Wright’s passion for the questions he is asking, visitors to the site might even find themselves discovering, through the power of high-speed internet access, the very meaning of life itself.



www.integralnaked.org

Are you in with the IN crowd? Integral Naked, the slick new website created by Ken Wilber and his Integral Institute, was launched in late spring of last year and

has rapidly taken off into the “second-tier” stratosphere. Consisting primarily of cool tantra-themed graphics accompanying multitudes of audio files, the site is the first public forum for conversations between Wilber and all his friends, pushing the edge in the fields of politics, psychology, medicine, music, spirituality, and more.

Where else in cyberspace can you find so many great minds and souls gathered in one place? From Ed Kowalczyk, lead singer of the band Live, lamenting the criticism he receives for being a sincere artist in the age of irony, to Jim Garrison, president of the State of the World Forum, explaining how “the planet is on a collision course with itself,” the scope and depth of discussion to be heard here are completely unparalleled. Listen in as Wilber and integral psychologist Jenny Wade discuss “Transcendent Sex,” or check out Michael Murphy in a fascinating discourse titled “A Natural History of Supernormal Powers.” Wilber and *What Is Enlightenment?* founder Andrew Cohen hold a number of conversations on the site, and even Deepak Chopra makes an appearance, with Wilber engaging him in amiable dialogue ranging from Chopra’s latest books to the biofeedback mechanism known as golf, before they both plunge into the headier fare of the effects of spiritual consciousness on physical health.

But that’s not all. The site also includes a captivating Flash presentation on evolution, group conversations by Integral Institute members on topics such as “boomeritis,” and an active message board community forum for all Integral Naked subscribers. The subscription rate itself is ten dollars a month, used for supporting the site and Integral Institute’s activities. And as I-I’s first step toward creating a solid presence in our culture, IN is certainly kicking the integral revolution off to a spirited start.

—Tom Huston



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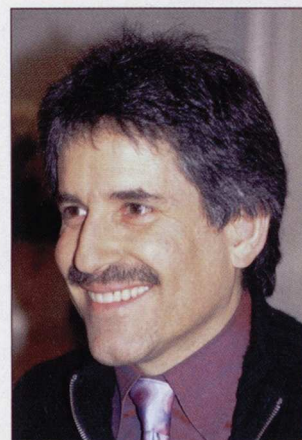
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### WHALE RIDER

Written and directed by Niki Caro

Columbia TriStar DVD Release 2003

Nothing short of celluloid magic, Niki Caro's *Whale Rider*, based on the book by Witi Ihimaera, is a winning tale of spiritual and cultural renewal. Set in an indigenous seaside village in modern-day New Zealand, the story follows the courageous coming-of-age of the young girl Pai—who, it so happens, is the mystically anointed but as yet unrecognized chief of her struggling Maori people. The film chronicles the delightful revelation of this fact, but conflict arises when Pai's grandfather Koro, an aging noble desperate to find a *male* messiah for his modernity-ravaged clan, remains utterly blind to Pai's extraordinary nature. The story is as much about the heart-rending breakdown of Koro's blindness as it is the stage for Pai's dramatic emergence as the mythic "whale

rider"—two narrative strands that director Caro interweaves with subtle imagery and masterful finesse. Pai's innocent emergence and Koro's transformed stubbornness ripple through the entire village and help spark the beginnings of a cultural rebirth that goes far beyond a mere return to the "old ways." Not a small part of *Whale Rider's* magic has to do with the captivating debut performance of twelve-year-old Keisha Castle-Hughes as Pai; the young actress's strength and utter lack of pretense give the tale a special believability. All in all, director Niki Caro has crafted an uplifting modern allegory rich with humanity, understated beauty, and social redemption.

—Melissa Hoffman





### THE HOLY LAND

Written and directed by Eitan Gorlin  
CAVU Pictures 2003

Like most good stories, *The Holy Land* begins simply. Orthodox yeshiva student Mendy (Oren Rehany), distracted from his studies by good old-fashioned lust, is given some very unorthodox advice by his rabbi: go find a prostitute in a town where no one knows you and get it out of

your system. But this bold debut, written and directed by Eitan Gorlin, doesn't stay simple for long. Before Mendy has spent three minutes in his chosen Tel Aviv strip joint, he's in love with Sasha (Tchelet Semel), the Russian-born "masseuse" he meets there, and the past is history.

With an unusually lush minimalism and a deftly paced screenplay, Gorlin moves his protagonists through a world repeatedly colliding with itself, where innocence is rare currency. Wisely, he lets the big religious and political questions remain as an inescapable subtext and focuses on the very human ones. In this, *The Holy Land* approaches the poignancy of Shakespearean tragedy.

Mendy, naïve and inexperienced, longs to meet the secular world from which he's been sheltered. Sasha, jaded and street-wise, is equally desperate to escape the brutal one she's been hardened to. What happens when they come together is darkly powerful, and superbly acted by Rehany and Semel. They mirror each other, but in perfect reverse—casualties of a Jerusalem in which liberation is married to betrayal, two snakes eating their own tails.

