



what is enlightenment

redefining spirituality for an evolving world

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why the future needs us

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the Big Bang just got bigger

MICHAEL MURPHY
living evolution

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GRATEFUL DEAD
the battle for innocence

Japan's suicidal
SUPERMONKS

PHIL JACKSON
the soul of teamwork

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awakening the authentic self

**CAN JESUS &
THE BUDDHA SAVE GEN Y?**

**COME
TOGETHER!**
THE POWER OF
COLLECTIVE
INTELLIGENCE



Issue 25 May-July 2004
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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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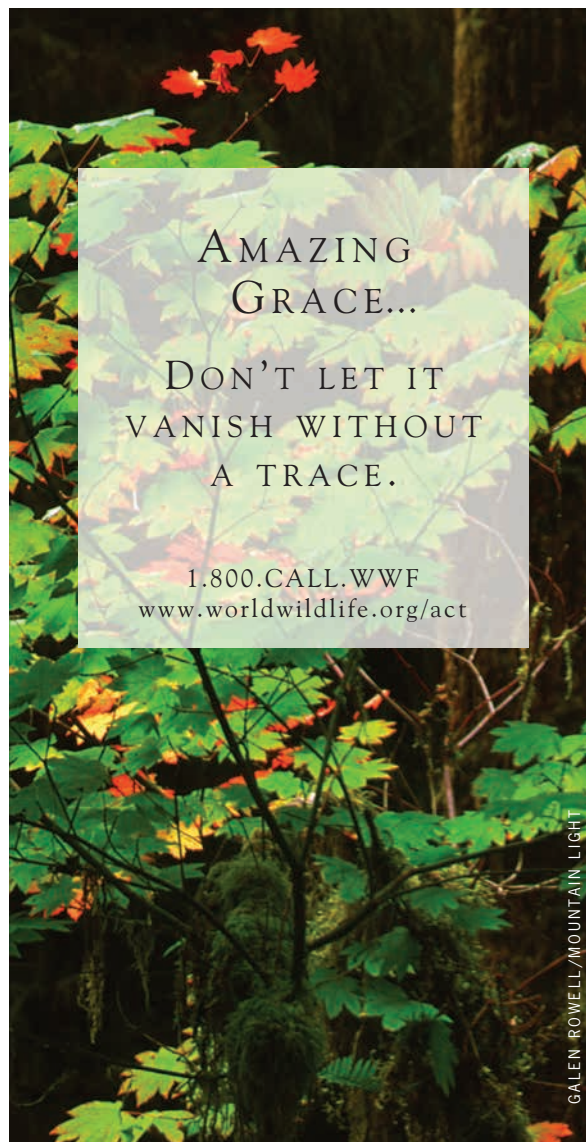
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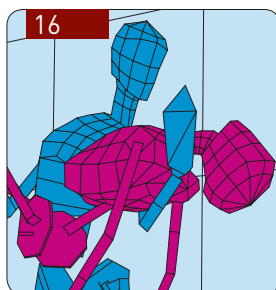
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The New Enlightenment

Andrew Cohen



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TOO MUCH INDIVIDUALISM

As a professional philosopher, I found "Morality Bites" interesting on many fronts. The piece by Jessica Roemischer was fascinating, and the center feature piece on ethics in a postmodern world, by Elizabeth Debold, was also interesting. She diagnoses the problem well: too much individualism. I myself would not find postmodernity to be the main problem, though. I think the problem begins with Liberalism (that's Big-L Liberalism, as in the foundation of Western social thought, starting with Descartes and Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, etc.). Modernity, then, set the stage for the radical individualism that has taken over our culture and our ethical thinking. For sure, we need to combat simpleminded relativism, but I think that is easily done. Most forms of relativism suffer from a central problem that is easily pointed out: they claim that nothing is universally true apart from the fact that nothing is universally true. That is, relativists want to claim that relativism is a universal truth, and you can't have it that way. This central, vicious circularity

is at the heart of relativisms of all kinds. But postmodernity, taken seriously as a response to the problems of modernity, is not so simpleminded. Derrida's deconstruction, for instance, is an attempt to show that modernity's claims to universality were in fact historically situated, that everything is interpretation.

But interpretation is not something that we have to "get around" or that keeps us from an absolute truth. We have access to the world precisely *through* our perception and interpretation. This does not lead to a lamenting of interpretation but to a celebration of it as the way in which the world—and truth—is given. The world is indeed given to our conscious engagement, and we can thus get closer to the truth by making the rounds in the community, looking at various viewpoints, and striving to come to an understanding that does justice to this. Reason is thus a communal pursuit, and one that can in fact lead to absolutes. The problem was in thinking that objectivity is divorced from subjectivity, and thus if all we have is the latter, we can never achieve the former. On the contrary, objectivity is founded on subjectivity. (What else could it be? We are subjects!)

Finally, the question of whether humanity is evolving toward some sort of goal is one that I would also problematize. Evolution is itself an appropriated idea once removed from biology. To apply it to ethics is to ignore the problems surrounding moving from the *is* to the *ought*—from, that is, "what is the case" to "what should be the case." Evolution, while I buy it wholeheartedly in biology, of course, when appropriated for such notions as human consciousness and human morality, brings with it a sense of progress. Properly understood, biological evolution has no sense of progress in it. Darwin himself was clear: evolution is not teleological. We aren't headed anywhere or getting any

better; we are merely changing. There is adaptation to whatever is needed at the moment. And the environment and the organism are in reality both evolving together, adapting together, so it makes little sense to speak of evolution apart from community, apart from an environment that at once initiates and is initiated by the change of the organism. A circularity that is not at all vicious!

I have gone on too long here, but it is simply testament to the richness of the article and the magazine that it evokes such thinking. My thanks and good wishes.

Peter Steeves

Associate Professor of Philosophy
DePaul University, Chicago

A BREATH OF FRESH ETHICS

An incredible article! ["Shifting Moral Ground The Dilemma of Ethics in an Out-of-Control World"]. My heartfelt thanks to Elizabeth Debold for expressing so well what desperately needs to be heard and understood. The evolutionary morality she speaks of is a complete shift from any form of "stuffy and stifling" morality that we usually associate with that word. Rather, this kind of ethics lifts us to higher ground. I could literally feel air being blown into the lungs of my soul as I read, and wind into the sails of change. This new perspective can guide us beyond what we think is possible. What a relief to draw oneself beyond a self-centered and isolated approach to life—to begin to see and live life, from its most mundane aspects to the lofty ones, as embedded in something much greater and more meaningful than we can fully grasp with our minds.

This is one of the most pertinent pieces of writing I have found, because it points out what a dead end we are heading towards if we do not step beyond our individualistic, pluralistic way of life.

Let's move on. And let's remember that this next step is all about evolution—not a new ethics that will need to be replaced because it too has become cemented in our lives, but an everlasting breath of fresh ethics (necessary for our very survival) that is ever-evolving, dynamic, responding to what is required at any given moment, expanding to encompass more and more of the Universe.

Miriam Mason Martineau

Next Step Foundation

Nelson, BC

SOFT-CORE SPIRITUAL PORN?

Snatching up the latest issue, "Morality Bites," I was looking forward to another deep and enticing examination of enlightening revelation. Instead, what I got was a lot of hollowness and superficial flash. Perhaps *WIE* is becoming like other trendy magazines on the rack? Morphing into the *Newsweek/People/Maxim/Cosmo* version of spiritual rags? Tantalizing, sexy, suggestive, with little real substance? Soft-core spiritual porn? If the subject is enlightenment, and the present question is morality, then it looks like the "Bites" issue is feeding and strengthening egoic delusion. Andrew Cohen, in his dialogue with Ken Wilber, seems to be trying to set the tone for the question of morality in today's world. There is much lamenting and exasperation from Cohen about the lack of a workable contemporary morality and the lack of passion among the awakened, along with the suggestion that there are many who claim enlightenment but who instead merely suffer from an inflated, narcissistic self. As proof of this perceived state of affairs, the whole dialogue is peppered with commanding words and phrases like "moral imperative" and "evolutionary urgency." The vibe of duty, requirement, and "could, would, and should" abounds. What is "right human conduct," and why "conform" to it?

If one is living and acting naturally from the enlightened state, morality and goal achievement have no meaning or reality, literally or practically speaking. Unity awareness includes its own natural, spontaneous "morality" and "code of conduct" but these are not intellectually derived rules. In fact, this spontaneity only exists as a consequence of having courageously embraced a state of "no rules whatsoever." One's moral conduct occurs in the moment, as appropriate, and is dissolved in the next. And massive enlightening "blasts" may require significant "down-time" for integration. Honoring that inner need for respite eclipses any moral "commands" for "assisting" evolution, until one knows it is time again to press on. Evolution takes care of itself as a natural expression of the journey. Tally Ho!

Captain Robert Sniadach

via email

WALKING THE TALK

I read your February-April 2004 issue of *WIE* with great interest. As a boomer who has pursued spiritual development for over thirty years, I have become aware of a great developmental gap in Western seekers. Specifically, that gap is a widening gulf between intellectual awareness and an embodied, emotionally mature wisdom. We enjoy such a great degree of intellectual and social freedom from traditional religious and cultural structures that we have been able to embrace an unparalleled volume of spiritual knowledge. Mr. Wilber and Mr. Cohen, among others, have done a fantastic job of making these complex and subtle philosophies of the world readily available to anyone who is interested. This is a great blessing, and it is also responsible for a great bit of our difficulty.

What we lack in this rapid unfolding of spiritual awareness is the corresponding emotional development that creates

a strong, grounded container to hold and express that awareness in the secular world. Where are the elders who can model and teach a more integrated way of being? Since our Native American wisdom traditions have mostly been destroyed, and our traditional religious structures are too distorted and too rigid, we have imported most of our teachings from Asia. And while Asia has been a tremendously rich source of wisdom, its traditions are historically monastic and more tribal than our modern secular culture. Are these teachings fully appropriate and useful for secularized Westerners? In my experience, most teachings and teachers from Asia fall short in understanding and addressing the emotional dysfunction found in the West. Americans, in particular, are so subject to the mass marketing of youth culture that we often don't grow up. We inhabit a narcissistic "it's all about me" phase of development, yet we talk about the universe and spirituality. These are mutually exclusive levels of awareness. So our challenge is to become emotionally mature adults who can live and model a higher morality, not just talk about it.

Dr. Larry Alboher

Mill Valley, CA

STUCK IN THE MUD

I read the new issue cover to cover, desperately seeking something of value. Who stole the magazine of relentless inquiry into the human condition and replaced it with a bunch of pop-culture drivel? In place of enlightening interviews with masters of all stripes, I find stories about naked dope smokers in the desert, proclamations that God is a DJ, and video game reviews. In a cruel irony, the magazine's editorial perspective has become stuck in the mud at the very same time it embraced evolution as its central organizing principle. Andrew Cohen used to dive

continued on page 130



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

IN THIS, OUR SECOND QUARTERLY edition of *What Is Enlightenment?* we've taken on what we feel is one of the most exciting emerging potentials of our time: collective intelligence. Is it possible that simply through coming together with others in a spirit of focused intention and attention we can not only find, but actually create, the door to the future? It definitely seems that something extraordinary has begun to happen in many different fields of human endeavor—something that may even enable us to find otherwise unseen solutions to the incredibly complex problems that our rapidly changing world is facing. And if indeed this is true, what could be more important?

The most rewarding part of working on this magazine is engaging so intimately with others in the creative process. Since *WIE* has taken on its new incarnation, we've also taken on three young editors who have helped to dramatically alter and influence our voice, especially when addressing issues related to popular culture. One sure sign of the aging process is the dawning recognition that one is shockingly out of touch with new tastes, perspectives, and trends that are the sights and sounds of a new generation. Embracing this new generation, while gently aspiring to educate, inspire, and uplift them through our pages, is now part of our ongoing mission. In trying to provide a serious forum for cutting-edge thinking, the experience of that creative process is deepened exponentially with the conviction that through coming together, not only as a dedicated team but also with our contributors and readers, we are helping in our own small way to create a more enlightened future for us all.

Andrew Cohen



sky to street

consciousness rising

A growing group of scientists and scholars are determined to understand one of life's most elusive mysteries

It is becoming one of the most confusing conundrums of the twenty-first century: What is consciousness? The question seems rather simple at first glance. We all have it, right? Yes, but what exactly is *it*, and where did *it* come from? The issue gets thornier the more you think about it. Is consciousness a byproduct of the human brain or the ground of its activities? Has it evolved or was it always present? Despite these profound gaps in our most basic understanding of reality, consciousness studies haven't exactly garnered widespread interest. As Nobel Laureate Francis Crick wrote in 1994, "The majority of modern psychologists omit any mention of the problem . . . and most modern neuroscientists ignore it." But that oversight may very well be a thing of the past. Recently, David Chalmers, a philosophy professor at the University of Arizona and director of the Center for Consciousness Studies, has helped fire up the field with his *Towards a Science of Consciousness* Conference, which he has been organizing since 1996. The most recent installment was just completed this April in Tucson. Bringing together cognitive scientists, philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, parapsychologists, and even some spiritual teachers, Chalmers is



approaching this difficult field with the widest possible net. "It's a big question. It's not going to be solved overnight," he told *WIE*. "It's probably the big challenge over the next century of science." But he does feel that progress is being made. "The framework of a science of consciousness is coming together, but we can probably expect a revolution or two before we get there."

Of course, not everyone thinks we need a revolution. The popular author and highly respected cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett also attends the conference, despite his contention that con-

sciousness is easily reducible to brain function. Dennett is an arch materialist even by scientific standards, and his views do not exactly resonate with most of the attendees, a fact that is not lost on him. "Now I know what it must have felt like to be a cop at Woodstock," he joked after last year's event.

Chalmers is not alone in his quest to bring more consciousness to the question of consciousness. In fact, he is at the forefront of a cross-disciplinary surge of interest in the subject, one that crosses normal academic dividing lines. And you can count him among

go with your gut

Science finds new evidence for gut instincts

Ever have a “gut feeling”? Okay, stupid question. Most people have, right? In fact, statistics show that approximately fifty percent of humans have experienced a gut feeling about something that later came true. With statistics like that, you’d think science would have long been hankering to understand exactly what is going on in the human stomach. Well, recently, at least, there are a few researchers who are beginning to suspect that everything might not be as it seems beneath the belt. Indeed, parapsychologist Dean Radin, author of *The Conscious Universe*, is committed to finding out if the gut may in fact have “perception intelligence,” an intelligence that would explain all of those gut feelings. Say that again? The gut is intelligent? Okay, it might not get you into MIT, but it does appear that the mind has a rival, or at least a smaller sibling. According to Radin, research results support growing evidence that humans do have more than one brain—that there is a “dense place of neurons,” down below, that points to the existence of a “belly brain.” And the belly brain, as you might imagine, seems to have responses and “feelings” that are all its own. In fact, it might sometimes have a different take on things than big brother upstairs. Who would have guessed so much could be going on between meals?

Radin’s research has also shown some surprising evidence of just how perceptive the belly brain can be. In an experiment at the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) with twenty-six pairs of people, Radin showed one person, the “sender,” eight minutes of video images, split into four segments, each according to their emotional content—happy, angry, sad, neutral (no images). Sixty feet away, a second participant, the “receiver,” was locked in a sealed room with electrodes monitoring heart, skin, and stomach muscles. Then the sender consciously tried to send the images to the receiver. The results have been persuasive. IONS research director Marilyn Schlitz says, “We are seeing that the gut is a very sensitive organ, so even if you are in another room, *my* gut can sense when *you* see a particularly evocative image and respond emotionally. Therefore, your state can actually influence my state.” Impressive. Not only is our belly brain sensitive, it appears to be psychic to boot.

Exciting as these results are in providing evidence of psychic phenomena between humans, they may also end up proving our good old common sense. During Radin’s experiments, the largest effect on the receiver has been when the sender is being shown images of food. All that sensitivity, all that psychic power, and what does the belly brain really care about? Surprise, surprise . . . lunch.

thinkers, like *Nonzero* author Robert Wright, who are pushing for scientists to accept what mystics have long claimed—that there are inner dimensions of the human experience not ultimately reducible to matter. “You’re not going to reduce consciousness to a process in the brain,” he declares. “My own view is that consciousness itself is in some sense irreducible. Maybe even something fundamental in the world.” Call it a new consciousness counterculture if you want, but if Dr. Chalmers has his way, this emerging Woodstock nation is going to shake up the old guard and rattle the cages of the academy, changing the face of science, philosophy, and maybe even religion in the years to come.

fairway to heaven

The bestselling genre of golf and spirituality is heading to Hollywood

When the website findshivas.com went up last September, it was a first, both for Hollywood and for Esalen founder and author Michael Murphy. It was a first for Hollywood because never before had a director and a producer used the internet to ask fans to assist them in casting one of the lead roles of a major Hollywood production—in this case the role of the mysterious golf teacher, Shivas Irons, a character in Murphy’s spiritual classic, *Golf in the Kingdom*. And it was a first for Murphy, because it signaled that *Golf in the Kingdom*, long coveted in Hollywood for its cinematic potential, was finally going to be green-lighted—thirty-one years after





fairway to heaven continued

he first published the book. Indeed, Murphy has teamed up with director Susan Streitfeld and producer Mindy Affrime, and though nothing is ever quite certain in the complex world of making movies, it appears that we may finally get to see this much-loved story on the screen. Last winter, *WIE* managed to get an early update on the status of this new production from the producer and director duo, who are embracing the formidable creative challenge of bringing Aurobindo, enlightenment, and integral ideas to a medium more accustomed to surf, sex, and Schwarzenegger.

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT?: *How long have you been working on this project?*

MINDY AFFRIME: Michael Murphy and I have been conspiring to make *Golf in the Kingdom* for almost thirteen years. A year and a half

ago, we got the film rights back from a Hollywood studio, and we have been working with Susan on a script. We just finished a wonderful draft.

WIE: *What makes this script work?*

AFFRIME: Michael feels like this script is the closest ever to being really true to his vision of the book.

SUSAN STREITFELD: What we did in the adaptation was to strip the story down to its essential core, paring it down to a simple tale of the search, of a boy and his teacher. Hollywood likes to embellish. They like to tell you what you're watching and how you're supposed to feel about it. We are trying to keep it very, very simple and open.

WIE: *Is it hard that the film is explicitly spiritual in nature—is that a hard sell?*

AFFRIME: Well, in some ways, yes. Really, *Golf in the Kingdom* is a very

simple tale about a young man who has been studying philosophy at Stanford in 1956 and who decides he has to go to India to gain enlightenment. At the very beginning of his journey, in the London airport, his flight to Bombay is delayed. So he ventures off to Scotland to play one last round of golf, his passion. There he meets Shivas Irons, a mysterious golf pro who teaches him all about life—on and off the golf course—in twenty-four hours. There is no sex, no violence, no sentimental ending. *Golf in the Kingdom* is a universal tale about a young man looking for transformation and finding it where he never thought he would.

WIE: *What qualities are you looking for in casting Shivas Irons, the teacher that Michael, the main character, meets?*

STREITFELD: Shivas Irons is a trickster, a Hermes character. Hermes was known as the God of the Hinge, and Shivas is like that. He sits at the threshold, opening and closing doors, pushing and pulling

6

THE MASTERS

IT SEEMS THAT FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS

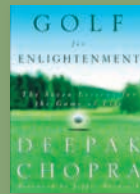
now, every time one visits the local Barnes and Noble there's a new book out proclaiming the spiritual virtues of golf. Indeed, after rising out of the seventies like a 300-yard tee shot, the enormously popular "golf-as-mysticism" genre is putting the ancient game at the forefront of the postmodern spiritual marketplace, commanding the attention of sporty seekers everywhere with its promise of an easygoing Sunday path to God Realization. But just who is behind this emerging religious phenomenon? *WIE* decided to find out.

at Michael's mind, trying to get him to go beyond himself. Shivas is the best part of all of us, but the part we have such a hard time actually living out of. He's the one who embodies original authenticity. Both Michael and Shivas are fantastic roles. Not only is the movie about the archetypal search, but it is also a love story. It is about finding a teacher, and about falling in love. These two see in each other a potential, something essential, the ability to connect and carve out this fantastic relationship for twenty-four hours, a relationship that will have resonance for both of them for the rest of their lives.

WIE: *If you capture that relationship on film, I think it will be a real accomplishment.*

AFFRIME: We're going to give it our best shot. Sorry, golf joke! But seriously, movies are difficult, and it's not worth making one unless it's a subject you really care about.

SPIRITUAL SHAKTI LEVELS



GOLF FOR ENLIGHTENMENT

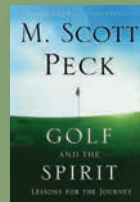
GURU Sri Chopra

TEACHING

Transcend your inner obstacles. Access the power of now. Let the game play you.

QUOTE

"In the softest shot using the lightest hands, you are commanding forces born in the Big Bang."



GOLF AND THE SPIRIT

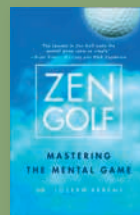
GURU Father Peck

TEACHING

Surrender to paradox. Be in harmony with the unseen order. Stay in the flow.

QUOTE

"Golf is not only like life, but it's like God.... You can give up. Or you can let it break you. Then you can go on, broken and in awe."



ZEN GOLF

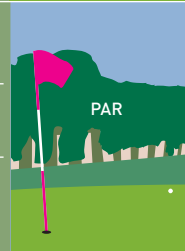
GURU Parent Zenji, Ph.D.

TEACHING

Give up control to get control. Visualize your shot. Don't struggle. Practice mindfulness.

QUOTE

"When body and mind are synchronized for a golf swing, they are unified in purpose, presence, and focus."



GOLF IN THE KINGDOM

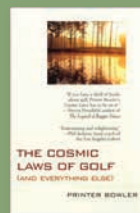
GURU Swami Shivas Irons

TEACHING

Surrender to True Gravity, the force pervading all. Sense the Fertile Void. Keep your inner eye on the ball and visualize its path.

QUOTE

"Ye must have a solid place to swing from, before ye open up so wide; otherwise ye'll be swept away."



THE COSMIC LAWS OF GOLF

GURU Master Bowler

TEACHING

Be the ball, for all is energy. Clear the screen of the mind. Learn to perceive clearly. Rid yourself of negativity.

QUOTE

"Thinking we're less than perfect is a malady afflicting just about everybody."



THE LEGEND OF BAGGER VANCE

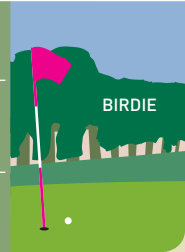
GURU Baba Vance

TEACHING

Discover your Authentic Swing. Respect your opponents. The battle on the golf course occurs only within the self.

QUOTE

"Give the shot to me. I am your Self, the Ground of your being, your Authentic Swing."



pulse)))

News, gossip, and rumors from an emerging culture

There's an old saying: Once, it's an accident; twice, it's a trend; three times, it's a pattern. Well, folks, I think we have a downright pattern on our hands. It would seem that the spiritual world has suddenly taken its eyes off its proverbial navel and placed them on the broader vistas of the future. Yes, the present, long the hot trend in spiritual publications, may soon be passé, and the future may be, well, the future. The clincher for this new fad was learning that **Neale Donald Walsch**, the phenomenally successful New Age author of the *Conversations with God* series, has now jumped on the bandwagon with *Tomorrow's God*, his new book exploring emerging spiritual ideas and our changing concepts of divinity. Now, in the interest of full disclosure, it must be said that *WIE* is an example of, and perhaps even a contributor to, this particular trend, starting with our recent thematic issue, *The Future of God*. But we're not alone. Currently, there are all kinds of interesting works being published that place our spiritual impulses within an evolutionary—and therefore *change-oriented* and *future-oriented*—worldview. Here are a few on the horizon: **Robert**

Wright's upcoming work is on the future of religion. **Eckhart Tolle** is said to be writing *A New Earth*, a book exploring the next wave of our spiritual future. **Ken Wilber's** upcoming *Kosmic Karma*, in addition to briefly covering the history of everything, will continue to express quite a predilection for the future, and even more so for evolution. Even business consultants like **Peter Senge's** group are getting in on the act with their newly published *Presence*, which introduces the concept of "pre-sensing"—the practice of looking into the future for insight into the present. So does that mean that the future is now going to play a big role in spirituality or that spirituality is going to play a big role in the future? Whatever the case, God's latest makeover will certainly be one of the most interesting cultural patterns to unfold in the next decade . . . *21 Grams*. That's the title of the recent feature film starring **Sean Penn** and **Naomi Watts**, but it's also the weight, according to one researcher, of the human soul. Believe it or not, one scientist at the beginning of the twentieth century did extensive testing on people as they were dying, and he is said to have verified that the body loses 21 grams of weight at the moment of death. Apparently, the study was quite meticulous, and other possible contributing factors to that weight reduction were ruled out. Big, tall, short, or fat—still 21 grams. Most scientists remain

unimpressed by the results, but that hasn't stopped popular lore from seizing on the notion. 21 grams—that may be all each of us has with which to face our maker when the time comes . . . If you happen to be one of the four or five people in the Western world who somehow missed the publishing phenomenon known as *The Celestine Prophecy*, do not be concerned—you'll soon get a second chance. And this time, you can bypass the book and go straight to the silver screen. Yes, **James Redfield**, his Peruvian rain forests, and the nine insights are coming soon to a theater near you. Though the New Age itself may be on the wane, the franchise that seemed to define the era is finding new life in the sets and studios of Tinseltown. Will *The Celestine Prophecy* do for spirituality what *The Lord of the Rings* did for fantasy? At least one person is convinced—the author himself. Reached on the set in LA, James Redfield told *WIE* that the key to making the transition from book to big screen was to make sure the adventure story that is the foundation of the book is front and center in the script, adding that the movie will be updated to take place in a post-9/11 world. Our society today has changed, Redfield explained, and it is simply "much more pessimistic than it was in 1994." Well, if pessimism is our problem, it's hard to imagine a better antidote than the optimistic vision contained in *The Celestine Prophecy*. Soon the cast and crew will head off to Florida, where much of the story will be filmed—Florida being a stand-in for those Peruvian jungles. And though it's almost impossible to know if a movie is destined for box-office feast or famine, we



wouldn't want to bet against the draw of the *Celestine* legend. But at least one thing can be said with certainty: **Machu Picchu** take heed. Peruvian tourism is about to get a serious shot in the arm . . . It's hard to imagine there's anything new to say about sacred sex these days, with the seemingly constant stream of releases on the topic, but transpersonal psychologist **Dr. Jenny Wade** may just have done so anyway. In her new book *Transcendent Sex: When Lovemaking Opens the Veil*, she explores the prevalence of spontaneous transcendent spiritual experiences during sex. She's not talking about tantric practitioners, but just your average Mr. and Mrs. Joe Six-Pack stumbling across God in the bedroom. About twenty percent of individuals have had this sort of thing happen, she claims, adding that most, however, keep it to themselves . . . **Naropa University** in Boulder, Colorado is rapidly becoming one of the premier alternative universities in the country. But in its rush to embrace the respectability and prestige of a serious university, some within the institution may have forgotten its more radical roots. The school was founded in 1974 by **Chogyam Trungpa**, a powerful Tibetan Buddhist teacher who made quite a name for himself in Boulder with his sublime spiritual teachings, his unique vision of East-meets-West Buddhism, and his provocative personal behavior. But much has changed since Trungpa's death in 1985, and Naropa, now independently owned and operated, has enjoyed great success and settled down into a thriving alternative academic environment. So what do they think of their founder's teachings now? *Pulse* has learned that a recent lecture at Naropa by a well-known spiritual teacher prompted some calls of complaint to the university, raising concerns among staff. Why? "Too

controversial" was the story we heard, but here's the kicker. When it was pointed out that Naropa's own founder was one of the most controversial teachers of the 70s and 80s, some Naropa employees acknowledged that in this day and age, Trungpa himself might not be welcome to teach at the place he created. Ouch! Oh, the irony. And whether or not they really would lock the doors on their progenitor, it just goes to show what a little success and mainstream recognition can do to one's radical heart . . . Add American spiritual teacher **Shantimayi's** name to the growing list of individuals who are giving humanity less than a couple decades to straighten things out on Planet Earth before the you-know-what hits the proverbial fan. In a recent meeting with local seekers in **Rishikesh, India**, where she can usually be found during the winter months, Shantimayi is said to have expressed her concern that we have very little time to shift consciousness on the planet if we are to avert the many potential disasters that loom on the human horizon. Her worries echo so many other futurists, scientists, politicians, and spiritual teachers that it can't help but give all of us cause for alarm, and no matter how good a job NASA does in the next two decades, escape to Mars just isn't likely to be a viable option. Of course, Shantimayi also said that she isn't really all that concerned about whether we survive or not, because in the end, God will still continue. Perhaps, but it'd be even better if we continue as well, so here's to hoping like anything and working even harder for a world where God, Rishikesh, Shantimayi, and all of us can survive and thrive far into the twenty-first century!

News from the Integral Institute

Are you ready for Integral ROCK!? Ken Wilber—founder of Integral Institute, creative director of the website *Integral Naked*, and philosopher of everything—has found fans among a new breed of artists who share the integral, evolutionary vision. Among the stars who have recently joined in the integral chorus with Ken and crew are: Serj Tankian (System of a Down); Billy Corgan (the Smashing Pumpkins, Zwan); Eddie Kowalczyk (Live); Saul Williams (hip-hop poet of the Sundance award-winning film *Slam*); Ottmar Liebert (guitarist of Nouveau Flamenco fame); TSO (a.k.a. Benjamin DePauw of Lotus Dog); and Stuart Davis (Screaming Witness).

Many of Wilber's new rock star friends are featured in a section of *Integral Naked* called *Avant Garde*. The idea is to resurrect the old notion that certain individuals or groups—especially artists—can be at the *leading edge* of conscious evolution.

Wilber's bigger and in some ways more significant project is the online Integral University. Due to launch in spring/summer 2004, IU is currently in alpha-testing mode. In addition to domains, or "schools," for Integral Business, Integral Medicine, Integral Ecology, and Integral Art, recent additions to the twenty-domain roster include Integral Sex and Gender Studies and Integral Psychiatry.

One of the most important functions of IU will be to foster cross-domain dialogues and learning. At a recent weekend event, for example, more than fifteen leading artists, psychotherapists, and business pioneers—including Neil Osborne (of the multi-platinum band 54*40), Roger Walsh (author of *Essential Spirituality*), and Bill Joy (cofounder of Sun Microsystems)—received Big Mind "pointing-out" instructions from Zen Master Genpo Roshi. The weekend's conversations included an analysis of the Big Mind process from a psychotherapeutic perspective, and a discussion of the future of the music business. Glimpses into this and other integral events can be found on the "Lifestyle" page of www.integralnaked.org.

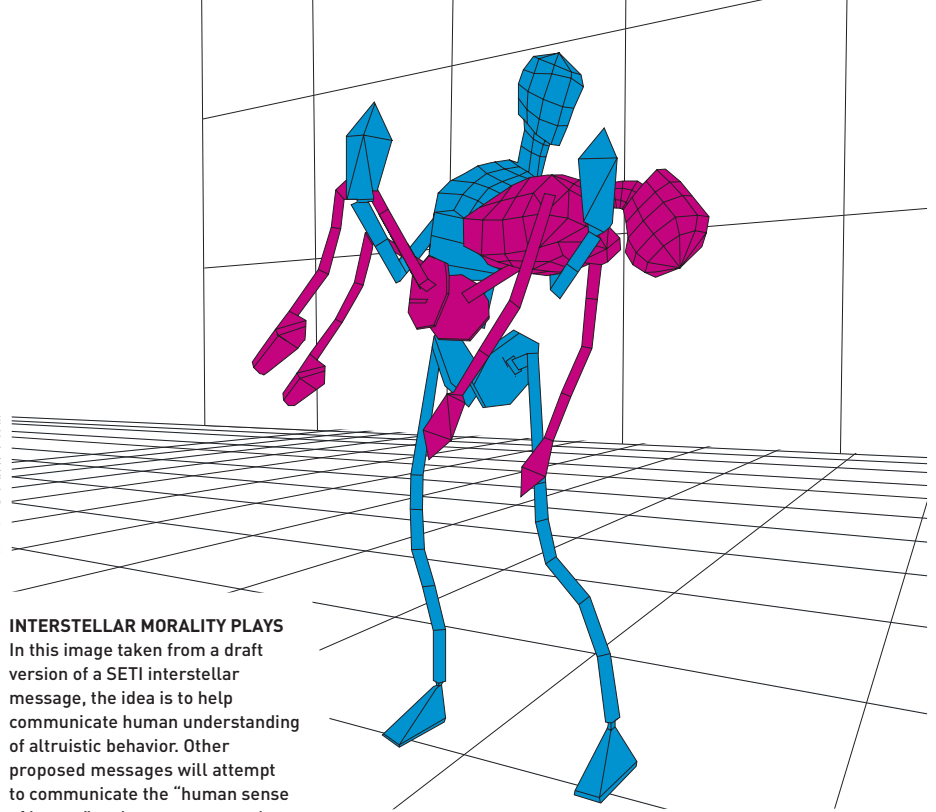
postcards from the galactic edge

A few scientists are trying to determine how to teach extraterrestrials the ABCs of human culture

It's a scenario that many scientists dream about—one day, radio telescopes on Earth suddenly pick up irrefutable evidence of a coherent message, a message from across the heavens, an interstellar greeting card from an extraterrestrial civilization far, far away. Can you imagine the impact—the excitement, the anticipation, the profound implications, the philosophical tsunami that would sweep through the culture? How would we respond to that cosmic hello? How do you greet ET? What happens when planet Earth is suddenly holding the galactic talking stick and it's time to share? Well, before you to get too concerned about putting our interstellar foot in our planetary mouth, you'll be glad to know that there are those who have spent quite a bit of time thinking about this very question.

Doug Vakoch, a social scientist at the privately funded SETI Institute (SETI is an acronym for Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence), has an official title custom-made to elicit double takes—the Director for Interstellar Message Composition. It is Vakoch's job to explore questions that most of us have never even considered. Questions like: What aspects of human culture do we want to share with our galactic neighbors? Do we communicate the universal elements of our planetary civilization or highlight the many differences? Do we talk about science, music, art? And one of the fundamental questions to preoccupy this unusual scientist is: What to do about religion? How do we communicate the ethical, moral, and spiritual side of human culture?