—Ross Robertson

## unsung celluloid

### FALLEN

Directed by Gregory Hoblit

Warner Home Video DVD release 2003

Used to be you had to enter into a formal contract in order to sell your soul to the devil. But the Satan in Gregory Hoblit's *Fallen* (written by Nicholas Kazan) doesn't stand on ceremony, preferring instead to leap from vehicle to unsuspecting vehicle through simple human touch. Denzel Washington plays John Hobbes, a cop of especially incorruptible character who matches wits with the thousand-year-old Azazel, a vengeful archangel intent on causing the downfall of civilization through a series of murders and framings-of-the-innocent. The film's effectiveness as a good-versus-evil

Hollywood thriller aside, *Fallen* is also a study in the tenacious wiles of evil and its subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle use of its vehicles. Smug grins of self-satisfaction flickering across the faces of the newly possessed, brazen defiance of time and death, the instant and willing compliance of the human personality—all the little devilish gestures achieve their dramatic power if for no other reason than that they are all too humanly familiar. This movie could have relied much more on sensational Hollywood tricks to get its story across, but it didn't, which is what makes it so compelling—the devil

really *is* in the details. In a world where, according to Hobbes, catching the bad guy is no longer good enough, *Fallen* proves that evil dies hard even when the good are prepared, and these days, prepared one must be. Both villain and saint achieve beyond-cliché traction in this film, and regardless of who wins in the end, *Fallen* is a film that gets honest, in its own Hollywood sort of way, about the epic nature of the struggle, not to mention the moral character and intelligence necessary for the fight.

—Melissa Hoffman



# If the Shoe Fits, Wear It

Sex and the City finds its moral footing

by Maura R. O'Connor



ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARGUERITE SAUVAGE

## AMERICA'S SWEETHEART IS NO LONGER

sweet. The first time we saw Samantha fully naked, witnessed Miranda using the vibrator permanently kept in her nightstand drawer, or empathized with Carrie—even while she was sleeping with two men—I'm sure we issued a collective murmur of shock. After six seasons and eighty-six episodes of martinis, shoes, graphic sex, and meandering commentaries on life as a woman at the beginning of the twenty-first century, *Sex and the City* is coming to an end this February, and I wonder if anyone is shocked anymore. Has anyone, besides the producers, noticed that the show consistently brings in eleven million American viewers? Why hasn't anyone protested that *Sex and the City* won the American Women in Radio and Television's Gracie Allen Award four years running? I personally can't help wondering if it was the scene in season four—when Samantha drops to her knees and gives her boss oral sex in a glass-enclosed office—that qualified them that year for an award that “encourages the positive and realistic portrayal of women in entertainment.” It is a little frightening to think that these things go by unnoticed, or at least fail to ring any alarm bells. But then I was contacted by a mysterious staff member who sent me a previously undisclosed script. To be aired as one of the final eight episodes on cable this February, the screenplay clearly demonstrates that not only does the show proudly bear the standard of postmodern ethics in our popular culture today, but also it has managed to accurately mirror the attitudes of that very same culture. In other words, if one wishes to examine the moral fiber of postmodern America, one need not go further than *Sex and the City*.





V.O.=Voice Over

FADE IN:

**1. EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET-DAY (D1)**

Carrie strides down the street in full fashion regalia. The sun is shining. She looks confident and happy. She comes to a stop at a crosswalk with a group of people. A bedraggled homeless woman appears from behind.

**HOMELESS WOMAN:** Excuse me ma'am, could you spare some change?

**CARRIE:** I'm sorry! (Halfheartedly sorts through her Fendi baguette.) I don't have any!

The homeless woman pushes forward across the crosswalk, and Carrie watches her intently for a moment. She frowns, looks in her purse again, and pulls out a one-dollar bill.

**CARRIE:** Excuse me! Excuse me! (Running clumsily in her stilettos.) Here. (Breathlessly) Have this.

**CARRIE (V.O.):** Some days are a mystery. Overcome by the need to help this woman, I had risked a broken ankle, or worse yet a broken heel, to give away a dollar bill. What had driven me to do such an uncharacteristically charitable act? As I caught a cab, I puzzled over this question: Where had this new conscience come from? Was it the conservative Oscar de la Renta pantsuit I just bought? That commercial about sponsoring a child in Asia? All of a sudden it hit me.

**FLASHBACK -** Images of Carrie and unknown man having sex.

**CARRIE (V.O.) (CONT'D):** I had been out two nights ago when a social worker approached me. He was good-looking and the night

resulted in a bout of fantastically wild sex. . . . Now how the *hell* does *that* work?

CUT TO:

**2. INT. BUSY RESTAURANT-DAY (D1)**

The four friends—Carrie, Samantha, Miranda, and Charlotte—are sitting at their regular table eating brunch.

**CLOSE ON—**tiny portions of food.

**CARRIE (V.O.):** Having divulged this information to my three best friends, I realized that the topic of my Sexually Transmitted Conscience might be inappropriate fare for our weekly brunch . . .

**MIRANDA:** That is so disgusting, Carrie.

**SAMANTHA:** Who gives a rat's ass darling *where* you got it from, just get rid of it!

**CARRIE:** How?! I'm sorry but it's a little too late for a "morality-after pill"!

**CHARLOTTE:** Oh *keep* it Carrie! You can come to my weekly chapter meeting of the Park Avenue Women's Society for the Betterment of the Homeless! It's *really* exclusive . . .

**CARRIE:** Look, I just need to think about what this means . . .

**MIRANDA:** I can tell you what it means: I had a conscience once before, and I never got the good cases or the good-looking men! If I'd kept it up I would *never* have made partner. (Laughs) Or had sex with my eyes open, ever!

**SAMANTHA:** What are you talking about? You can get laid *and*





have a conscience! Why just the other night the handsomest homeless man I've ever seen asked me for some change, and I said, "Honey, what are *you* going to do for *me*?" Let's just say it was quite a stimulating night . . . and it only cost a pocketful of change!

CUT TO:

### 3. INT. CARRIE'S APARTMENT-NIGHT (N1)

Carrie is lying on her bed, laptop computer open.

**CARRIE (V.O.):** I stayed home that night, troubled by the day's events. What was a conscience? Was it just something that you "got"? What happened to my freedom of choice? Obviously my three friends still had a choice in the matter! Like a pair of silk panties, they casually slipped their consciences on and off depending on their mood and circumstances. I knew that what I had experienced was a sense of obligation and that somehow this "sense" might alter my life irrevocably. I couldn't help but wonder. . .

CLOSE ON the computer screen, the words appear as she speaks.

**CARRIE (V.O.) (CONT'D):** Is a conscience the new fashion accessory? And if so, how much does it cost?

CUT TO:

### 4. INT. SHOE STORE IN NYC-DAY (D2)

**CARRIE (V.O.):** The next morning, when I woke up, my conscience was plaguing me. It was time to answer the question: Was this a

fashion statement that needed to be made? I decided to ask for some advice, so I made plans to meet with Charlotte.

**CHARLOTTE:** I understand your fears about becoming a conscientious person, Carrie. But don't worry too much; when it gets hard, you just take some time out to indulge yourself. It works for me all the time!

**CARRIE:** Hmm . . . the only thing is that indulging myself feels strangely, well, I don't know . . . wrong.

**CHARLOTTE:** Lesson number one, Carrie: Compassion is just one part of ourselves that needs to be fulfilled. But no one can be one hundred percent compassionate! You've got to ask yourself: What would happen to the part that cares about *our* happiness?

**CARRIE:** But the reason you help homeless people is because you care about *them*. Right?

**CHARLOTTE:** I don't really think that's the issue. (Whispers) By the way: the women in my charity are *such* a good resource for available men . . .

**CARRIE (V.O.):** I grappled with what Charlotte was saying for a moment: Was the Park Avenue Women's Society for the Betterment of the Homeless secretly a dating service for its participants?

**CARRIE:** So you go to your charity group to meet men?!

**CHARLOTTE:** (Exasperated) Carrie, you don't have to be so serious. Enlighten up! Lesson number two: The end result is what is important—if it makes you feel good, then that's what the right thing to do is.





CUT TO:

**5. TRENDY BAR-NIGHT (N2)**

**CARRIE (V.O.):** How had I failed to notice it before? Charlotte was acting more like a charlatan. That night I turned to Miranda for help.

**MIRANDA:** Welcome to the real world, Carrie. A conscience is a fantasy—and one that you can't even get off on! (Laughing) It just proves how completely hypocritical the whole morality question is. I mean, really, the thing most of these "caring" people care about most is their own image!

**CARRIE:** But what do I *do*? It's all well and good for Charlotte to strike gold in the bedroom via the soup kitchen—but I don't want to live my life as a hypocrite!

**MIRANDA:** What you need to do is annihilate this thing immediately. It's called *logic*. In New York City, the kind of time and commitment it takes to have a conscience just doesn't exist. And Carrie, you can't wear those stilettos in a convent or the damned Himalayas.

**CARRIE:** Jesus.

**MIRANDA:** Forget it, babe. Jesus probably worried about his image too—and he wore sandals.

CUT TO:

**6. INT. CARRIE'S APARTMENT-NIGHT (N3)**

Carrie is sitting on her floor surrounded by piles of clothes and shoes. She appears distraught.

**CARRIE (V.O.):** It had been three days since my conscience had begun ailing me, and my worst fears were now confirmed. The STC had spread to the inner sanctum of my wardrobe! What did a "good" person wear? I saw the lifeless carcasses of my cocktail dresses and mini-skirts before me . . .

Doorbell rings and Carrie gets up. She opens the door.

**CARRIE:** Samantha! Thank God. I can't even dress myself anymore!

**SAMANTHA:** Oh shut up, Carrie. You can't linger in this indecisive hellhole any longer: no clothes, no sex, no fun! You're becoming a didactic bore, and your sex column has gone down the drain! Carrie begins to cry.

**SAMANTHA:** If you want to be happy, you've got to realize that *sex is your only path to salvation*. In your case, though, I can prescribe only one type: Sex as a Charitable Act.

**CARRIE:** (Eyes widen) What does that mean?

**SAMANTHA:** SCA is the only way to appease your conscience and therefore cure your STC. If your motivation is to *give* sex you will



be gratifying the former, but the latter will also be fulfilled inadvertently. Basically, you've got to start giving it away, babe.

**CARRIE:** Would that really work?

**SAMANTHA:** You think you're the first one to be plagued with a Sexually Transmitted Conscience? Darling, I was getting laid by social workers when your *only* fashion accessory was a pair of braces.

**CARRIE (V.O.):** Samantha taught me a lesson I would never forget. I had an epiphany that evening when she suggested that I pay a visit to the local V.A. hospital. Coming home from my first night of humanitarian aid, I felt so fortunate that my blessing to the world was something I was good at to boot!