Vakoch is not the first to consider these issues. The late Carl Sagan helped to fashion some of our initial forays into extraterrestrial communication with the Pioneer and Voyager spacecrafts. But today,



INTERSTELLAR MORALITY PLAYS

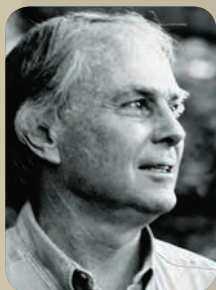
In this image taken from a draft version of a SETI interstellar message, the idea is to help communicate human understanding of altruistic behavior. Other proposed messages will attempt to communicate the “human sense of beauty” and some may even be composed of “interstellar music inspired by the structure of DNA.”

those messages seem limited, “more a message for us than a message for extraterrestrials,” says Vakoch, explaining that there was a tendency in those messages to “avoid anything with controversy.” (There were no images of war, for example.) Also, there was a focus on scientific knowledge at the expense of giving potential ETs “a more complete picture of ourselves.” But finding a consensus on a subject like religion can be a dicey business, which is why Vakoch's work with SETI has focused more on two core concepts to communicate who and what we are to our cosmic brethren: *altruism* and *evolution*.

Altruism is obviously essential to our understanding of spirituality, and evolution is becoming more and more so every day. But how do you communicate that to an intelligent species with no human context? Evolution, which as Vakoch explains includes “cosmic evolution, geological evolution, biological evolution, and the evolution of culture,” at least seems possible to represent with imagery, but the abstract concept of altruism demands some new thinking. That is why Vakoch has enlisted some of today's best minds to tackle the issue at conferences like *Encoding Altruism: The*

Art and Science of Interstellar Message Composition, held last year in Paris. Participants embrace the challenge of thinking about human culture from the perspective not just of another species but of a life-form that is the result of an entirely different planetary process of biogenesis and social evolution—putting themselves in the shoes of aliens, so to speak.

Still, there may be some aspects of human culture that we share with our alien friends, knowledge that is truly *universal*. Indeed, who's to say that the essence of our religious sensibilities might not be similar, even across the cosmic ocean? Will ET have any understanding of altruism—or of God, creativity, or emptiness? It's an intriguing contemplation. And in a world where so many are struggling to understand the perspectives of the people down the street, much less in Iraq or Afghanistan, it's encouraging to know that a few scientists are keeping the bar set high. So when ET finally calls, none of us may exactly be ready, but at least we might not make such egocentric, ethnocentric, humancentric, or Earthcentric fools of ourselves, and maybe we'll earn a little more respect from the Joneses on planet X.



pulpit

the fundamental urge of the universe

Michael Murphy



WIE: *Back when the great religious traditions were developing, nobody knew about evolution. It hadn't been discovered yet. Therefore, all the transformative spiritual practices that emerged within those traditions naturally lacked an evolutionary worldview. But times have changed. What does our growing understanding of evolution mean for spiritual practice today? Does the evolutionary perspective change the spiritual path itself?*

MICHAEL MURPHY: Absolutely—because this evolving universe is now the context of spiritual practice. I think that today, anybody who is the least bit thoughtful has to slow down enough to say: "Okay, evolution is a fact." Any educated person has to say that. The evolutionary story is continually being disclosed to us. Literally every day, there's some new discovery in some field. The story of evolution is bringing all other stories together. It's the great myth of our time, if you want to call it a myth. So if you're thoughtful and you accept that fact, then you have to conclude that all human activity has that as its context, including all long-term transformative practice of any kind. Today, practice means getting yourself in sync with the most fundamental urge of the universe itself—namely, to develop, to evolve in a progressive way.

If all transformative practice—including all contemplative practice, Buddhist

practice, shamanic practice, whatever—is indeed embedded in an evolving world, we need to find out what that means. We're driven to find out more and more about it, to become conscious of the fact that evolutionary progress is in our being as well. Spiritual practice is evolving; vision is evolving; realization is evolving. Enlightenment itself is evolving, no matter what you mean by enlightenment. The experience of consciousness is changing, in all sorts of unexpected ways. Take golf for instance. Why is it that thousands of people are now having these mini-satori experiences playing golf? That's fascinating in its own right. People who've never heard of satori, who've never even heard of Zen, who have no spiritual aspiration whatsoever—all these guys out there having spiritual experiences. I think that golf is a mystery school for Republicans.

We could make a catalogue of the ways in which the evolutionary vision serves transformation, but one of them is that it's a paradigm buster. So there's the thrust of the new, but there's also the death of the old. Just look at the troubles of the church. Look at the hideous forms of Islamic and Christian and Jewish fundamentalism—it's like we're witnessing the decay of these old religions right in front of us while this new thing is being born. And more and more people are disaffected. The snake is growing a new skin, but the old skin is really

getting old and it's ready to slough off. It's like Yeats' line from "The Second Coming": *What rough beast, its hour come round at last/ Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?* It's this worldview that's slowly emerging, this rough beast. But it's unfinished. And folks, we've all got to go out there and contribute to it. I mean, either we do it, or we don't and we sink back into the next cataclysm. Because it ain't predetermined. It's all up to us. And we know that deep down—we know it's up to us. Now, we can work at it in many different ways. We don't all have to be philosophers. But at the heart of it is transformative practice itself, which is about what you actually do. Because in the end, we have to live it. We have to want to live it.

Michael Murphy is the cofounder of Esalen Institute and author of *Golf in the Kingdom*.



A New Challenge for Interfaith

A Christian monk has a plan for how to deal with Al-Qaeda
(Hint: It doesn't involve invading anyone)

Brother Wayne Teasdale is a pioneer in the interfaith movement and author of *A Monk in the World*.

by Carter Phipps

POP QUIZ: What forum plays host to tens of thousands of people, has a potential television audience of hundreds of millions, and has been largely ignored by much of the world's political intelligentsia? No, it's not the Super Bowl, it's not Mecca, and it's not a Britney Spears show at the Superdome. It's the Parliament of the World's Religions. Call it the religious answer to Davos, this granddaddy of all modern interfaith forums will be holding its next meeting this summer in Spain, and it promises to be a massive undertaking by any standard. For nearly a week, Barcelona will play host to more than twenty thousand people from just about every walk of life on God's green earth—spiritual, secular, and otherwise. And they will address issues that run the gamut from local to global, from theological to ecological, from the practical and pragmatic to the sacred and sublime.

Now if the term Parliament of the World's Religions seems somehow familiar, it might be because of its now-legendary beginning in 1893 in Chicago, when the great Hindu sage Swami Vivekananda took the podium and made East-West history with his stirring address to the assembled religious leaders. Back then, few had ever seen an Eastern swami, and the sight of this noble gentleman wrapped in *sanyasi* robes introduced America to a notion of interfaith harmony that went well beyond the Abrahamic religions, and certainly beyond a détente between Catholics,

Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, and Baptists. A hundred years later, in 1993, the Parliament was reborn. It convened once again in Chicago and has since helped inspire a significant movement toward reconciliation and dialogue between the jostling faiths of our global village. But the urgent question facing this movement today is: How, in an increasingly secular society, can noble interfaith ideals be translated into real results on the world stage? Do the religious traditions still have the power to make a significant impact on the political and cultural agendas of the international community? It is a question that might sound a little strange, given that we seem to be hovering on the edge of a civilizational war over what essentially amounts to a profound difference in values—values that are, in many respects, deeply religious. Indeed, how will the Parliament address the building tensions between Islam and the West that threaten to undermine the tenuous movements toward solidarity that the world has achieved in the last quarter-century? Brother Wayne Teasdale, a lay monk, mystic, and Christian pioneer in the interfaith movement, spoke to *WIE* recently and gave us the lowdown on what will be happening—and more importantly, what should and could be happening—to address the current concerns over terrorism, this summer on the east coast of Spain.

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT?: *What is the focus of the Parliament of the World's Religions going to be this year?*

WAYNE TEASDALE: The Parliament is going to be more activist in its orientation because of the four themes it wants to investigate: water issues, debt relief, refugees, and the end of religiously inspired violence. They are planning to look into these areas with an eye toward really making a contribution. European television is going to devote two hours a day to coverage, so there will be an audience of half a billion people watching. There will also be many other things going on—dialogues, teachings, a science symposium. I think it is going to be an historic event.

WIE: *We seem to be living in a time when the influence of the religions in global affairs, at least in the West, is dramatically waning. Given that reality, what do you feel the Parliament can do to stay relevant in today's crisis-ridden world?*

TEASDALE: Well, first of all, it's more than just the religious traditions. The Assembly, a collection of leaders that will be gathering at Montserrat Abbey before the main session of the Parliament, is made up of four hundred members. And they are not just religious and spiritual leaders. Yes, the religions are a major part of it, but also included are inspired mystics, sages, etcetera, as well as

people in the media, people in the corporate world, diplomats, scholars, scientists, and activists. This is the human community in microcosm—it's the most diverse group that ever meets on the planet. Quite frankly, it's more diverse than the United Nations. You never see the indigenous peoples in the UN. But this is a very diverse group, and every segment of the world is represented. However, one thing that I think would make the Parliament have a huge impact would be to invite some of the Wahhabi mullahs from Yemen, Somalia, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.

WIE: *You're referring to the Saudi Arabian sect that is spreading a very extremist vision of Islamic life across the Islamic world. Isn't Al-Qaeda in large part influenced by Wahhabism?*

TEASDALE: Yes. Wahhabism is a very eccentric sect that began in Saudi Arabia 150 years ago. The thing about the Wahhabis is that a lot of scholars suggest that they are not truly Qur'anic. It's more of an Arabian cultural movement, and it contains many elements that you see accentuated in the Taliban, because they're inspired by the Wahhabi model. It's really problematic for Islam, but we have to deal with these people because these are the spiritual leaders of the terrorists.

WIE: *I would imagine that they would be unlikely to come to the Parliament.*



TEASDALE: I think some of them would come. There are some good mullahs among them. It would be an educational opportunity for them. They can be informed by a larger perspective and get an up-close look at the larger reality of the world.

Now, the whole Islamic world is not going to become Wahhabi, but we do need to get a dialogue going and we are simply not going to have a dialogue between the U.S. and Al-Qaeda. But we could have these back-forum dialogues going on between the Wahhabis and members of other traditions. It would be a formative opportunity for the Wahhabis to see that there is another reality on the planet, and that Wahhabism is basically a step back—way back—and not an authentic step back. Wahhabism is a desert phenomenon. It won't survive in the cities; it won't survive in modernity. So you don't destroy it; you reform it, you build on it, you evolve it.

WIE: *Has there been any contact at this point?*

TEASDALE: Some. The Parliament had consultations two summers ago with the World Islamic Council, which is an influential Saudi-based organization. I was able to speak to a couple of leaders there and suggested that it is important for Islam to develop an authoritative body that represents all of Islam, a body that can interpret the Qur'an and take it away from these individual mullahs who just proclaim their own interpretation and then mislead the community. But I actually couldn't see them being part of the Assembly itself. The people who come to the Assembly are already committed to a kind of universal collaboration.

So rather than overwhelm the Wahhabis with dialogue, and with the agenda of the Parliament, it would be best for them to just be able to go there, experience it, and then go back to their communities and process it. If they just had the opportunity to look and to see what's going on, I think it could be very, very useful. ■



voices from the edge

presenting the values & visions of a new global culture

Duane Elgin

John Petersen

Dr. Munawar Anees

Book excerpt:

Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future

Peter Senge, Claus Otto Scharmer,
Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers

EXCITING NEWS FROM WIE

What Is Enlightenment? is taking its inquiry from the pages to the podium. We're bringing the visionary thinkers we've featured in the magazine to you . . . live . . . in our new forum called *Voices from the Edge*.

This spring we'll present talks by several of the pioneering thinkers from the February-April 2004 issue of *WIE*, and also by *WIE*'s own editors.

Please check our website for more information about events around the country: www.wie.org



DUANE ELGIN

Our Collective Awakening and the Politics of Consciousness

THE CHALLENGES OF OUR TIMES are so great that we are called to move beyond our personal awakening to our collective awakening—as communities, as nations, and as a species. In this generation we confront growing disruption of the global climate, an enormous increase in human populations living in gigantic cities, the depletion of vital resources such as fresh water and cheap oil, the massive and rapid extinction of animal and plant species around the world, growing disparities between the rich and the poor made starkly visible with the communications revolution, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Considering just this limited list, it is clear that the human family must wake up and begin to make profound changes in our manner of living, consuming, working, and relating if we are to build a sustainable future.

But what is the nature of the “collective awakening” that is so essential to our future? Some may view this as a collective mystical experience that magically galvanizes our sense of connection with and compassion for all of life. However, I see our awakening in much more practical and approachable terms. A common theme in the world’s spiritual traditions, as well as in psychotherapy, is that the first step in awakening is to simply see “what is.” In other words, we begin by becoming an objective witness or impartial observer who tells ourselves the truth about our actual situation. Honest reflection and nonjudgmental witnessing are fundamental to both individual and collective awakening.

By mobilizing our capacity for reflective consciousness, we can become self-directing agents of our own evolution, not only personally but also socially. In a democracy, when we are informed as individual citizens, then we “know.” However, when we communicate and reflect among ourselves as citizens—publicly learning about and affirming our shared sentiments as an extended community—then we “know that we know.” In our dangerous and difficult time of global transition, it is not sufficient for civilizations to be wise; we must become “doubly wise” through social communication that clearly reveals our collective knowing to ourselves. Once there is a capacity for sustained and authentic social reflection, we will then have the means to achieve a shared understanding and a working consensus regarding appropriate actions for a positive future. Actions can then come quickly and voluntarily. We can mobilize ourselves purposefully, and each person can contribute his or her unique talents to building a life-affirming future.

How, then, does a nation of several hundred million people pay attention? Where is the “knowing faculty” to be found in modern civilizations? I believe that television, in particular, is fundamental to the knowing capacity of modern societies. However, to suggest that television is vital for the functioning of a reflective consciousness for modern societies will strike many people as an outrageous assertion. Television has been called a “boob tube,” a “cultural barbiturate,” a “vast wasteland,” and worse. How can such a seemingly dysfunctional technology be at the heart of our capacity for social knowing?

A few stark statistics testify to the power of television in dominating the consciousness and perceptions of modern society. In the U.S., 99 percent of all households have a television, making the TV set one of the most common fixtures in our lives. The average person watches nearly four hours of television per day, and a majority of persons get a majority of their news about the world from this single source. Television creates our shared frame of reference, and for all practical purposes, if something does not appear on television, it does not exist in mass social consciousness. Television, then, has become our social witness, our shared vehicle for knowing that we know.

Despite the power of television to awaken our collective knowing, it is clearly not serving us in this way. Television may be our primary social mirror, but it is holding up a reflection that is diminished, distorted, and shortsighted. Consequently, I believe that the most critical environmental problem facing humanity is not a problem with the physical environment but with the electronic environment generated by the mass media. To build a sustainable and compassionate future, we must overcome the cultural hypnosis of consumerism that is generated daily by commercial television. By allowing television to be programmed primarily for commercial success, we are simultaneously programming the mindset of entire civilizations for evolutionary stagnation and ecological failure. Our evolutionary maturity is being tested. Our future as a species may well depend on a new “politics of consciousness” that holds the mass media accountable for being a fair witness and mature partner in our collective awakening. ■

Duane Elgin is an author, speaker, educator, and activist for media accountability. His personal website is www.awakeningearth.org, which contains his writings as well as information about his upcoming talks, telecourses, and workshops. He is also the cofounder of the nonprofit organization Our Media Voice: www.ourmediavoice.org





JOHN PETERSEN Eye on the Future

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT?: *What new developments and trends are you keeping your eye on these days?*

JOHN PETERSEN: There are revolutionary changes going on in a variety of technology areas—in biotech, information technology, nanotechnology, cognition technology. And in every case, the new technology's capabilities are moving quickly, giving us abilities that no one has ever had before.

For example, there's biometrics, which promises to be able to identify someone just by looking at their biology.

WIE: *Do you mean things like physical fingerprinting?*

PETERSEN: Fingerprinting is the simple version. But biometrics also has to do with things like facial recognition, retinal scanning, and newer technologies that use DNA or that can identify you at a distance simply by your gait, by the way you walk. These technologies in combination allow you, with cameras and other devices, to look out on a street, for example, and know exactly who you're looking at. People will no longer have any anonymity. But Americans particularly are very suspect of that. They have this strange notion of anonymity and what they call freedom. They think they should be able to operate and do things without anybody knowing what they're doing.

WIE: *Do you mean strange as compared to other cultures?*

PETERSEN: Well, if you go to Britain, for example, they track you; they know where every car is. There's no place in London that you can go that doesn't have television cameras—they scan every street. They built all that stuff because the IRA was putting bombs in wastebaskets and blowing them up. When I gave a speech on privacy and security in Europe, the press all came up to me and said, "What are you talking about? We all have ID cards, everybody knows where we are all the time. I mean, what's the problem?"

WIE: *I remember reading about the Super Bowl a couple of years ago where they scanned the face of everyone who came into the stadium and compared it against a list of wanted individuals. Do you think this kind of thing will be happening more frequently in the future?*

PETERSEN: Well, there is a new technology that is able to tell by your voice with one hundred percent certainty whether you're telling the truth. Nobody has ever been able to do that before. They're keeping it kind of quiet right now, but if it became widespread, it would really change things.

There's another technology that uses the fact that your brain always keeps a record and a pattern of everything that ever happened to you. So you can hold up an object and ask somebody, "Have you seen this?" and then you can tell whether they've

actually seen it or not by their brain waves. So in the case of O.J. Simpson, for instance, you could have held up the glove and he wouldn't have had to tell you if he had seen it before. A monitor could have registered it from reading his brain waves.

There is also a new subdermal chip—a microchip that is placed just under the skin—and it's so small that you can hardly see the thing, but wherever you walked, you could be scanned. You could always know who it was that came in the door.

So these are very significant converging technologies that are all working on figuring out who you are, what you're doing, how you're doing it, whether you're telling the truth, and what your motivations are. And that's very different from the way it's been in the past.

WIE: *You mentioned biotech. We all hear a lot about genetics and some of the miraculous things that we'll soon be able to do. But what will it really mean in the next five or ten years?*

PETERSEN: Well, it would mean, for example, that there might no longer be any cerebral palsy. All kinds of diseases that are genetically driven could be dealt with. It also could be useful in growing food. One recent genetic variation, for instance, allows you to grow certain vegetables—I can't remember if it was cabbages, lettuces, or tomatoes—in a highly saline environment, like seawater. That would be extraordinarily useful in some third world countries where you're near the ocean and don't have fresh water.

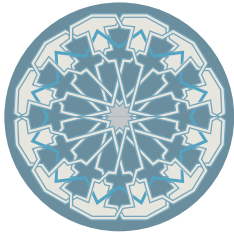
WIE: *Of course, there are all kinds of fears that we are going to be able to create a super-race, a special genetically altered class of people.*

PETERSEN: Yes, of course, this technology can be misused. You could just make big athletic football players if you wanted to. But the technology itself is intrinsically neutral. It can be used for good and it can be used for bad, based on the values of the people who are using it. You can use a knife to cut up your dinner, or you can use a knife to kill somebody. It's the same principle.

There is, however, a new wrinkle. Because there are new technologies that are so powerful and that have such extraordinarily profound implications, they might get out of hand. Something might happen that we didn't have control over, a situation where we didn't understand what the implications were going to be, and it was too late to figure it out. And then we'd have a big problem. ■

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 Wild Cards and Big Future Surprises*.





DR. MUNAWAR ANEES

What Future for Muslim Identity?

TODAY, THE MUSLIM WORLD FACES the most critical period of its history. It is a civilization standing at the crossroads, seemingly unable to carve a niche in the community of nations. The colossal tragedy that struck the United States on September 11, 2001, has once again put the House of Islam at the forefront of world affairs. And it can be decisively argued that a strategy for change in the Muslim world is one of the crying needs of the hour.

Though it would be erroneous to characterize the Muslim world as a monolith, it is fair to argue that not a single Muslim country today meets the criteria for modern political and social governance, religious liberty, economic evolution, gender equality, cultural prosperity, and human dignity. Muslims continue to live under dictators, autocrats, kings, and authoritarian rulers—in grossly oppressive conditions. Having lost the ability to face the outer world, which is motivated by concern for human rights, multiculturalism, and tolerance, the Muslim social fabric has seen little beyond sectarian strife, tribal wars, and suppression of women and minorities. Nearly one-fourth of the human population—1.2 billion people, living in fifty Muslim countries—face a grim and uncertain future. And those who habitually put the blame for their ills upon the colonial oppressors need only to be reminded of intra-Muslim carnage: witness the Muslim-on-Muslim violence that led to the division of Bangladesh from Pakistan, a country born in the name of Islam; the decade-long Iran-Iraq war; and the abject neglect of the Palestinian refugees by the wider Arab community, to name a few examples.

Historically, Islam absorbed and comprehended other cultures and gave them expression. The early Muslim civilization, heir to a rich and diverse intellectual stock—Roman, Greek, Indian, and Persian—accomplished a unique synthesis of ideas in all branches of knowledge. From the eighth to the thirteenth century, there were more religious, philosophical, medical, astronomical, historical, and geographical works written in Arabic than in any other language. And the religious code itself—that is, the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet—was a very liberal, forward-looking code of ethics.

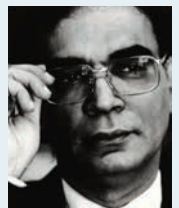
So, in turning a critical eye to Islam, my focus would not be on the religious code. Rather, it would be on how to revive the *culture* of learning, how to revive the *culture* of tolerance, how to revive the *culture* of liberalism, which have remained at the core of Muslim civilization for centuries. We must ask: What are the factors that have gone into pushing that culture back into the Dark Ages, which is what we see today all over the Muslim world in this cultural impasse?

The Prophet of Islam, in his own city—in Medina, where

he lived the later part of his life after he was forced to emigrate from Mecca—allowed Jews and Christians to coexist there. Did he subdue them? Did he force them to become Muslims? Did he kill them? He did not. *This* is the ideal. So we need to find out why this ossification has occurred in Muslim thought and behavior, which is now denying or altogether ignoring its own heritage—to its own detriment and to the detriment of the rest of the world. In the last few centuries, Muslim culture has grown inward instead of growing outward. There has been a rejection of anything “other.” It has become xenophobic, not in the racial sense but in the epistemological sense. It has an inward-looking attitude at the global, civilizational, and community levels. And this creates a literalism, which is equal to fundamentalism, that is the rejection of tolerance, the rejection of the other's opinion. This, to my mind, is a great hindrance to the peaceful coexistence of different ideals, different ideologies, and different religions, and it is a great obstacle to the Islamic world becoming a participant in global transformation. So I think this cultural impasse has to do with the current Islamic *worldview*, and we need a dynamic invocation that can play a pivotal role in breaking its grip on the Muslim mind and culture.

The formation of a democratically governed Muslim world must be driven by an imperative born out of a new Muslim recognition of their rights and responsibilities in a globalized world. For this mindset to emerge, Muslims must learn the magnanimity of critical self-analysis. While democratic freedom does not germinate out of the barrel of a gun, neither is it obtained by being oblivious to self-identity, to our own tradition. According to the teaching of the Prophet, one's cognizance of the Almighty is inseparable from the cognizance of the Muslim tradition of liberalism and tolerance. And the future of Muslim identity in the twenty-first century and beyond lies with that vital cognizance, not with confrontation. ■

Dr. Munawar Anees, a Pakistani-American writer and social critic, is founding editor of the *International Journal of Islamic and Arabic Studies* and *Periodica Islamica*, as well as author of numerous books, articles, and reviews. He is a special consultant to the John Templeton Foundation and is among UNESCO's select group of forty international scholars. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in February 2002.



Presence

Human Purpose and the Field of the Future

Across the ideological spectrum, in boardrooms and over coffee, within environmental organizations and multinationals, one insistent question keeps tugging at the edges of human consciousness and conscience: Will we wake up in time? And what if this wasn't just a frightening thought, but was instead a real—and urgent—question: *Will we awaken* to new ways of seeing each other and working together before we bring about a real disaster?

The four authors of the recently released *Presence* took that question very seriously. It motivated them to begin a profound and personal exploration into the nature of real change. For Peter Senge, organizational change guru and author of

the blockbuster *The Fifth Discipline*, this meant paying close attention to those moments when individuals and organizations tap into deeper capacities for creative transformation. For researcher Otto Scharmer and American Leadership Forum founder Joseph Jaworski, it meant conducting some 150 interviews with creative scientists and entrepreneurs to learn how successful innovation arises. And for Betty Sue Flowers, a specialist in myth, it meant exploring the power of envisioning new futures. For all of them, it meant reaching for a new way to understand the depth and complexity of who we are and what confronts us. Together, through a series of conversations that took place over the course of a year and a half, they

began to recognize an emergence in human consciousness: the capacity to “presence”—to *pre-sense*, to *become present* to an emerging future that is our highest purpose and potential.

Presence, part fictitious reenactment of their conversations and part exploration of all that points to this new emergence, is the result of this remarkable collaboration. Published by the Society for Organizational Learning (www.solonline.org), which was founded by Senge, the book is a creative synthesis of their work with the latest in science, organizational theory, and sacred wisdom. Here, in the excerpt that follows, is the first “conversation” between the authors, their call to all of us to wake up—before it's too late.

The Requiem Scenario

An excerpt from ***Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future***
by Peter Senge, Claus Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers

November 2000

The four of us were sitting in a circle in the study of Otto's home on Maple Avenue in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Outside, a light snow was falling. Inside, under the windows, Otto had placed bright red poinsettias. The walls were covered with charts, several with a large U drawn on them. Books were neatly stacked everywhere, and in one corner a computer hummed quietly.

“When Otto said that *Jurassic Park* was written in this house, I couldn't help thinking how ironic it was, given our conversations,” said Betty Sue. “Now here we are sitting in the ‘house of the dinosaurs’ talking about a real-life nightmare scenario: the destruction of our environment; the growing social divide between rich and poor; the potential dangers of things like biotechnology; and escalating violence around the world.”

“Isn't it ironic the way people talk about dinosaurs?” Peter said. “Today we say an organization is ‘just like a dinosaur’ when we mean it's slow and can't adjust to change. But you know, the dinosaurs did manage to survive over a hundred times longer than humans have so far. Whatever beings might take our place here in the future will probably say, ‘Just like the human beings—too bad they didn't have the adaptive capabilities of dinosaurs!’”

Betty Sue shuddered. “Hearing human beings talked about in the past tense like that is terribly chilling. I guess we all know that since we have the means to destroy ourselves, it's possible that we will. The unthinkable is possible, but it's still very difficult to consider. The poet Auden said, ‘We must love one another or die.’ No one thinks we're very close to loving one another just yet, but we also don't seem willing to consider the consequences of not doing so.”

"And that's why we don't change," Peter replied. "I was speaking at a conference on business and the environment last week, and stayed at a conference center that I first visited twenty years ago. This center hosts a conference every year at which a prestigious environmental sustainability award is given, so you would expect it to be a showcase for environmentally sound practices, but I'm sure this place generates more waste per customer than they did twenty years ago."

"Everything is individually wrapped—coffee, sugar, shampoo—and each container will be thrown away. The materials used in the room were no more environmentally sound than they had been twenty years ago—the wood hadn't been sustainably harvested, the plastics and materials couldn't be recycled, and the appliances couldn't be remanufactured. I had asked for a room where I could open the windows. They didn't have any because they relied on central air-conditioning and heating. The electricity that drove the air conditioning undoubtedly came mostly from power plants that burned coal and other fossil fuels—heating up the earth in order to cool off our rooms. Then I saw this silly little bar of soap, individually wrapped. Somehow it epitomized the whole situation."

"Those soaps end up being ninety percent wasted—waste that is completely unnecessary. They could easily be replaced by liquid

soap dispensers that create almost no waste. There are even biodegradable liquid soaps now. One is manufactured by a supplier in Sweden, partly owned by Scandic, which has gone from a mediocre, financially strapped business to one of Sweden's most financially successful hotel chains, in part through its commitment to 'the sustainable hotel room.' There's no reason being environmentally smart can't be good for business as well—at least in Sweden."

"So I stood there looking at this little bar of soap, listening to my air conditioner whir in the background, feeling angrier and angrier, and wondered why this American conference center still hadn't learned in twenty years what the Swedish hotel chain had learned in a few years. Why were we even still bothering to hold conferences about environmental business practices? Do we Americans care at all about the effects we're having on the natural environment that all life must share? Then I saw the only artifact of environmental consciousness in the whole room—a little card that said, 'In order to help the environment, we won't do your linens if you don't ask us to.' Give me a break! After twenty years, all we've accomplished is they won't wash our linens if we don't ask them to!"

"We've all known the frustration and discouragement you were feeling," said Betty Sue. "At least I have. But are you saying that we avoid these issues to avoid the discouragement?"



Excerpt from

Global Requiem

by Jack Miles

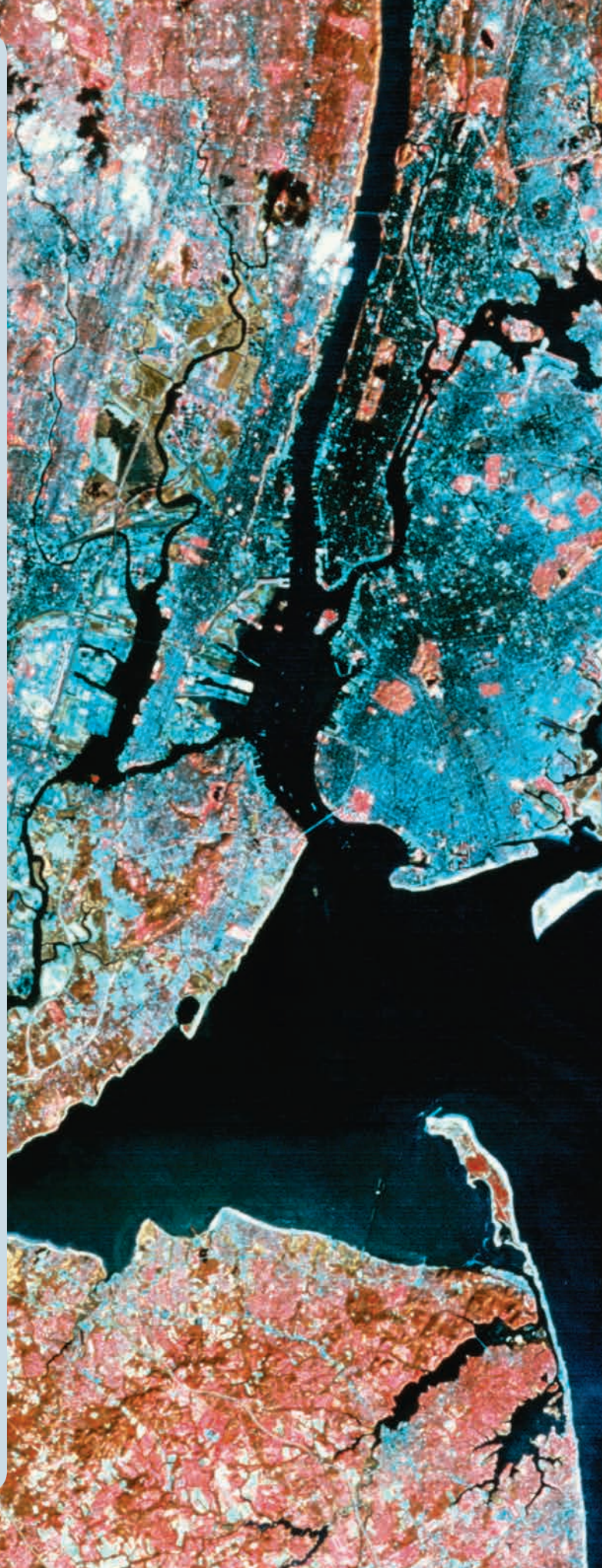
We have been in possession since Charles Lyell and Charles Darwin of a disturbing new awareness that nature too has a history. It does not abide forever. This alone is enough to undercut the age-old contrast between the temporality of mankind and the eternity of nature. But more recently that disruption has acquired a corollary. If the first generations that assimilated Darwin's thought were concerned with the origin of species, our own is concerned in an unprecedented way with the extinction of species and, above all, with the threat of extinction that faces the human species. During the 1850s, while Darwin was concluding *The Origin of Species*, the rate of extinction is believed to have been one every five years. Today, the rate of extinction is estimated at one every nine minutes.

Will the human species be extinguished in its turn? The statistical question, perhaps the statistical likelihood, is complicated, morally, by the probability that human extinction, if it comes about soon, will prove to have been species suicide. "Human reproduction," veteran foreign correspondent Malcolm W. Browne wrote in his 1993 memoir *Muddy Boots and Red Socks* (Times Books):

has some disturbing similarities to cancer. In an analysis published in 1990 in the journal *Population and Environment*, Warren M. Hem, an anthropologist at the University of Colorado, noted some striking clinical parallels between a typical urban community and a malignant neoplasm, a cancerous tumor. They share rapid uncontrolled growth, they invade and destroy adjacent tissues, and cells (or people) lose their differentiation, the concerted specialties, and skills needed to sustain a society or a multicelled animal.

In his monograph, Dr. Hem included photographs taken from space satellites showing the growth of Baltimore and the colonization of the Amazon basin, side by side with photomicrographs of cancers of the lung and brain. They were hard to tell apart. "The human species," Dr. Hem wrote, "is a rapacious, predatory, omnivorous, [devouring its entire environment] species" that exhibits all the pathological features of cancerous tissue. He grimly concluded that the human "cancer" will most likely destroy its planetary host before dying out itself.

"Many would disagree with that assessment," Browne concludes, "but for what it's worth, my own experience as a journalist bears it out." As voices like Browne's are increasingly heard, the cause that until now has been presented as the defense of the environment, as if the environment were an importunate relative whom long-suffering mankind was being asked to support, is beginning to be presented as the self-defense of the human species itself. The environment is, after all, the human habitat, and time after time extinction has followed on loss of habitat when the species at risk was not able to adapt in time. Despite our large numbers, we are an endangered species.



"Not quite." Peter paused and continued quietly, "I had a difficult meditation this morning. It was very disturbing, as sometimes they are. I seemed to be in touch with an extraordinary fear—just the fear by itself, no thoughts or associations.

"This fear is probably present more than I'm willing to see, except when it suddenly pokes through like it did this morning. The anger I felt at the hotel came from this deeper fear. I've known about the threats to the environment for so long—but the changes we've made are so small, given what's needed and what we're capable of achieving.

"If the future is going to be different, we have to go far beyond these little piecemeal gestures and begin to see the systems in which we're embedded—and I guess I have doubts if we're up for this. The question isn't, 'Do you want your bed linens changed?' It's more like, 'Do you want to change the way you live?' But this question sits on top of an immense fear, and I think that, Betty Sue, is one reason we prefer not to think, or talk, about these things."

Joseph leaned forward. "But isn't that why we're here? Haven't we come together to answer one fundamental question: Why don't we change? What would it take to shift the whole?"

"We don't change because we think we're immortal." Otto's tone was matter-of-fact. "Like teenagers, we might be afraid, but we still think we'll go on forever."