CUT TO:

**7. EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET-DAY (D4)**

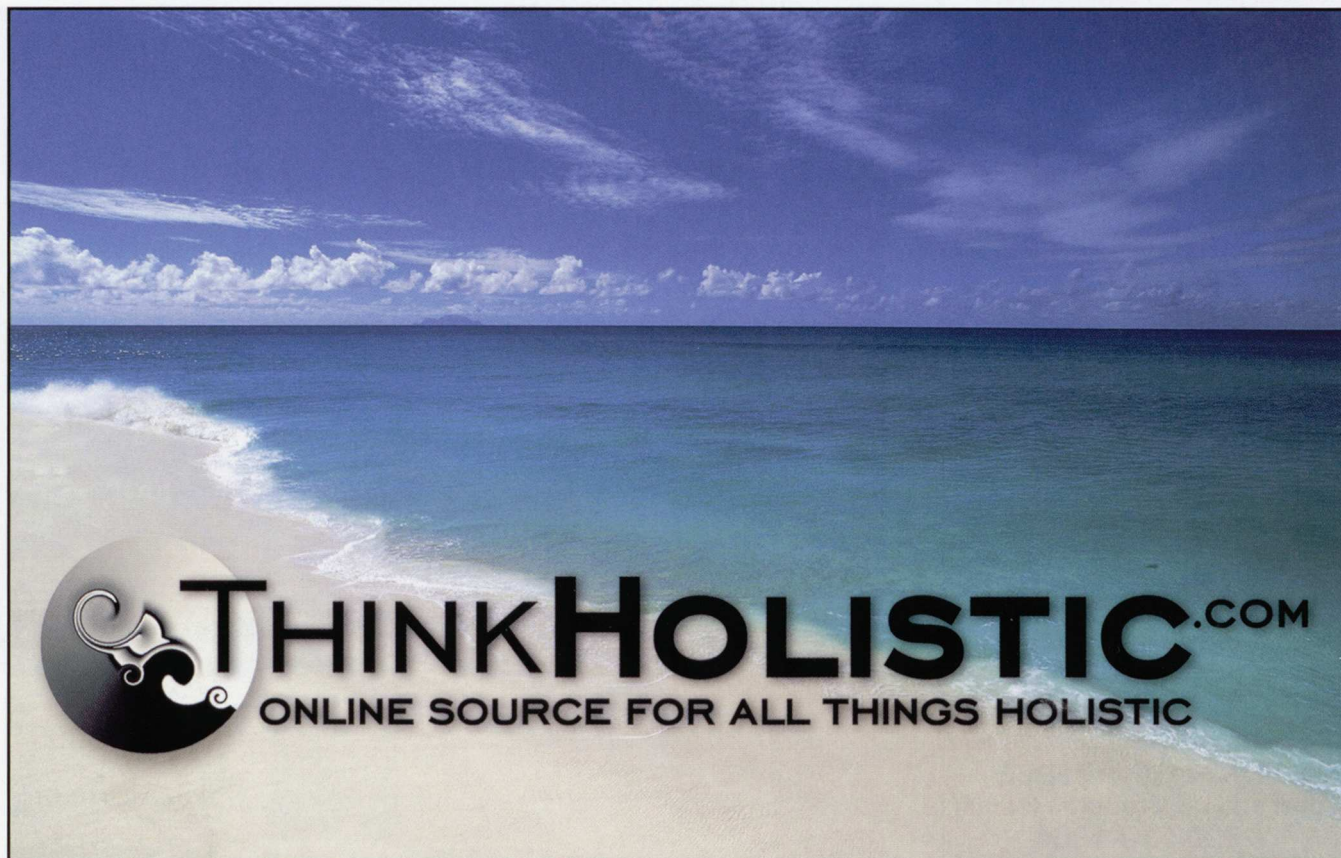
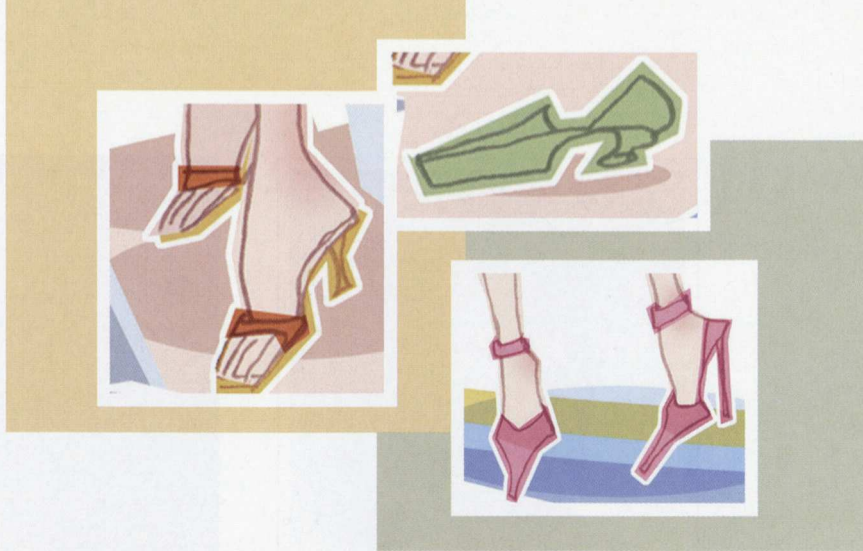
Carrie is seen walking down a sunny street.

**CARRIE (V.O.):** The next day I awoke with a completely new outlook on life. A conscience was a bargain indeed—it cost nothing! Thinking of my three friends and their pearls of wisdom in retrospect, I had come to realize the true nature of humanity's moral instincts. Like a shoe, morality seems to be individually sized to fit perfectly, allowing us to trek the expanses of our human experience in

comfort and style. Since contracting my conscience, I had discovered the open-toed mule of narcissism through Charlotte, the practical pump of logic through Miranda, and the liberating stiletto of compassion through Samantha. In the end I knew without a doubt that it wouldn't matter *what* each of us was doing, as long as we all looked good in our shoes doing it.

FADE OUT as Carrie continues to walk down street.

THE END





# a 21st century love story

"Disturbing and inspiring, luscious and utterly unique, *A 21st Century Love Story* is the magisterial chronicle of two young people on the brink of self-realization. The raw innocence of their correspondence is agonizingly persuasive, divulging a sober and subtle intelligence that is a rare credit to their generation. . . . With great narrative verve, these precocious seekers are proving themselves capable of fundamentally altering the tectonic landscape of the classic coming-of-age tale. In a daringly hybridized exploration of the moral, philosophical, and spiritual context for their own lives, their frequently hilarious and touching dialogue manages to illuminate and transcend. America loves—no, needs—Evan and Ella."

— *The New York Cultural Review*

## Part One

From: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>  
To: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>  
Date: Wed, 03 Dec 2003 19:45:33 -0800 (PST)  
Subject: hello : )  
Attachment: evan-wacked3.jpg

dear ella,

how's life in brooklyn? how's your dad doing? man, i don't know what to say about this whole thing...other than that it sucks of course. i don't mean to sound cold or insensitive, but i wonder if there's even a possibility that he'll survive this? he's totally pearly, right? like taken a turn for the worst? i don't know much about the disease he's suffering from, but it sounds pretty gnarly. seriously though, really, i hope everything's okay. my sister's praying for him and stuff.

and me...well i'm doing alright, you know. i left santa cruz last week and reported back in for messenger duty monday morning. in fact, yesterday i was nearly killed by this yuppie kook in an suv, who came backing out of his driveway at forty miles an hour. the moron broke my front wheel! but he paid me for it, so...whatever. and courtney's just won some employee of the month award for september, so i'm supposed to meet her at this party tonight, which is way lame. things with courtney and me haven't been going so great lately.

anyways, i hope you're chillin', that your dad's feeling okay and all that... (btw, i'm attaching a pic of me, for you to stare at endlessly into the night. :)

later, ecco! :)

love,  
the evanator

p.s. did you ever read that onion article, "dolphins evolve opposable thumbs"?\* you'd totally dig it, babe. it rules.

From: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>  
To: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>  
Date: Thu, 04 Dec 2003 12:10:24 -0000 (PST)  
Subject: Jerk

Evan,



"Gnarly"?! It's called lymphatic cancer. I'm only going to say this once, stop emailing me! You are so "way" immature I can't waste any more time on you.  
I'm seeking a restraining order from Yahoo.

Goodbye...forever.

E

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From: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>  
To: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>  
Date: Fri, 05 Dec 2003 21:11:37 -0800 (PST)  
Subject: Kurt Donald Cobain

Dearest Ella,

I'm sorry. You're right. My whole life has been a lie. I'm a loser, a phony, an unenlightened asshole forever lost in the surf of samsara. I guess I already kind of recognized it before I met you, but after I met you--maybe even the moment I met you--I thought things could be different. You gave me hope, a sense of clarity. I felt confidence in myself and in LIFE when I was around you in a way I never had before. Never. But now you're gone--and you're making it official, for good, forever. I half expected this. But Jesus, Ella... If I can impart some parting words to you before I put an end to this incarnation and leave this realm, it is these:

"God is love; and he that dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him."

--l John, 4:16

Maybe Christians aren't so crazy after all. And maybe I am. But it doesn't matter anymore. Goodbye, Ella Paris. And clichéd as it sounds, now's the time to say it: Goodbye World, Goodbye Samsara.

I'll always love you, Ella. Please tell my parents and sister I love them deeply, and let them know about this (or not).

Sincerely,

Your Immature Friend

---

From: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>  
To: glassyzen@yahoo.com  
Date: Sat, 06 Dec 2003 09:48:32 +0000  
Subject: Evan Jerk McAllister

Evan,  
Grow up and have a little dignity "dude". It used to be that if you



wanted to die you would do it without fanfare, away from other people so as not to disturb them. Which is to say that suicide these days, and the pitifully melodramatic email you wrote, is completely selfish (even for the likes of our friend Kurt). If you were really going to commit suicide you would have done it immediately, knowing that the effect of me hearing that you were dead and hadn't written or told me beforehand, would have been exponentially more painful. And therefore the equivalent of an emotional 'last word'. As it stands now you have given me ample time to respond, probably in the hope that I would cajole you out of it.

Wrong. I dare you to do it.

For someone who claims to want real Meaning in their life, this is the instant solution to the problem. What I mean is, if you kill yourself you'll really know the meaning of the word "coward".

Besides, why are you always sending me fake suicide notes? Isn't this number FOUR? Why do you like to joke around about stuff like this? Huh? I bet you dream about your funeral and all the people who would spontaneously arrive, crying for the great loss of You. Lets talk about something else....

Ella

---

From: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>  
To: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>  
Date: Mon, 08 Dec 2003 02:11:23 -0800 (PST)  
Subject: all the spaces, the strings

lovely ella, meter maid,

you saved me! you spared me from selfishly self-annihilating my self! for the fourth time!! how cool is that? i knew i could count on you. but seriously, folks... you ask why i joke about dying? because i WANT to die! i want to die into the eternal void, i want to die into the unborn Source of ALL. i don't dream about my funeral and savor fantasies of long-lost posers coming to celebrate my departure from this earth. no, i dream of Life Eternal, beyond the comings and goings of pathetic, finite forms. our bodies are just skandhic coils of mortal flesh, doomed to return to the dust whence they sprang, but who are YOU, really? beyond the body, beyond the mind, who are YOU?

ella, i really want to help you understand this better, because i think it will help you A LOT in what you're facing with your dad and his illness. think about it ella: we're born into this strange world, we live our lives, going along with the flow, believing whatever lies we're forced by the world, struggling and suffering along with everyone else, and then one day our bodies fail, and it's all over as quickly as it began. and people ask WHY? what is the POINT? well, i know why, and i know the point--that there is no "point"! it's just a game (god's game) or a dream, whichever metaphor you prefer.



ella, i'm sorry if i've upset you by joking around so much. i don't want my happiness to screw with our friendship, okay? ella, if you really want me to stop, and turn into stodgy academic mode, then i will just for you. you're so beautiful ella, so pure--like a radiant bodhisattva of perfection in this world. your sweet smile, your glossy dark hair, your eyes like globes of blue earths that form a matrix of endless windows that anyone can look at but only i can see.

with infinite love,  
your own Original Face

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From: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>  
To: glassyzen@yahoo.com  
Date: Mon, 08 Dec 2003 15:11:36 +0000  
Subject: Re: all the spaces., the strings

ARE YOU ON DRUGS?!