"Perhaps that's true," said Joseph, shaking his head. "I recently read an article that's been circulating in the foundation community written by a man named Jack Miles, a senior adviser to the J. Paul Getty Trust, called 'Global Requiem.'¹ It's a speculation about what would happen if we started to realize that humankind might not overcome these problems, that we might not develop a sustainable society—that the human race might perish. It's an exploration of the unthinkable."

"But don't scenarios like that evoke the very fear Peter is talking about?" Otto asked. "As he showed, this sort of fear is usually met by denial or simply makes us feel hopeless."

"But that doesn't have to happen," Joseph replied. "I've seen many instances where imagining alternative futures, even negative futures, can actually open people up."

"Scenarios can alter people's awareness," Betty Sue agreed. "If they're used artfully, people actually begin to think about a future that they've ignored or denied. The key is to see the different future not as inevitable, but as one of several genuine possibilities.

"Maybe if people really believed we could be headed for extinction, we would do collectively what many people do individually when they know they may actually die—we would suddenly see our lives very clearly."

"If we could actually face our collective mortality—and simply tell the truth about the fear, rather than avoiding it—perhaps something would shift," said Peter.

"Several years ago in one of our leadership workshops, a Jamaican man from the World Bank named Fred told a story that moved people very deeply. A few years earlier he had been diagnosed with a terminal disease. After consulting a number of doctors, who all confirmed the diagnosis, he went through what everyone does in that situation. For weeks he denied it. But gradually, with the help of friends, he came to grips with the fact that he was only going to live a few more months. 'Then something amazing happened,' he said. 'I simply stopped doing everything that wasn't essential, that didn't matter. I started working on projects with kids that I'd always wanted to do. I stopped arguing with my mother. When someone cut me off in traffic or something happened that would have upset me in the past, I didn't get upset. I just didn't have the time to waste on any of that.'

"Near the end of this period, Fred began a wonderful new relationship with a woman who thought that he should get more

"Maybe if people really believed we could be headed for extinction . . . we would suddenly see our lives very clearly."

opinions about his condition. He consulted some doctors in the States and soon after got a phone call saying, 'We have a different diagnosis.' The doctor told him he had a rare form of a very curable disease. And then came the part of the story I'll never forget. Fred said, 'When I heard this over the telephone, I cried like a baby—because I was afraid my life would go back to the way it used to be.'

"It took a scenario that he was going to die for Fred to wake up. It took that kind of shock for his life to be transformed. Maybe that's what needs to happen for all of us, for everyone who lives on Earth. That could be what a requiem scenario offers us."

There was silence for a moment.

"You know," said Joseph quietly, "when all is said and done, the only change that will make a difference is the transformation of the human heart." ■

¹ Jack Miles, "Global Requiem: The Apocalyptic Moment in Religion, Science, and Art," keynote address, fiftieth anniversary Cross Currents Consultation, Association for Religion & Intellectual Life, printed in *Cross Currents*, Fall 2000, vol. 50, issue 3.



feature



the café at the Beginning of the Universe

An encounter with Howard Bloom

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to witness the birth of the universe? To watch in slo-mo as matter and energy, space and time, explode and unfurl into being? Well, this might be your chance—as it was ours, one very surprising winter's night, when a group from our editorial staff visited the New York apartment and virtual universe of the remarkable Howard Bloom. Bloom is most widely known as the author of the acclaimed books *The Lucifer Principle: A Scientific Expedition into the Forces of History* and *Global Brain: The Evolution of Mass Mind from the Big Bang to the 21st Century*. But perhaps because he is “omnivourously curious about everything in the cosmos,” as he puts it, Howard Bloom is one of those rare human beings who defies simple description. Schooled as a scientist, he probes the human and planetary psyche with the patience of a historian, the precision of a quantum physicist, and the passion of a poet.

After graduating magna cum laude from New York University, Bloom turned down four graduate fellowships in science to become, of all things, a very successful rock and roll publicist, helping to polish the stardom of such giants as Prince, Michael Jackson, Bette Midler, and the Talking Heads. “I wanted to move into the center of the myth-making machine of mass society,” he explains, “where the human mind froths and foams.” It wasn't until 1988, when he contracted chronic fatigue syndrome and took up an almost hermit-like residence in his Brooklyn apartment, that he returned to the world of science full time, plunging headlong into the study of biology, psychology, sociology, physics, and history. He even invented his own field of study—paleopsychology—along the way.

Perched atop a king-sized bed, surrounded by stacks of books and a potted ficus that had shed several seasons' worth of leaves, Howard Bloom took us on such a journey through cosmic history that the most basic realities we take for granted—like matter, gravity, and time itself—began to shift and morph around us. As the blue-jeaned genius danced his story of the universe through our minds (occasionally rising to do a jig atop the mattress that nearly filled the room), the wild and mind-boggling precision of the universe's creative intelligence came ever more fully into bloom.

Melissa Hoffman

HOWARD BLOOM: Let's imagine that you and I are sitting around at an outdoor café table at the beginning of the universe. Sitting here, we're going to watch the Big Bang and watch what happens as the universe unfolds. But before we get to that, there are a few things I need to tell you about, starting with Hegel. In 1837, he wrote an incomprehensible book that almost no one reads called *The Philosophy of History*. Hegel's message—and it's as applicable in 2004 as it was then—was that history is a process of spirit becoming flesh. History is a process of transubstantiation.

For example, remember geometry? In my geometry class, they gave us four postulates at the beginning of the year, four axioms. They were things like “two parallel lines never meet.” Simple things. And from these four axioms, week after miserable week, by the end of the year, we'd derive the whole euclidean geometry system. In other words, there was an entire two-dimensional and even three-dimensional world implicit in what? In four axioms! That's Hegel's “spirit becoming flesh” in a most remarkable way. At Reed College, we had a freshman math course based on something similar—Peano's Postulates. They gave you a sheet of mimeograph paper the very first day in class. It had four postulates on it, four axioms—just 165 miserable little words. By the end of the semester, you'd worked out the corollaries coiled in those four initial axioms and you'd come up with the entire mathematical system. Positive numbers, negative numbers, multiplication, division, square roots, rational numbers, irrational numbers—the whole thing. That, to me, was flesh emerging from spirit again.

So there is something about this cosmos that says, in essence: If you start with just a tiny number of rules, and then you work out all the things that are consistent with those rules and you weed out all the things that are inconsistent with those rules, you can unfold a universe. You can unfold all of euclidean geometry in one semester of high school. You can unfold an entire mathematical system in two semesters at Reed College. And if you happen to be a cosmos and you can do your homework in Planck units of time,

then you can finish 330,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 homework assignments in just one *second*. If you keep that up for fourteen billion years, what do you get? You get a universe! Quite a universe!

Now, if you're fourteen billion years into this process, many of the implications that hovered unrealized like spirit at the beginning have been turned into realities. But an uncountable number of implications of the Big Bang's initial axioms still lie ahead of you. They are still mere hints waiting to be uncovered. It takes the universe a hell of a lot of homework to figure out the next step. The next step has to be consistent with the initial postulates just to flicker into existence. Then it has to duke it out with all the

The universe is essentially social. There is nothing, nothing, *nothing* individual about this universe.

other children, grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren of those starting postulates if it's going to stick around.

The odd thing is this: all of its competitors are cousins. Everything is a child of the Big Bang. This means that you are a cousin to a nova. You are a cousin to a nebula. You are a cousin to a galaxy. You are a cousin to the stone you trip over. You are a cousin to the animal that wants to eat you. We're all united. Which does not mean we will all survive.

Now for something very strange: This entire planet is inhabited by only one form of life. Why is this peculiar? Because current science says, both in evolutionary theory and in physics, that the universe is random. Quantum physics says the universe is probabilistic. And a clique called the "neo-Darwinians" says that evolution is based on random changes, on random mutations. The mutations that fit stick, and the ones that don't fit, don't stick.

When I worked in the record industry, people went by the philosophy "throw the s--- up against the wall and see what sticks." If this were really a random universe that uses that philosophy, that just coughs out mutations in totally random ways and lets those that stick, stick, then we might have 38 different life-forms, or 138 life-forms, or 3,800 life-forms, or even 1.3 billion life-forms on this planet. But we only have *one*. It's the DNA system. The DNA system is the *only* system of life we've got. Now how's that for random?

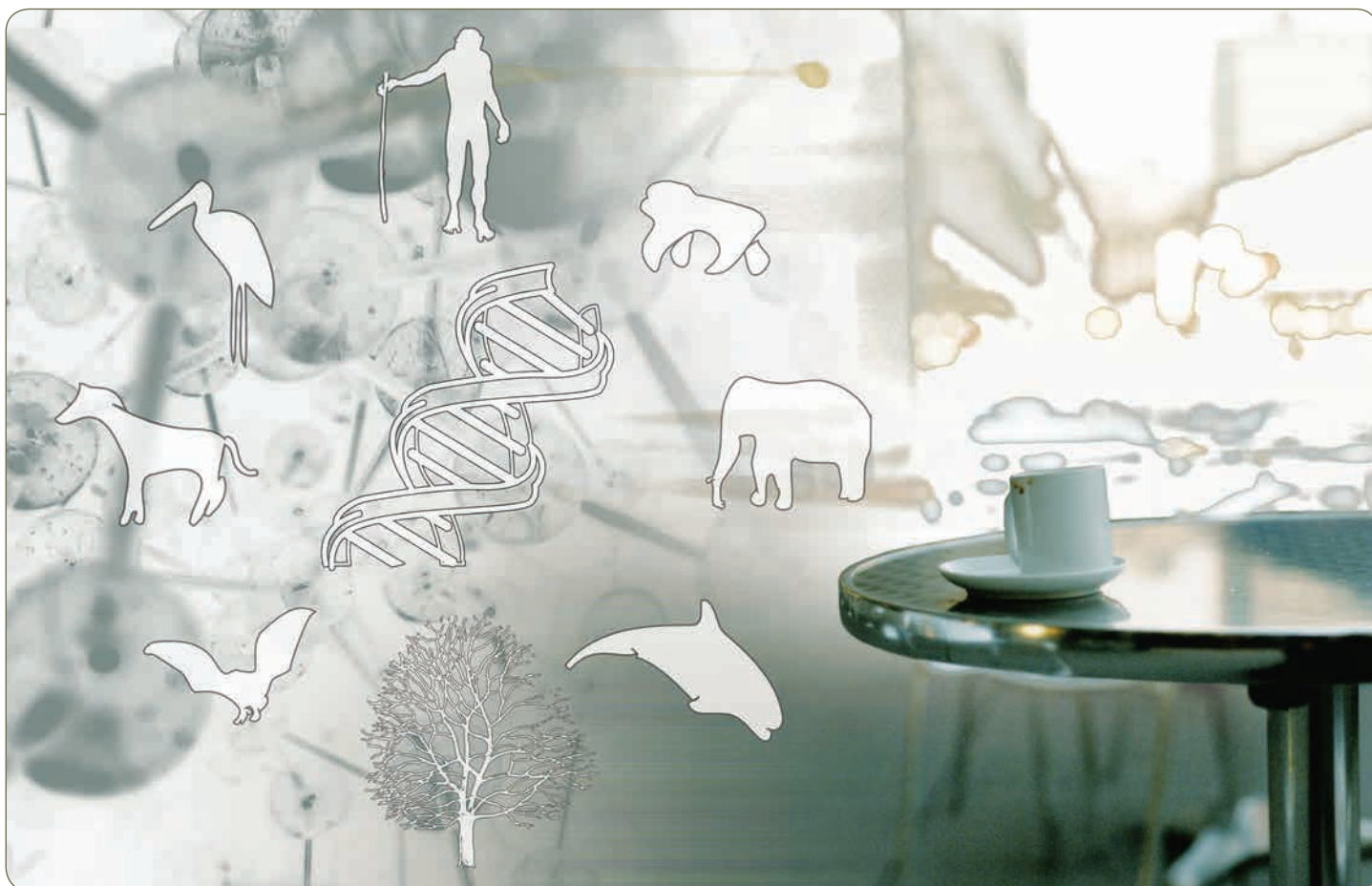
So, in the same way that the universe started by working out the implications of its initial set of rules from the initial pin prick of the Big Bang, this planet, for 3.85 billion years, has been working out the implications of a DNA-based system. This means that everything around you, whether it's alive or not, is your cousin. We are all children of the Big Bang, which means that every stone and every volcano that flash-fries us with its lava is our cousin. So if we talk about an environment that's distinct from us, it is an artificial way of hacking things up. The environment is part of the same process we're a part of.

We're all children of the Big Bang, and we're all children of the system of DNA. This means that not only do we have a history in common that goes back fourteen billion years, but we have a *future* in common that's implicit in us at this very moment. And what that future is depends on how far into the future you want to go. It's a future that's going to get wilder and wilder. One thing that we know about this cosmos is that the cosmos is a wiz at creating astonishing surprises. Astonishing surprises! So

with or without us, this universe is going to pop out new things that will blow minds, if there are still minds around to be blown.

And that brings us back to our café table, our coffee table at the beginning of the universe. Let's start with the instant of the Big Bang. All you've got are four forces, and this enormous flash of something called energy. Forces are rules, social rules. Who will be attracted to whom? Who will be repulsed by whom? The four forces are an Emily Post book of etiquette, but for things that don't exist yet. So what does it mean to say there are only four forces and there are no objects of any kind yet? It's sort of meaningless. We're sort of stuck here.

We're also stuck because—what's the dictionary definition of energy? "The ability to do work." Well, what does that really mean? The ability to move something. But there is nothing. There are no things in this universe yet. Okay. So let's get down to the problems and rules. The universe starts out with this big enormous flash of something we'll call energy. And we're living in Planck time. Do you know what Planck units are? When a little bit of energy emerges from an atom, it doesn't emerge in just any willy-nilly form whatsoever or any willy-nilly size whatsoever. It always comes out in a standard size, like a brick. No one ever thinks about this, but bricks are standardized. They're modular pieces of mud. They're all the same. And the fact that they're all the same makes it possible to build city after city out of bricks.



Well, the universe works that way, too, with modular units. And the modular units are Planck units. So if you're an electron, and you're circling in an outer shell around a nucleus, and you drop down a shell, you give off a bit of energy. It's not just any random bit of energy. It is a specific unit of energy called a Planck unit. It's a photon, and it's precisely a Planck unit of energy that you give off.

So here we are, sitting around, and we're measuring things in Planck units. Okay. Something that happens in a second, for us takes an eternity—we get to see this in slow motion. You and I are sitting here and watching this huge flash, this unbelievable flash in slow motion, a flash that will eventually produce an entire universe from a pinprick—which means an awfully, awfully big flash. We're watching this flash together, and you are a dreamer and I am a skeptic, and you say, "Howard, you know, I have this feeling that in, oh, let's say, one to two hundred Planck units from now, all of a sudden, there are going to be these new things called *things*." But there never have been *things* before. There's just been energy. So I say, "You're crazy. I've been sitting around in this universe ever since it started, dozens and dozens of Planck units ago. I know this universe. I know how it behaves. There never have been things and there never will be things."

And then, suddenly, whammo! These quarks appear in six different forms.

Now, think of this for surprises, okay? We've never had a thing of any kind before. You have made this lunatic, absolutely maniacal prediction, and it has come true. And what's also remarkable about it is that quarks come out in *only* six different forms, right? We've got something like ten-with-eighty-five-zeroes-after-it number of quarks that have just appeared in the universe, and they're in only six forms! Where the heck does that uniformity come from?

The future's as real within us as the universe was real in those first tiny axioms of the Big Bang.

What's the answer? Well, there is no answer yet. I'm working on the aspect of it that I call *supersameness* and *supersimultaneity*. That's the question: Why have so many things emerged together with such amazingly precise identity? It's astonishing, but so far as I can tell, this is a question physicists haven't answered. My hypothesis—the Bloom answer—is that in the first flash of the cosmos you're so close to the initial axioms that your wiggle room is very, very small. Your wiggle room is so small that yes, it will

allow you to produce six quarks, and yes, that's a big step up from just four forces, a big jump in the number of forms of processes or things. But sorry, kids. We're still so close to the initial rules that that's as much wiggle room as there is. As a consequence, when you've got things emerging, they're all emerging as an expression of the same rules. They're all pushed forward by the same thing, that operator we call *time*, the gizmo that moves things forward, that gives you new homework assignments at every step, every Planck step. The combination of the operator and the initial rules

We have a unique responsibility. We're among the first batch of quarks we know trying out this new surprise called consciousness.

is only going to give you a very tiny number of different things, but it will give you huge quantities of duplicates because there was so much energy in what you started with.

Okay. Now, we also start out with another thing that many of my friends in science are only beginning to recognize. And that is that the universe is essentially social. There is nothing, nothing, *nothing* individual about this universe. There is no such thing as the lone individual anywhere. The four forces are forces of sociality. The four forces are social rules. And those rules say which quarks are going to be allowed to associate with what quarks, and which quarks are going to have to say, "I'm sorry, no. I don't like you. I won't get near you. You get away from me. And I'm going to go away from you." That's already happening somewhere early in the first second, like in the ten-to-the-minus-thirty-second of a second.

Quarks are social. Quarks cannot exist on their own. So, quarks gang up in groups of three. If two up-quarks merge with one down-quark, that trio is a proton. And if it's the other way around, two down-quarks and an up-quark, it's a neutron. That's it.