---

From: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>  
To: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>  
Date: Fri, 12 Dec 2003 06:49:35 -0800 (PST)  
Subject: apology

hi ella,  
the short answer is...yes. on sunday evening i found dave smoking copious amounts of crystal on the beach, and i joined in....

i'm really sorry for whatever crap i wrote you that night. ignore it, okay? how are you doing?

love you,  
evan

---

From: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>  
To: glassyzen@yahoo.com  
Date: Sat, 13 Dec 2003 16:54:24 +0000  
Subject: Clicking into Place

Damn-it Evan I knew something must have been up. I thought you had quit?!

Well, it really warms my heart that my absence has had such a "narcotic" effect on you. Heheheh. What if you had overdosed? Your obituary would read, "Tragic Youth's Death! Evan McAllister's Zen Ego rears it's monstrous head in the midst of a methamphetamine binge!"



I went out last night and came home mildly intoxicated myself. I wish there was something else to concentrate on besides a week of drudgery and then partying. I had a good conversation with my dad though (he hasn't "pearled" yet). Around three o'clock in the morning when I got back he was still awake. You always think of sick people being asleep, but he seems to be revived constantly by a sort of mental insomnia. He asked me about my night, wanting to know all the details and then told me that he thinks I should go back to school as soon as I can to finish my degree. So I can do something important. But what does he want me to say, "Sure dad! Just as soon as your in the ground!"

Have you done any meditation at the Zen Center?

I had an interesting experience yesterday in the morning. Before this it's always felt like there was an interior battle occurring when meditating, but this time there wasn't even a fight. Something CLICKED into place and then Nothing was happening. What the hell IS THAT?!

Miss you terribly,  
E

---

From: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>  
To: glassyzen@yahoo.com  
Date: Sat, 13 Dec 2003 17:39:53 +0000  
Subject: By the way...

Do you really think I'm a stodgy morbid academic?

---

From: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>  
To: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>  
Date: Sun, 14 Dec 2003 10:36:25 -0800 (PST)  
Subject: emptiness

hey ecco,

no, i do not think you're a stodgy, morbid academic! did i say that? ignore that shit, alright? i was totally out of it. but thanks for putting up with me. you're the best. ;)

wow, it sounds like you had a pretty powerful meditation experience. guess what happened to me on friday night? the evening began with me going out to see "step into liquid" again with courtney. after she went home, i was still feeling pretty inspired, so i headed to the beach.

what happened there was *insane*.

get this: after maybe half an hour, from out of the darkness, rolling in like a sea serpent, i somehow caught this full-on barrel--and was cruising like a maniac before wiping out, with the wave slamming me underwater



into this bigass rock. i felt a sharp pain shoot up my right leg but, fortunately, was still able to grab my board and paddle to shore. the next thing i remember, i was lying on the beach, totally motionless, with a tingling sensation throughout my body. but my sense of "self" was completely gone! instead, there was nothing but boundless space in all directions. i had never experienced such peace and stillness in my entire life. it felt like i could remain there forever. it almost felt like i had been there forever! and as i lay there on the beach, with no sense of having a body at all, i noticed the sound of waves crashing in the ocean. it felt like i was completely one with them. like they were moving through the nothingness that i had become.

after a while i tried to sit up, and felt myself quickly return to my body, with a throbbing pain coming from my right ankle. i had to crawl about 100 ft. up the beach to get to my car, and i just sat there for a while before calling courtney on my cell. my mind was completely blown. i was thinking over and over, "*is this world really nothing but waves on the surface of that infinitely deep abyss?*" and i haven't been able to stop thinking about it. i mean, i've read about experiences like this, but...jesus. "what is THAT?" is right.

amazing...

love,  
evan

---

From: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>  
To: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>  
Date: Wed, 17 Dec 2003 17:09:04 -0800 (PST)  
Subject: !!!

hi ella, did you get my last email? anyway, check it out: i just got off the phone with courtney, who was on orbitz booking tickets for she and i to fly out to new york for the weekend, arriving at JFK on friday afternoon! her boss is sending her there on business, but she's paying my way to come along. is that fair? i told her i definitely want to go, but what she doesn't know is, i really just want to see you. :)

what should i do?

lots of love,  
evan

TO BE CONTINUED...

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\*Reference on page 118: "Dolphins Evolve Opposable Thumbs," *The Onion* [Vol.36, Issue 30, Aug. 31, 2000].



### SHALLOW DRAUGHTS

I want to complain about the "shallow draughts": the disjointed, misleading, inaccurate, and superficial manner in which Carter Phipps presented Annie Besant, C. W. Leadbeater, Krishnamurti, Madame Blavatsky, Alice A. Bailey, Benjamin Creme, and the ascended masters, including Maitreya. Such reporting discredits your magazine and provides a disservice to your readers.