We sit around watching these quark threesomes slam into each other and bounce off again for over 300,000 years, and all of a sudden you, the dreamer, come up with another one of your scatterbrained predictions. "These things," you say, "these protons and neutrons are going to get together with those little

things flicking around called electrons." Now I *know* you're crazy. So I try to talk some sense into your head. "No, no, no," I tell you. "You just don't get it. This universe is a high-speed ricochet soup. It's what we call a plasma. Everything is moving so fast that everything is bouncing off of everything else like bullets—bullets slamming at mega-speeds! There's no opportunity for anything to get together. These particles hate each other. Look at them. They're crashing and bashing all the time. And you're telling me these things are going to settle down into some sort of peaceful union

with each other? And you're also trying to tell me that a proton, which is 1,842 times the size of an electron, is going to discover that it has a force, a need, a longing that precisely match the need and longing of an electron? And the electron, instead of going in a straight line and doing a head-on crash and then boinging away, is going to slip into a gentle little circle around the

proton? And this is going to produce whole new properties that you've never seen and never imagined in your life? And you're going to call it an atom?

"These gang-ups you're predicting just don't square with this universe. They really don't square with the way this universe has been at all. I'm sorry. You're crazy . . . why do I even sit here with you? Why do I indulge a lunatic like you?"

And all of a sudden, whammo! You are proven to be right again. It's me who doesn't get it. I'm still a traditional scientist, saying everything's going to stay the same as it's been. I'll grant you that there can be straight-line predictions from the way things are, but that's it. "There are no surprises in this universe. I know the whole thing." That's what standard science tends to say these days. Even though we've got this story of an unfolding universe sitting right in front of us, and it's twitching with amazements.

Well, I could go on and on and on, and tell you about surprise after surprise. Even the attractive power of this stuff we call gravity does not appear until roughly 400,000 years after the universe gets started! There's simply nothing big enough to attract anything else with gravity. The first matter of any substance—matter made up of more than one atom getting together—doesn't appear until over 300,000 years after the universe has started. So there are surprises being belched out



all the time—galaxies, stars, star-collapses, whole new forms of atoms, planets, atmospheres, and life.

What I've basically been saying is, right now we carry a fourteen-billion-year history within us, a fourteen-billion-year history of surprises. You are a lump of quarks. So am I. Those quarks are joined in atoms. Those atoms are joined in something very complex called molecules. But we also carry fourteen billion years or more of another kind of time within us—*future*. The future's as real within us as the universe was real in those first tiny axioms of the Big Bang. I'm not predicting that you and I will be around to see that future. But in one form or another, our basic ingredients sure as heck will be.

And we have a unique responsibility. We're among the first batch of quarks we know trying out this new surprise called consciousness. Every new surprise—every new upgrade—is tested. Protons, for example, were tested to the nth degree. They've gone through every kind of catastrophe you can possibly imagine. They've gone through the bashing of the initial high-speed plasma soup. They've gone through the crunch and shattering of dying stars. And they've pulled through it all. Right? They're the ultimate survivors in this universe. But we'll see whether consciousness is able to survive. We will see.

So, we started with Hegel, and with spirit attempting to become flesh. And spirit attempting to become flesh is just another way of saying that the implications of the universe are implicit in you and me. The implications are hovering; they're with us all the time. Sometimes those implications appear in visions. Sometimes they appear in fiction, poetry, and dreams. Many of our former intuitions and our long-gone fantasies have taken flesh as everyday realities. And the implications of this universe contain huge surprises. Like the development of galaxies that are dark. They have no light. They're simply matter that's aggregated, but what a surprising way to aggregate, in huge spiral pools. When you told me there were going to be the first collections of atoms, I didn't believe you. And now you've got these aggregations that are thousands of light-years across, each swirling around its own center of gravity. And I, the skeptic, told you once that gravity was one of your impossible dreams. Well, that kind of thing keeps coming up in the universe all the time. Quarks were once surprises. So were neutrons, protons, atoms, and "things."

What will happen with our thoughts and feelings? Will we transubstantiate them? Will we be an evolutionary misstep, or will we prove our mettle? Will we seed surprises that defy today's imaginings? ■



the Guru & the Pandit

ANDREW COHEN & KEN WILBER IN DIALOGUE



ANDREW COHEN: GURU. Evolutionary thinker and spiritual pathfinder. Self-described “idealist with revolutionary inclinations.” Cohen, founder of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine, is a spiritual teacher and acclaimed author widely recognized as a defining voice in the emerging field of evolutionary spirituality. Over the last decade in the pages of *WIE*, Cohen has brought together leading thinkers from East and West—mystics and materialists, philosophers and psychologists—to explore the significance of a new spirituality for the new millennium. His books include *Embracing Heaven & Earth* and *Living Enlightenment*.



KEN WILBER: PANDIT. A scholar who is deeply proficient and immersed in spiritual wisdom. Self-described “defender of the dharma; intellectual samurai.” Hailed as “the Einstein of consciousness,” Wilber is one of the most highly regarded philosophers alive today, and his work offers a comprehensive and original synthesis of the world’s great psychological, philosophical, and spiritual traditions. Author of numerous books, including *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* and *A Brief History of Everything*, Wilber is the founder of Integral Institute and a regular contributor to *WIE*.



FOLLOWING THE GRAIN OF THE KOSMOS dialogue V

States, Stages, Selves, and the Directionality of Development

Who are we and *how* do we evolve? In this dialogue, guru and pandit explore the transformative power of what Cohen calls the Authentic Self, illuminating the dynamics by which we move up (and down) the developmental trajectory, and the miraculous collective potentials that lie on the horizon of consciousness.

THE AUTHENTIC SELF

ANDREW COHEN: I wanted to speak about something we've discussed before, which is what I call the Authentic Self. In the development of my work in the field of evolutionary spirituality, I've come to the conclusion that awakening to this Authentic Self is a pivotal factor in the transformational process. And I think that a lot of people who are interested in enlightenment, including myself for a long time, have unintentionally been failing to make the important distinction between the Self Absolute, the Authentic Self, and the ego. As I have come to understand it, the Authentic Self is the deepest part of our *humanity* beyond ego, or the awakened spiritual conscience. The great twentieth-century sage Sri Aurobindo referred to it as the "psychic being," and some might call it the soul.

A couple of years ago, when we did a piece on Sri Aurobindo for the magazine, we spoke to one of his oldest living disciples, Amal Kiran, a very famous poet

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Andrew Cohen

in India. He spoke passionately about the psychic being, saying that the cultivation of this part of ourselves is the most important aspect of the spiritual path. He told us:

What Sri Aurobindo called the psychic being, or soul, is the innermost being that is encountered in the heart center. It is that consciousness that is in touch with and identical to man’s highest possibility. The psychic being is aspiring all the time. Its very nature is to go higher and higher and higher. And in order for transformation to occur, that being, in all its qualities, has to come forth, come into the open. If you go through your psychic being, you are bound to reach the highest, ultimately.

After speaking with him, we talked a lot about it, and we realized that Aurobindo’s psychic being seemed to clearly define something that I’d intuited and been trying to cultivate in my students for many years. Now I simply call it the Authentic Self. And this recognition was very helpful to me, because for a long time the traditional enlightenment model, which only seemed to describe the path from the ego to the Self Absolute, had not been meeting my own evolving understanding of what radical realization is all about when one is no longer merely trying to transcend the world but is simultaneously aspiring to transform it.

KEN WILBER: Yes. The traditional model goes from ego to absolute, and that’s it. And now you’re emphasizing the Authentic Self as an important ingredient in this whole equation.

COHEN: It is so important. The Authentic Self is a completely different dimension of the self than either the Self Absolute or the ego. It is that part of ourselves that is *already whole*. It has never been hurt, wounded, traumatized, or victimized. It is already whole and complete, and yet it *can and does* develop. For the Authentic Self, the point of departure in the developmental process is wholeness itself. This is the part of ourselves that *cares passionately* about evolution for its own sake, *already*. When individuals awaken to the Authentic Self—even if it’s only temporarily—suddenly they become aware of a living evolutionary context and experience a passion and concern about the necessity for development itself. I identify the Authentic Self as synonymous with what we could call the first cause, the creative impulse, and its expression in the awakening human. The Authentic Self doesn’t abide in the gross realm; it abides in what you would call the subtle realm. It’s aware of everything that is happening here, cares passionately about and can act in response to everything that’s happening here, but *is always free from everything that’s happening here*.

WILBER: Right.

COHEN: The ego, or what you would call the frontal self, exists only in this world. And that’s why, of course, when people fall back into the ego and the world of the personal self in the gross realm, after having experienced the ecstatic evolutionary passion of the Authentic Self in the subtle realm, they lose touch with that passion in an instant.

Now, what is called the Self Absolute or the unmanifest ground of being is that deepest part of human consciousness that, because it abides beyond time and space, beyond creation itself, does not care at all about what’s happening here in the realm of manifestation. It’s always free from anything that’s ever happened here and always is at rest. Infinite peace is its nature. So whatever does happen in our world, in the manifest realm, has no effect on that deepest part of our self. Birth or death, Big Bang or no Big Bang—

WILBER: —not a problem.

COHEN: Right. But the Authentic Self cares passionately, cares desperately about everything—

WILBER: Yes. It’s like the seat of morality.

COHEN: Exactly. And this is so important, especially for us Westerners, because in the new definition of enlightenment, which we’ve talked so much about, evolution is the context, rather than transcendence. And when people start to directly experience for themselves what the Authentic Self is, they literally begin to light up with awakened understanding—suddenly life, being alive, being a *human being*, begins to make perfect sense. They exclaim, “Oh, this is the part of me that *cares* about the life process, the world system, about infinite becoming itself!” And that’s so important, because if we can awaken to this Self and *recognize* what it is, it can help us to make this extraordinary transformation. If we can identify with the Authentic Self—and through doing so, release our

attachment to the ego and its fears and desires—that can be the catalyst for evolutionary enlightenment.

WILBER: I agree with what you're saying. Let me give you the way integral psychology, my own view, tends to look at this.

COHEN: Great.

A MATRIX OF DEVELOPMENT

WILBER: First I'll scope out the big picture, and then we'll come back to some of the finer details. One of the important distinctions we make, and we've talked about this from various angles, is the difference between *states* of consciousness and *stages* of consciousness. For this discussion we can use a fairly simplified developmental scheme—we can just say egocentric, ethnocentric, worldcentric, and then we sometimes add something like Kosmocentric. Those stages represent one's identity, moving from an identification merely with "me" (egocentric) to an identification with "us" (ethnocentric) to an identification with "all of us" (worldcentric) to an identification with the All (Kosmocentric). As permanent realizations, those are *stages*; they develop and unfold. States, on the other hand, can mean states of consciousness like waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and so on. You can usually experience these states at any stage—even an infant wakes, dreams, and sleeps. As professor and consciousness researcher Allan Combs says, states are free; stages have to be earned.

In any event, peak experiences or altered states tend to be temporary, transient—they come and go. They can be very important and very profound; it's just that they don't last. For example, an initial state experience of *satori* can be very important before it becomes a permanent or stage realization.

COHEN: Yes.

WILBER: But in relationship to what we are speaking about, if you look at the type of self or selves that a person can have in terms of *states*, in addition to stages, then it gets very interesting. For ordinary people in the waking state, the self they have is the ego. In the subtle or dream state, it's the soul or what you're calling the Authentic Self, which I refer to as the deeper psychic. And in the deep-sleep formless state, it's the Absolute Self. Now if we describe those three as *nirmanakaya*, *sambogakaya*, *dharmakaya*, or gross, subtle, causal, then those are the three major, or basic, selves that every human being possesses. We have a gross self, or ego, a subtle self, or soul or deeper psychic, and a causal, formless absolute or *atman* Self, capital S, a transcendental witness. So even an infant has a soul. They're not necessarily awakened to it, they're not necessarily alive to it, but it's there, yes. And they also obviously have an *atman* Self, even though they're not awake or realized as that transcendental Self or witness. States are free; stages are earned.

So the interesting thing is that you can now do what we call a lattice or a matrix, where you can plot stages of development and then look at the selves

or the states that are occurring. The essential point, as we were saying, is that a person at any *stage* can have a temporary experience of almost any *state*—so you can have an egocentric experience of gross, subtle, and causal; an ethnocentric experience of gross, subtle, and causal; a worldcentric experience of gross, subtle, and causal, and so on. We have an enormous amount of evidence that all of those occur.

On occasion, then, almost anybody at any stage can get a glimpse of the deeper psychic, or the soul. They can have that state experience, but it usually slips and fades away. It is merely a passing state and not a permanent trait, not yet a permanent stage realization.

Now, what I think happens, and the way it ties together with what you're talking about, is that at some point in actual development, between the worldcentric and Kosmocentric stages, the deeper psychic can awaken to itself, *not as a temporary altered state but as a permanent realization or stage accomplishment*.

COHEN: Right. And that's a very significant moment.

WILBER: So at that point you are awakening to this self in the subtle dimension. It's actually becoming alive to itself, even though in a sense it's been there all along, even though it had this kind of wholeness all along. It's been developing itself, because these stages have been developing as the vehicle through which it can express itself. But you have to be at least at a worldcentric stage of development or it's not going to stick. You can

awaken the deeper psychic, or the soul, and get a taste of it, but it fades. But at some point, as we were saying, between worldcentric and Kosmocentric, it can be awakened, and there's a kind of flip. *And then you hang everything off of your soul.*

COHEN: Right, exactly!

WILBER: Does that make sense?

COHEN: Yes, perfectly.

WILBER: So theoretically that's pretty good.

NO WAY BACK

WILBER: Of course, we've talked about what happens when people at lower levels of development have a temporary state experience of the subtle soul, or causal Self, and then they revert next week or the week after that, and then they usually feel pretty cranky about what's gone on—

COHEN: Very cranky. Even more than cranky. You see, I'm starting to see that when people really awaken to the Authentic Self, they begin to see the world in a completely new way; they discover a new morality. Suddenly they discover a completely different relationship to mind, to emotions, to the purpose and meaning and direction of life. But when they fall out of that perspective, because maybe they didn't want to face whatever they had to face in themselves—then what they do is fall back into the level of development that they were in before they had that realization. So suddenly they're not

seeing things in the new way anymore, and they embrace the psychology and worldview that they had before, and then *they see the experience that they had in a higher state from the perspective of the lower stage.* So of course, now it's seen in a completely distorted way.

WILBER: Unfortunately that happens all the time. [Laughing] Happened to me just this morning at breakfast.

COHEN: [Laughing] It's a very weird experience to watch this happen to people.

WILBER: Well, again, you're looking at states and stages in what you're just describing. And the thing is, *stages* can't be skipped. For example, take atoms, molecules, cells, organisms. An atom can't have an experience of a cell and bypass being a molecule. It just doesn't work like that. So a person can be plunged into an authentic experience of a higher state—even of the nondual—at virtually any stage that they're at. They can have that temporary state experience—but then what also happens is that if the person is *ready* to move to the next stage of development, that experience will help dislodge their identification with their current stage, and they will then start to actually move to that next stage, in addition to having the state experience of the nondual.

COHEN: Right!


WILBER: And that's what lights their candle, that's what gets them totally fired up, because they're getting two for the price of one. And what you were

describing was somebody who has that experience and then slips back. So to give you a more fine-tuned understanding of the psychology of it, what happens is that when they come out of that experience, if they're really not stabilized in the higher stage, then their center of gravity will structurally move back down, and then they'll interpret both the higher stage structure and the nondual state from the lower stage of development.

COHEN: Right, and it can get pretty nasty.

WILBER: It gets pretty ugly because then they kind of resent what has gotten into them, and they feel rage. They've seen paradise and then seen it fade.

COHEN: Precisely. I've been on the receiving end of that rage more times than I'd like to remember. I've seen this happen to many people over the years, and that's why I started wondering, "*Who is the individual?*" Because I've seen that when they evolve into a higher level of development, they become a different person. They discover a trust in the inherent goodness of life; they become aware of different structures. They are awakened to the call of their own higher potential. They feel an obligation to it that is endless, and they recognize it as ultimately being a sacred obligation. And once that obligation is recognized as being sacred, it's a really big deal because then your higher conscience is awakened. Then you recognize that you can't really turn away from it without messing yourself up. Because once that happens, it's almost like, shall we say, the evolutionary developmental



"You can awaken the deeper psychic, or the soul, and get a taste of it, but it fades. But at some point, between worldcentric and Kosmocentric, it can be awakened, and there's a kind of flip. *And then you hang everything off of your soul.*"

Ken Wilber

trajectory, or God, or whatever you want to call it, has got its hook into your heart, into your soul. And as much as we may want there to be one, there just ain't no way back.

THE SEAT OF MORALITY

COHEN: You said before that the Authentic Self, or deeper psychic, is the “seat of morality.”

WILBER: I think that is a good way to look at it. Just as we were saying, the causal transcendental Self is radically impartial. And that's the ever-present ground of radical certainty and absolute truth. But the moral compass in the manifest realm is the soul, or the deeper psychic.

COHEN: Yes—and that moral compass reveals itself only when we've actually reached what you are calling a worldcentric stage of development.

WILBER: Exactly. Worldcentric soul or higher. Then the soul partakes of the impartiality or the unflappability of the transcendental Self, so it's unmoved in a certain sense by what's happening, but it partakes of the gross manifest realm in that it *makes choices*. It's discriminating wisdom we're talking about, which *is* the moral compass.

COHEN: Right, yes.

WILBER: So that's why the soul is the seat of wisdom and of the moral choices that one has to make.

COHEN: And those choices would be based upon the recognition that the manifest universe that we're part of is constantly evolving. This fact of a

developmental or evolutionary context—which we've only known for about two hundred years—is very profound. When one grasps it deeply, it completely rejigs one's worldview. Now it would seem to me that the Authentic Self would be the very part of us that would be the receptacle of this truth of our own nature.

WILBER: Yes. And that truth would be part of its moral orientation.

COHEN: The Authentic Self is the part of ourselves that is going to *awaken* to the moral context of the evolutionary imperative.

WILBER: I think so. And as evolution in the manifest realm continues, we don't know what particular degrees and stages of complexities there will be a thousand years from now, or two thousand years from now. It might be subtle light transfer bodies—the Authentic Self will then be awakening to *that*. At that point, that will be its moral compass, its moral guide. But right now, in today's modern and postmodern world, it's the evolutionary enlightenment—that is the form of the manifest realm right now. The grain of the Kosmos is the moral compass. The whole point about morality is that it follows the Eros or the grain of the universe. And that grain right now is the evolutionary unfolding. That's where the moral compass is oriented. So you try to say, “I'm going to get with the evolutionary impulse,” because the evolutionary impulse is increasing wholeness, increasing care, increasing compassion, and increasing consciousness. That's the moral compass by which we're making judgments. And

the Authentic Self, the deeper psychic, is the one that is relaying that to us.

COHEN: Right, exactly. The thing is, this makes sense; it's very logical. Understanding the Authentic Self fills in the important gaps, especially for people who are interested in enlightenment today, because the old model just doesn't—

WILBER: —doesn't quite work.

COHEN: No, it doesn't answer the important questions about the right relationship to the manifest realm and to an *evolving* universe. So the Authentic Self has to help us really redefine and give birth to a new context—a new spiritual, philosophical, and moral framework. But very few people seem to know about it. In fact, besides Aurobindo, I've never heard anybody speak about the Authentic Self in this way.

WILBER: You have to do a fair amount of translation and it wouldn't fit quite as well, but a lot of the Christian mystics, in their orientation to the soul, are pretty good on some of that. Also, a lot of Kabbalists are pretty good on that kind of stuff, as is tantra. But even those profound mystics have *always* been an extreme minority—East or West—in terms of what's really going on. That's the tragedy. And in our culture right now, in our generation, unfortunately what we have, on one hand, is what I believe is a misunderstanding of the *anatta* [no self] doctrine, which just trashes everything manifest and puts you in that radical pluralistic, relativistic, extreme postmodern nightmare that we've talked

“The soul partakes of the impartiality or the unflappability of the transcendental Self, so it’s unmoved in a certain sense by what’s happening, but it partakes of the gross manifest realm in that it *makes choices*. . . . That’s why the soul is the seat of wisdom.”

Ken Wilber

so much about. That’s what so much of American Buddhism is doing now. Or we get the neo-vedantist or pure absolute approach, on the other hand. And the Authentic Self gets gutted one way or another—in a sense, those are the two lousy choices that we have at large.

COHEN: Precisely.

WILBER: And in my opinion, it’s a travesty on both sides, but it’s certainly a travesty with regard to Buddhism because the Vajrayana position *does have room* for the Authentic Self. It does have the soul that transmigrates and carries one’s wisdom and one’s virtue. But all that gets trashed as well. It’s truly a travesty.

COLLECTIVE OBJECTIVITY

COHEN: For me, the most interesting discovery was when, as we’ve spoken about previously, I saw individuals awaken to this Authentic Self *simultaneously*. In this, something miraculous occurs that is way beyond just seeing one individual awaken to a more deeply moral, deeply spiritual, more integrated self.

WILBER: And you see this in the kind of dharma-dialoguing, or intersubjective dialoguing that you would do as a group exercise—do you see the Authentic Self come out of that?

COHEN: Well, it’s more than an exercise; it’s an awakening experience—

WILBER: But you would see it happening in those circumstances?

COHEN: Definitely, yes. The goal of this kind of dialogue, which I call Enlightened

Communication, is to trigger the collective awakening of the Authentic Self. And interestingly enough, as our friend Bob Richards pointed out to me using the four quadrants*, it’s actually “intersubjective/interobjective.” The intersubjectivity is the dropping of ego boundaries and awakening to the Authentic Self simultaneously with other people. But in this there’s the emergence of an unprecedented potential for *collective* objectivity—which is everything! To me, that’s more important than anything else. From a certain point of view, our future may depend on it. I mean, that’s the ultimate coming together. And in that coming together, a creative potential and source of, as you said, discriminating wisdom emerge that otherwise could never be accessed. That’s the ground from which we can begin to deal with just about anything and solve our real problems from a truly awakened, enlightened perspective.

And what’s even more exciting is that as this thing emerges and gets stronger, it seems to get easier and easier for new people to have the experience.

WILBER: I think that when you’re working with this intersubjective exercise, in itself it sets up a *state resonance* that can help somebody awaken to a finer understanding or feeling of the deeper psychic or soul. But as we’ve been saying, it depends upon the person’s level of development how it sticks and for how long. This experience you’re describing, like all states, can be experienced at many different stages of development. But what tends to happen

is that even if a person has an authentic state experience, when they come out of the immediateness of it and try to digest it, of course, they are going to interpret that state—

COHEN: According to the stage that they’re at.

WILBER: Yes, exactly. And it’s going to look different at different stages.

*FOUR QUADRANTS



In Ken Wilber’s integral philosophy, our multidimensional Kosmos can be thought of as a room with four corners to it: the subjective, the objective, the intersubjective, or cultural, and the interobjective, or social. All four corners arise together, as fundamental components of any experience, and none can be simply reduced to any other. That is, reality is constructed not as merely “subjective” and mental (“I”) nor as strictly “objective” and material (“It”) nor as the plural forms of those (“We” and “Its”), but rather as *all* of those at once. Any interpretation of reality that fails to take all four of these dimensions into account, Wilber feels, cannot be complete.

“The grain of the Kosmos is the moral compass. The whole point about morality is that it follows the Eros or the grain of the universe. And that grain right now is the evolutionary unfolding.”

Ken Wilber

Nonetheless, the more you are dunked into a state that you cannot adequately interpret at your present stage of development, the more that state acts as a *micro-transformative event*, disidentifying you from your present stage and helping you move to another.

I think what’s happening in a lot of those group settings, or experiences of group consciousness that you’re describing, is that people have to be at least at a worldcentric stage of development, possibly higher, and *then* have that state experience. And under those circumstances the person would interpret this state as an evolutionary enlightenment impulse, whereas a person at a lower stage wouldn’t have that kind of self-understanding, even though they could have an authentic experience.

COHEN: Because an evolutionary context would not yet have emerged at that lower stage.

WILBER: Right. There wouldn’t be any evolutionary context. But somebody at worldcentric or above is plunged into that nondual state and they can interpret it in a sort of holarchical, increasing-depth, increasing-span, evolutionary-enlightenment kind of fashion.

COHEN: And in terms of the emergence of this consciousness itself—

WILBER: Oh, it becomes easier and easier.

COHEN: I first saw it about four years ago—it was a big explosion among a committed group of students after a lot of hard work. Then it emerged more and more often, and now, suddenly we’re finding that even people with no previous exposure to this can relatively easily have the same experience. So you see, something’s moving forward—that is the thing itself.

WILBER: Yes. It’s morphogenetic fields, or what I call developmental grooves, which are patterns that influence the development of physical, biological, and psychological structures. For example, just as you’re finding, once a difficult task has been accomplished anywhere in the world—from crystallizing complex molecules to rats learning a particular maze to linguistic words being created—the same task can more easily be repeated anywhere else in the world (as has already been demonstrated by numerous empirical studies). This is identical to what we see with the emergence of psychological forms. For example, in historical unfolding, once a certain stage of development like Spiral Dynamics’ red meme had significantly emerged anywhere in the world, it began more easily appearing elsewhere around the world. A difficult, novel, creative emergence had settled into what I call a “Kosmic habit,” now available for all subsequent development.

COHEN: Yes. And that’s why I think that if this thing can become stabilized in

a significant number of people, other people are going to have much easier access to it.

WILBER: Right. You know, they’re surfing on the *underside* of waves at Maui now. That’s what happens with this—when it starts out, one or two people can stand up on a surfboard for about three seconds, and now they’re surfing underneath the curl! Basketball—it’s not the game that I played in high school. We did not take the basketball, like Michael Jordan, fly through the air, and drop it in the hoop—that’s not how the game was played when I played it. We had to actually shoot the ball up at the basket, not drop it in the basket from above. Sheeeesh.

COHEN: When we wake up to this, to the miraculous dynamics of our own individual and collective evolutionary potential, nothing could be more exciting, compelling, and demanding. If we have enough courage, we face the fact that it’s actually up to us to create a new stage of development. That’s why it’s not a game.

WILBER: Although, you know, some folks are now dropping the evolutionary ball into the basket from above, aren’t they? ■

“When individuals awaken to the Authentic Self simultaneously, something miraculous occurs. In this there’s the emergence of an unprecedented potential for *collective* objectivity—which is everything! That’s the ultimate coming together. And in that coming together, a creative potential and source of discriminating wisdom emerge that otherwise could never be accessed.”

Andrew Cohen



feature





come TOGETHER

Can we discover a depth of wisdom
far beyond what is available to individuals alone?

the mystery of collective intelligence

by Craig Hamilton

A DIFFERENT KIND OF KNOWING

IT'S JULY 2003, AND FIFTEEN TOP TELECOM EXECUTIVES have gathered at a small island retreat off the coast of Maine. Tensions are high as they head into a three-day summit to discuss the future of the industry. Since the advent of wireless service and the web, companies have been scrambling to stay ahead of the technological curve, and amid growing market competition, it has become clear that some new thinking is needed.

For the first two days, the talks are frustrating. Experts take turns trading theories and speculations, but everyone remains guarded. Finally, at the suggestion of one executive, on the third morning a "dialogue facilitator" is flown in to try to bring the group together. After giving a brief introduction about the importance of listening and suspending assumptions, and a plea to remember the common goal that brought them together, the meeting begins. Already, there is a different quality in the room. Around the circle, people seem more relaxed and more attentive to one another. A few minutes into the discussion, the CEO of one of the large wireless providers shares his vision: "I think we need to stop thinking of our work in purely business terms," he states, pausing, groping for words. "What if we began to see one another not simply as competitors for market share, but as partners in uniting the world through technology? If you really think about it, in a sense, isn't our larger mission to create the infrastructure that will make it possible for the Global Village to become a real community?" His openness seems to catch everyone off guard, and for the first time all weekend, there is a brief silence. In this silence, an almost imperceptible, vibrant energy begins to grow in the room. "I'm glad you had the guts to say it," another executive offers. "I think we've all grown tired of just chasing the bottom line." "I agree," a third adds. "If there's anything this industry needs right now, it's vision."

The shift in the group is now becoming palpable, and several people comment on it. There is an electricity in the air and a sense of space that seems to envelop everyone. More members join in, and as each



individual speaks, it seems to pull the group deeper into a unity, not only of interest but of vision. Several people try to speak at once, only to burst into laughter upon discovering that they all spontaneously had the same idea. A creativity seems to swirl in the room, carrying everyone with it, and a mysterious recognition begins to dawn in the group that they are no longer operating as separate individuals but are actually thinking together. Hours pass, but nobody wants to stop. Eventually, the meeting comes to a natural close, and everyone sits together in silence for a few minutes. Nobody knows what has happened. But they all know it was important.

In a world where many of us are still apt to think that there is nothing genuinely new under the sun, something seems to be emerging on our collective frontier. Around the country and across the globe, from corporate boardrooms to social change think tanks, people are responding to an impulse to come together in shared exploration. And in their midst, something miraculous is being

mysterious can come into being, with capacities and intelligences that far transcend those of the individuals involved.

“In these group experiences, people have access to a kind of knowing that’s bigger than what we normally experience with each other,” describes author and researcher Carol Frenier. “You feel the presence of the sacred, and you sense that everybody else in the group is also feeling that. There’s a sense of openness and awareness of something larger than yourself. Your ability to communicate seems broader. What is astounding to people is how much creativity comes forth in a setting like that. You have a sense that the whole group is creating together, and you don’t quite exactly know how.”

As Frenier, Kenny, and a growing cadre of other researchers in this new field are finding, it seems that in the spaces between us, unexpected higher-order collective potentials can emerge that make even our greatest individual capacities look insignificant by comparison. And the implications for the way we understand ourselves and the way we work together are as startling as they are profound. Juanita Brown, author of the forthcoming *The World Café: Bringing Conversation to Life*, observes, “What’s happening in these settings is that you’re actually bringing up *the new*. That’s what makes it

so exciting for people to be a part of. You’re bringing up the next level—whether it’s deeper or higher or broader—and people sense that there’s something there of immense value. Sometimes it shows up in the inner experience, either individually or collectively, as an ‘Aha!’ Other times, everybody will go silent, because they’re all reflecting on what has just been revealed. It’s almost like a revelation of some sort makes itself visible.”

If you’ve never read a book about this “collective intelligence,” you’re not alone. Despite its widespread emergence, it’s a phenomenon that until recently has almost escaped the lens of the social sciences. For the past decade or so, this nascent social dynamic has been quietly simmering on the cultural back burn-

Call it collective consciousness, team synergy, co-intelligence, or group mind—a growing number of people are discovering through their own experience that wholes are indeed far more than the sum of their parts.

born. “When the group reaches a certain level of coherence, generally there’s some higher level of order that comes into the room and it’s very noticeable to people,” explains organizational consultant Robert Kenny. “It’s like something has shifted. People stop fighting for airspace and there’s a kind of group intuition that develops. It’s almost like the group as a whole becomes a tuning fork for the inflow of wisdom.”

Call it collective consciousness, team synergy, co-intelligence, or group mind—a growing number of people are discovering through their own experience that wholes are indeed far more than the sum of their parts; that when individuals come together with a shared intention, in a conducive environment, something



ers, slowly building up steam for the moment when it would burst forth into full boil—a moment that may have just arrived. Thanks to the strong voices of a few key movers and shakers, this newly recognized potential is rapidly catching the attention of a growing number of innovators intrigued by the possibility of harnessing the creative power of collectives toward the resolution of our most complex problems.

Google “collective consciousness” and you’ll get over 64,000 results. “Collective intelligence” brings 30,000; “group mind,” 20,000. A visit to some of the sites listed reveals a host of new organizations with names like the Co-Intelligence Institute, the Collective Wisdom Initiative, and community-intelligence.com, all dedicated to chronicling and furthering our understanding of higher-order group functioning. Peppered throughout the latest literature on leading-edge organizational development are an ever-growing number of references to concepts like “developing group synergy,” “tapping the group mind,” “unleashing collective creativity,” and “developing team coordination.” In increasingly diverse fields of endeavor, it seems, the power of the collective is coming to the fore.

The fact that coordinated teams faced with a common task can access higher levels of functioning is, of course, not a new revelation. Ask a sampling of soldiers who faced combat in a platoon whether they ever experienced a heightened awareness of the whole, or even a “group mind,” and you might be surprised to find how many will have a sense of what you’re talking about. Indeed, rescue crews, sports teams, dance troupes, and music ensembles have for years been reporting remarkable experiences of team synergy or group flow that have lifted them to undreamt-of heights of coordination and effectiveness. Add to that several millennia of group worship and other shared religious practice, and you might be inclined to ask what the fuss is all about. From a certain point of view, it could be argued, experiences of communion are as old as the tribe. However, what seems to be new about what’s

happening today is that this phenomenon is not only arising spontaneously in increasingly diverse groups throughout the world but, according to Otto Scharmer, cofounder of the MIT Leadership Lab, “more and more people are having this type of experience in the context of everyday work and professional settings. What’s interesting today is that this kind of experience is something that no longer occurs in retreat from doing your real work, but in the midst of doing your real work—particularly when the work is related to profound social change and innovation.”

How to account for this new emergence is not entirely clear. Perhaps in our increasingly secular global culture, the sacred dimension is simply being forced to find new, more secular channels by which to make itself known in the world. Or it could be that, in response to mounting threats to our very survival, a kind of adaptive impulse is arising in the species, calling us to come together. As Juanita Brown puts it, “Perhaps in the face of the collective danger we’re experiencing, our collective survival instincts are waking up and we’re searching for a way to pass forward that will not be suicidal.” But among those

“In these group experiences, people have access to a kind of knowing that’s bigger than what we normally experience with each other.”

Carol Frenier

who experience it, there is an increasing sense that whatever is bringing this collective awakening about, its implications are nothing short of evolutionary. As Bill Veltrop, former Exxon executive and founder of the International Center for Organization Design, puts it, “We’re absolutely convinced that we’re experiencing the beginnings of an evolutionary shift that’s greater than anything we’ve ever experienced . . . as [a] society.”

GROUPTHINK, THE BORG, AND THE CULT OF THE INDIVIDUAL

In the group, I experienced a kind of consciousness that was almost a singularity, like a dropping of personalities and a joining together where there was no sense of conflict. Nobody was in opposition and everybody was just helping each other. It became obvious that we weren't responding to individual personalities but were responding to something much deeper, much more real in each other that was collective, something that we shared—a commonality, really. There was a tremendous sense of listening and awareness that was much greater and much more vast than anything I've ever experienced. And with that experience came a sense that there was just one body in the room.¹

Jane Metcalfe, London



OF COURSE, FOR MOST OF US IN THE CONTEMPORARY WEST, the idea of becoming part of a “group mind” hardly sounds inviting. In a postmodern culture that has elevated individuality, independence, and autonomy to near-sacred status, the thought of a “collective consciousness” is likely to send many of us running for the nearest mountaintop. What *Star Trek* fan would disagree that of all the formidable foes faced by Captain Picard and the *Next Generation* crew, none was as intimidating as the “collective entity” known as “The Borg”? Traveling from planet to planet, “assimilating” every intelligent species it encountered into its own ever-expanding communal mind, this archenemy of interplanetary biodiversity was not only a cleverly imagined cosmic villain but also a clear reflection of our cultural wariness around anything resembling group consciousness. A wariness that’s not unwarranted.