Why could not Phipps have introduced his remarks by admitting, "I am a skeptic who does not believe in the Second Coming, therefore my reporting will be distorted by my disbelief"?

**Paul J. O'Neill, Ed.D.**

*via email*

### LIVING RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

I have been disappointed and discouraged by your discussion of whether religion can respond to our current global crisis. I felt myself called into spiritual leadership precisely in response to this crisis because I felt that it was, in essence, a crisis of spiritual perception, a blindness to the subtle reality underlying our physical world. My leadership took the form of becoming a rabbi when I realized that my ancestors were calling me to receive and transmit a precious medicine for the world. I realized that Judaism was not a package to be unwrapped, a fixed set of beliefs and practices, but rather a great river connecting me to the source of Wisdom and Love. Each generation receives the flow of that essence and must recreate particular forms to express that flow in response to the questions and challenges of the present moment.

To be true to a living tradition, I must participate in its evolution. If I pass on the same forms that I inherited, then I am participating in the death of Judaism. When I study the history of Jewish practice, I can trace this amazing

evolutionary process and I am inspired to be creative and responsive to the challenges of my time. At the same time, I learn to respect and admire the forms that my ancestors created in response to their times. I live in this creative tension. I'm sure that there are others like me working in a religious context, in love with God, renewing and recreating the essence of a living tradition, but you usually won't find us at the center of the exoteric, well-funded institutions. We are the mystics, the artists, the innovators, the activists. The work we do is subversive and may not be officially recognized in our lifetime or ever. Yet we keep our religions alive by receiving the essential mystery, learning the mythic language of our ancestors, and using that language to express what we have received in new ways. I am not surprised when we are marginalized by the mainstream media, but I had some expectations that more enlightened seekers might recognize and encourage this important work of renewal that is happening in the context of living religious traditions.

**Rabbi Shefa Gold**

*Jemez Springs, NM*

### BLAME GAME

Elizabeth Debold's attempt to make a "definitely" astute article on Caplan's book *Do You Need A Guru?* left me too unenlightened halfway through, so much so that I did not finish it. I felt she was coming from the ego "Blame Game" which seems to still be the hottest way to present a viewpoint in this evocative, evolving twenty-first-century publishing field. The transformation now happening in this new age, new millennium, and new century, predicted two thousand years ago, is that we do not have to go on as before and suffer as much if we stop blaming others for our choices and accept sole responsibility for our lives.

It is time to heal with or without a guru. You can be your own wise teacher. If you feel incapable of doing so, search for one wisely. Look closely at the life they truly lead and then and only then follow their lead. As you grow and change, so will your teacher. It takes spiritual common sense. Or try a life coach, for they provide your own sounding board.

**Doris E. Roberts, Ph.D.**

*Rainier, WA*

### EVERY ASPECT OF OUR MANIFESTATION

I want to thank Elizabeth Debold for her article on Mariana Caplan's recent book, *Do You Need a Guru?* Although I have not read Caplan's book, I got the sense that she believes that an enlightened individual can be effective as a teacher even if they aren't fully and clearly embodying their enlightenment in the way in which they move as a human being in the world. From what I have observed, this is simply not true. Actually, it seems to me that the extent to which a teacher of enlightenment has not fully embodied their realization in their humanness is the extent to which they will NOT be effective as teachers of the Truth Absolute. If Total Liberation is what we yearn for then we must seek out and settle for nothing less than an individual who not only knows the Truth and speaks the Truth, and even demonstrates the Truth, but who actually, and very consciously IS the Truth, through and through and through. Even in their relationships with others, even in the way in which they move in the world, even in their smallest gesture, wholeness is there, utter lack of conflict and division is there, total honesty and rare vulnerability is there. Such people are living invitations for each and every one of us to come Home to the Truth of our own Being, fully and in every aspect of our manifestation.

**Sean Arnold**

*Eugene, OR*



### DISTURBING DYNAMICS

I first took in the white male image of God on your latest cover with a sense of irony and humor, believing that it was chosen as commentary on the futility of outdated representations of the Divine—not as an accurate representation of the magazine's view of God. Unfortunately, the prominence of Don Beck's "Spiral Dynamics" within the pages made me rethink my interpretation. Don Beck's Spiral Dynamics memetic system puts African Bushmen and shamans at the lower rungs of his evolutionary spiral, reproducing the evolutionary framework of eighteenth and nineteenth century colonizers, missionaries, and scientific racialists. Meanwhile, he places "holistic, intuitive thinking" at the top of his schema, curiously neglecting to note the holistic worldview of those aforementioned populations.

More disturbing however, are his interview comments that suggest that more "evolved" (i.e., First World) societies "gently, if possible, and sometimes with tough love when necessary, assist humans to emerge through these layers and levels." Not only does such a view perpetuate the notion of First World superiority, but its so-called "tough love" approach sounds too close to the view of European colonizers who endeavored to "uplift" the "primitive" indigenous people around the world by forcing them to adapt to Western culture and mores (when they were allowed to live, that is). Thus, once again it is white Western men who are defining themselves at the top of a spiritual and social hierarchy. The second time I looked at your cover, sadly, all I saw was another reminder of how easy it is for ego-bound humans to make God in their own image.

**Anonymous**  
via email

### EGO IN THE REAL WORLD

Have just finished reading the latest edition of *WIE*, "Can God Handle the 21st Century," with mixed feelings. The new direction of the magazine is quite right for the time we are living in, but I am beginning to find it very apolitical. There is much talk of integrating the whole sphere of the human condition but in reality there is *no* real analysis of political, sociological, or economic life in relation to consciousness. What action do we take *now* in the practical, *material* world? There is little mention in *WIE* about political models and about class and capitalism being a manifestation of ego. As "spiritual warriors" and presumably "revolutionaries" we must make this blatant link. Capitalism is destroying the world. It is the cause of mass poverty, imperialism, war, spiritual degradation, inequality, selfishness, terrorism, and environmental destruction. We must be willing to face up to our own insulated, comfortable, middle-class conditioning if we really want to change *now*. This is facing up to ego in the real, practical world.

**Andrew Alexander**  
London, England

**ED. NOTE:** *We hope you enjoy the political commentary that we're featuring in our new quarterly format, including Jim Garrison's provocative view on "America as Empire."*

### A SOURCE OF SUPPORT

All throughout history, every person who's ever dared to journey beyond the realm of the familiar, in order to question the boundaries of their era's reality, has met with strong resistance. And although our species is slowly learning to overcome its reluctance to change, most social, economical, intellectual, and

cultural climates are not yet equipped to handle the sudden introduction of unfamiliar concepts. Messengers of such radical new ideas, the pioneers of our world, are often opposed. History presents us with many examples of our species' tendency to cling to the old and reject the new, before strangely heralding the new as the norm. Paradoxically, those individuals whose visions of reality were opposed with great resistance then became a norm of humanity's progress and insight. Seeking the truth beyond the familiar is a difficult and desolate road that requires vision, passion, and a burning desire to be free. In each issue of your magazine, this unassuming attitude towards life, combined with a deep love for authenticity and truth, has proven an undeniable source of support on my own journey beyond the boundaries of the familiar.

**Lee Mason**  
Amsterdam, Holland

### OLD FRIENDS

I am always glad when your magazine arrives with its variety of articles and essays. At times I find the names of old friends! Yes, one just keeps on learning, feeling, and sharing experiences, even at ninety-two.

With joy,

**Erica Maria Moore**  
Santa Barbara, CA



# Cosmic Conscience

by Andrew Cohen

**WHAT IS THE MORAL CONTEXT FOR THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE** at the beginning of the twenty-first century? Most importantly, for the minority who are privileged and educated, for those at the leading edge—*us*—what is the moral context for *our* relationship to life? The fact is, for most of us, there isn't any. That's the problem, really. But it's not our fault. We are all products of our own time and place in history, and ours is the age of the individual—a time when our own personal desires and concerns are almost always the determining factors in making our most important life choices. In this time when we have almost infinite options, when many of us are dubious of notions of higher truth and experience an aversion to any sense of obligation, it's no wonder that morally we find ourselves at sea. So self-focused have we become that we've literally lost touch with the moral dimension of the human experience. And the only way that a new, authentic moral context will begin to reveal itself to us is if our fixation on our personal desires falls into the background. It's for this reason that spiritual experience is so important.

The traditional teachings of enlightenment tell us that only when we are willing to let go of our personal desires will we be able to directly experience the grandeur, glory, and awe-inspiring mystery of Being that transcends life and death. The living revelation of enlightened consciousness itself is so extraordinary, so liberating, because freed from the tethers of the personal sphere, our awareness expands to what feels like infinity. And in that infinite embrace of everything that is, a care and concern, a love and passion *for* everything that is reveals itself quite spontaneously. And we recognize that that care and concern is not in any way separate from consciousness itself, and is in fact our *own* deepest care and concern. There is nothing that gives greater conviction in the inherent goodness of the creative principle, or the source of life itself, than the direct discovery of the passionate care that emerges naturally when consciousness has been freed from the endless desires, fears, and concerns of the personal ego. That care, we discover, is not only an innate quality of who and what we are, but is who and what we *become* when we authentically begin to evolve beyond ego. And the most thrilling part of this evolutionary transition is the emerging intuition of a living moral context that exists in and as a fundamental part of the fabric of creation itself.

This cosmic moral context becomes apparent in and through the evolving consciousness of the awakening human being. In fact, the higher moral dimension of the life process only reveals itself when the awakening human is able to see beyond not only the desires of the personal self but also any and all notions of self-identity, individual and collective, that are less than limitless. A new enlightened moral framework for the human experience—one which we as a race are so desperately in need of—will become apparent only when more of the privileged minority who have already been given everything are willing to let go of our attachment to our good fortune to make room inside ourselves for the gift that consciousness itself is waiting to bestow upon us.

Ironically, we're in a double bind. Never have so many of us been in a position to understand how much the universe needs our evolution beyond ego, our enlightenment. And at the same time, because we're all products of the age of the individual, never has our attachment to our personal ego or self-sense been stronger. In fact, it is because of this that even in sophisticated contemporary spiritual circles, the perennial challenge from the greatest masters throughout history—ego death—is dismissed as an outdated relic of our less-enlightened past. So what are we going to do? The next step really does depend on each and every one of us.

It's urgent that we begin to define a new moral context that will, in its depth and breadth of vision, be able to embrace the multidimensional nature of the human predicament in all its complexity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. And some bold pathfinders are already well along in that endeavor. But the most important part of this project, and I'm sure few would disagree, is actually being willing to pay the price for self-transcendence, as individuals, so that more and more of us will be able to directly intuit the contours and parameters of this new moral ground from the core of consciousness itself. ■

**Andrew Cohen**, founder and editor-in-chief of *What Is Enlightenment?*, has been a spiritual teacher since 1986, and is author of numerous books, including *Living Enlightenment* and *Embracing Heaven & Earth*. For more information, visit [www.andrewcohen.org](http://www.andrewcohen.org).