From the witch hunts of the Middle Ages to the great social experiments of the past century, history has shown us more than enough evidence of the horrors that groups can perpetrate when

demonstrated that the forces that drive collectives to bad and sometimes perilous decisions were alive and well, even in groups driven by more wholesome aspirations. In cohesive decision-making groups of all kinds, Janis found, our most basic social drives for belonging and acceptance become magnified, giving rise to an unhealthy climate of conformity in which important questions never get asked.

There may, however, be more to our cultural paranoia around groups than meets the eye. For, upon closer examination, our resistance to being part of a collective reveals itself to be rooted in something more fundamental than a fear of coming to a misguided decision, or even of being swept into dangerous collective madness. Is not our most basic fear of collectives a fear of losing our individuality, our autonomy—and thus, our freedom—in the group? As the Borg story makes clear, it is hard for most of us to imagine a collective consciousness that does not inherently suppress our independence, our liberty to think and act for ourselves. And while at first glance this fear seems well-founded, it does beg an important question: How independent are we really?

Insightful observers, from anthropologist Gregory Bateson to Gautama the Buddha, have been telling us for millennia that despite our perception of ourselves as “independent thinkers,” most of us rarely, if ever, have a truly independent thought pass through our heads.

In describing culture as “an ecology of mind,” Bateson illuminated the fact that our thinking is, on the deepest level, conditioned by the narratives of the social environment in which we live. As consciousness researcher Chris Bache explains it, “While individuality is extremely precious and extraordinarily important from an evolutionary perspective, if you look carefully at what that individuality is, you find that it’s an open system which reflects

“What’s happening in these settings is that you’re actually bringing up *the new*. You’re bringing up the next level.”

Juanita Brown

mobilized behind a destructive ideology. And in case Nazism and Stalinism hadn’t struck quite close enough to home for those of us in the democratic West, in 1972, Yale psychologist Irving Janis sounded a wake-up call to us all with his landmark study on the dangers of “groupthink.” Analyzing some of the major U.S. foreign policy fiascos of the mid-twentieth century, Janis



A FLOCK OF ANGELS

the larger cultural and psychological history of the species.” Then there’s the evidence from developmental psychology that even our minds themselves only develop in relationship with other minds, that if left in isolation during our formative years, we would end up with but a fraction of our current cognitive and emotional capacity. Add to that the growing body of scientific research which suggests that our minds are not “locked” in our brains at all, but are actually fields that constantly interact with one another to create larger social fields with a tremendous influence on our behavior, and our fear of losing our independence begins to look like a bit of a red herring.

In light of these findings, the issue, then, does not seem to be so much whether it’s a good thing to be part of a group mind. If what this research is telling us is true, in some sense, for better or for worse, we already are. From this perspective, the real question facing us is: What sort of group mind are we a part of? Fortunately, in this new emerging collective consciousness, a radical alternative to the dangers of “groupthink” seems to be afoot. “This type of collective is very different than the old way of thinking about the collective, in which the individuals are subordinated or diminished,” Otto Scharmer observes. “In this new type of collective, the individual is actually enhanced. One has the experience that this way of operating actually connects one to one’s highest future potential.” According to Scharmer and others who have experienced the emergence of this collective mind, autonomy and individuality, rather than being suppressed, are actually strengthened by participation in the group. Tom Callanan, a program officer at the Fetzer Institute, explains: “My experience with these groups is that the stronger the collective wisdom present, the stronger my sense of unique individuality—only now it’s *within* the context of the whole rather than *separate from* the whole.”

The Blue Angels probably come as close as humans get to flocking. Flying in precision formation at supersonic speeds, these sky-dancing Navy stunt pilots have been inspiring American fairground goers since 1946 with their breathtaking display of grace and coordination. And in this case, it’s a grace hard won.

Every winter the Blue Angels leave their spouses and families behind and head out to the desert together for two and a half months. But theirs is no vision quest. It’s a training mission—with a uniquely collective twist. “It takes a long time to get everyone in sync, to get into a rhythm together,” Commander Russ Bartlett explains. “So, we’re out here to learn the way each other thinks, learn their idiosyncrasies, learn everything about the way we operate so that when we fly together, they can tell by my intonation and the way I’m flying the jet exactly what I’m going to do with it. We fly so close together that we have to execute everything simultaneously.” And in this case, “close together” means *close together*. In their tightest formation, the Blue Angels overlap their wings until, as Bartlett explained, “my wingtip is twelve inches from my buddy’s head.”

In preparation for this high-stakes journey, before each flight the pilots spend forty-five minutes sitting together, eyes closed, listening to Bartlett recite the commands he will use during the flight—an exercise that at least one researcher has compared to the entrainment rituals practiced by hunting tribes. Although Bartlett declares that there is nothing “cosmic” about the synergy that allows these Angels to fly as one, his own descriptions seem to suggest that there might be more to the story than “rote repetition” and “muscle memory” could account for. “Sometimes you have these shows where everybody is on top of their game. Everybody’s flowing together. The maneuvers are coming off well, one after another, and nobody has to get out of the formation for any reason. Things go like clockwork. And when you come back, you just go ‘Wow! That was awesome.’”

A CALL TO DIALOGUE

When someone else spoke, it felt as if I was speaking. And when I did speak, it was almost egoless, like it wasn't really me. It was as if something larger than me was speaking through me. The atmosphere in the room felt like we were in a river, like the air got thicker. And in that space we started to create. We started to say things that we had never thought before and started to let ourselves be influenced in ways and think in ways that we had never thought before. It was almost as if when someone would speak, something would become illuminated, something would be revealed, and that would open up something else to be revealed.²

Beth Jandernoa, Essex, MA



START ASKING PEOPLE TO EXPLAIN COLLECTIVE consciousness in scientific terms, and it won't be long before you hear something to do with the "quantum vacuum" and the "zero-point field." It's no surprise, perhaps, that the latest scientific theories to have infiltrated the New Age seminar circuit would have found their way into a field as open to theorizing as collective mind. But there is a connection between physics and the group mind that is perhaps a bit less esoteric. His name was David Bohm.

A renowned physicist with a passion for inquiry, Bohm is probably best known for his contributions to plasma theory and his widely celebrated dialogues with the great Indian mystic J. Krishnamurti. But toward the end of his life, Bohm's attention became increasingly drawn to a potential he saw for a new kind of conversation that he felt held "the possibility of transforming not only the relationship between people, but even more, the very nature of consciousness in which these relationships arise." He called it, simply, "dialogue."

For Bohm, all the problems of human affairs could be traced to the "incoherence of our thought," and particularly, of our collective thought. Looking at the way our unexamined cultural presuppositions, beliefs, and ideas prevent us from coming together in meaningful exchange on matters of importance, he proposed a new mode of inquiry that would both reveal this incoherence and point the way beyond it. Drawing from the Greek *dialogos*, which

he defined as "meaning moving through," Bohm explained that in this new form of dialogue, "a new kind of mind . . . begins to come into being which is based on the development of a common meaning that is constantly transforming in the process of the dialogue. People are no longer primarily in opposition, nor can they be said to be interacting, rather they are participating in this pool of common meaning, which is capable of constant development and change."

The basic idea behind Bohm's dialogues was simple. Gather a group of between twenty and forty people into a circle and have them talk to each other—about almost anything. Through following a few basic, if challenging, instructions—like suspending one's strongly held ideas, listening closely to others, and speaking authentically—Bohm felt that the group would enter into a deeper current of engagement, one that would begin to reveal the unexamined assumptions behind our thinking and propel the group into a higher level of congruence and a new collective understanding. But for Bohm, the significance of this dialogue pointed far beyond the experience of those in the group. By bringing "a new kind of coherent, collective intelligence" to bear on the very thought structures underlying culture itself, he felt that this inquiry "might well prove vital to the future health of our civilization."

Bohm's ideas on dialogue began to take shape in the early

eighties, and for the eight years leading up to his death in 1992, he made a considerable effort to demonstrate and interest others in the potential he was seeing. During that time, many reported having profound experiences of the kind of collective opening he was pointing to, and a small movement began to form around his work. Bohm was certainly not the first modern thinker to have seen the potential for a collective mind. In the twentieth century, such visionaries as Sri Aurobindo, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Alice Bailey, Rudolf Steiner, and M. Scott Peck had all spoken of this extraordinary potential for the emergence of conscious collectives. But it was in Bohm's work that this emerging vision would first begin to capture the attention of a broader, more secular audience, thanks in large part to the interest of a few key figures, foremost among them the renowned management consultant Peter Senge.

It was 1990 when Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* rocked the business world with its groundbreaking translation of systems theory into hands-on strategies for a corporate learning revolution. In addition to introducing a radical new way of thinking about management, Senge also devoted considerable attention in the book to the merits of Bohmian dialogue as a method of "team learning." As the book's sales skyrocketed into the hundreds of thousands, this late-formed idea from a thoughtful physicist began to find an unexpected audience in the boardrooms and conference halls of American big business. And within a few years, the demand for skilled practitioners and serious study of this largely unexplored discipline had reached a threshold. Armed with a sizable grant from the Kellogg Foundation, William Isaacs, one of Senge's colleagues at MIT's Sloan School of Management, launched the MIT Dialogue Project in 1993.

The goal of the project was straightforward: to explore the potential applications of this new "social technology" across a broad range of practical settings. Over the next several years, Isaacs and his colleagues did just that. One group brought together leaders in Colorado healthcare management. Another worked with citizen groups in urban settings. Isaacs himself took dialogue into the heart of a union/management battle in Kansas City. And at the core of the project was a practitioner group that was brought together to experiment—on themselves.

As Mitch Saunders, who was part of that group, describes it, "We saw ourselves as a group of guinea pigs, and we tried everything we could imagine to explore the dimensions of the field, both at the individual and collective levels. And this was before the field had been defined at all."

Testing the limits of Bohm's ideas, and experimenting with their own, during the three-year life of the project these pioneers of conscious conversation began to chart the terrain of collective thinking in a way that no one previously had. In the course of their research, they learned a lot about the need for a variety of approaches to meet the diverse demands of real-world situations. Some settings, particularly those involving strongly opposing sides, demanded more structure and facilitation. Others, where the inquiry was more open-ended and exploratory in nature, called for a less directed approach. But across all the modes of their research, there was at least one finding that remained universal: when people came together with a willingness to look beyond their preconceptions, something remarkable came into being between them. As Saunders describes it, "In almost any session, you could count on it happening. That magic in the middle of the circle was becoming a reliable feature of life. So much so that our fascination began to shift from the emergence of that magic

"We're absolutely convinced that we're experiencing the beginnings of an evolutionary shift that's greater than anything we've ever experienced . . . as a society."

Bill Veltrop

toward the question of what to do with it. How could we use that phenomenon, where everybody drops into a collective mind, to take the next step and move into collective *leadership*? Is there some way this kind of consciousness could serve the evolution of something more coherent, to give shape to what's emerging?"

Saunders is not alone in his question. Indeed, as the field has expanded far beyond those initial experiments in dialogue into ever new domains over the past decade, the question of how our higher collective capacities can be used to our collective advantage has been coming increasingly to the fore. In the case of one organization, it has become the focal point for an initiative that is attempting to mobilize this still-fragmented field into nothing less than a movement.

A COLLECTIVE WISDOM INITIATIVE

Then another person stepped forward, and another, and another, telling their stories and offering their experiences and questions. I got this sense that there was a stew that we were making together. There was this cauldron in the center of the circle. . . . From the outside it might have looked like just a group of people talking. But it was totally magical. Toward the end, I would say something, and somebody across the room would say, “You know, I was thinking the same thing.”³

Tom Callanan, Kalamazoo, MI



ANYONE WHO HASN'T BEEN LIVING IN A CAVE for the past fifteen years has probably noticed the surge of interest in mind/body healing that has recently swept the West, and particularly the U.S. From PBS's immensely popular "Healing and the Mind" series with Bill Moyers to the superstar status attained by Deepak Chopra and Andrew Weil, we've seen the field of mind/body medicine gain a firm foothold in the modern psyche seemingly overnight. But what hasn't yet made it onto *Oprah* is the unique, catalytic, behind-the-scenes role that the Kalamazoo-based Fetzer Institute has played in this explosion. And, more importantly, what collective intelligence has to do with it.

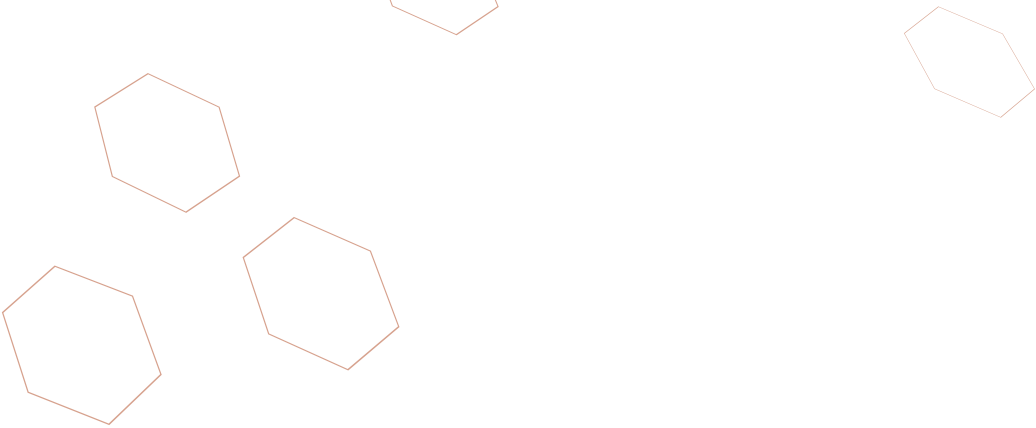
A small, endowed foundation with a spiritual mission, Fetzer has, since its inception in 1962, earned a reputation as one of the primary sponsors of research into the upper reaches of human potential. But unlike most foundations, which issue grants to fund individual projects, Fetzer is what's known as an "operating foundation," which means it takes a more hands-on—and more collective—approach. As program officer Tom Callanan explains it, "We proactively go out into a field and ask, 'How can we help advance this field?' We pull the leaders in the field together, and then instead of competitively giving grants to the best projects, we say, 'We're going to support a project to advance the field. How are we going to work together to do that?'"

As part of its mission to bring thought leaders together, in the mid-nineties Fetzer built a small conference center in southwestern Michigan, where it began to host a series of think tanks with the leading luminaries in mind/body health. The goal, Callanan

explains, was "to create a container where breakthrough thinking could happen." But as the discussions got under way, what soon became clear was that it takes more than great thinkers to make a think tank. As Callanan put it, "Good conversation doesn't just involve getting the best people in a room and saying 'Let's talk.'" Occasionally, an unexpected intimacy and vulnerability would emerge between the participants. But often the groups struggled to find cohesion. At times, something magical would occur, and a remarkable collective creativity would be unleashed. But at other times, the dialogues ended up being little more than a sharing of diverse ideas and opinions. They had all the ingredients of a good think tank. But for a foundation whose goal was to "support the cutting edge of individual and social transformation," the results were too unpredictable.

It was out of this recognition that in early 2000, Fetzer launched a research project to begin to look for ways to increase the effectiveness of its dialogues and to deepen its understanding of the dynamics of group wisdom. What was this experience of "magic" that emerged when groups were at their best? What was the mysterious intelligence that often seemed to accompany it? And more importantly, what were the conditions that would make it more likely to occur? With these questions as a leaping off point, a handful of researchers began to pull together the fragments of a field still in its infancy, to see what had been learned by those who had already been working with group intelligence and how they could be encouraged to join forces to move the field forward.

It wasn't long before they realized they had gotten more than



they had bargained for. Alan Briskin, an organizational consultant with a long history of working in groups, was one of the initial researchers on the project. As he explains it, “We began by simply seeking out people who we thought might be able to inform us about these questions, and the response was so enthusiastic that people not only welcomed the chance to talk about this, but they directed us to increasing numbers of people in the field. So the project that we had initially imagined would involve talking to maybe eight or nine people grew to over sixty interviews.”

The findings of that project were eventually published in a small, spiral-bound 2001 book entitled: *Centered on the Edge: Mapping a Field of Collective Intelligence and Spiritual Wisdom*. And according to Callanan, along the way, Fetzer learned enough about collective wisdom for its mind/body healing think tank “to become one of the collective wisdom engines of the mind/body health field.” For Fetzer, however, this initial foray would become but a catalyst for further exploration. Having come across a field that was ripe for pulling together, the research team, headed by consultant Sheryl Erickson, proposed a new, more comprehensive project that would not only document the body of knowledge that was surfacing but also would serve as a self-organizing structure around which the field itself could begin to take shape and move forward. Excited by what their initial inquiry had opened up, the foundation's board agreed, and the Collective Wisdom Initiative was born.

Visit collectivewisdominitiative.org and you'll find a wildly configured conglomeration of information on topics from collective intelligence to collective resonance to group synergy to group creativity. Go through one “doorway” and you'll land on a long string of “personal profiles” of people who work in the field. People like Jim Rough, whose pioneering “Dynamic Facilitation” process of dialogue has generated phenomenal breakthroughs in the most

entrenched disputes. Or Tom Atlee, whose initiation into collective intelligence during the Great Peace March of 1986 inspired him to found the Co-Intelligence Institute, a networking and research organization committed to tapping group wisdom for social and political change. Click on another “doorway” and you'll find a series of interviews with people about their spontaneous experiences of collective wisdom and “flow”—from a Marine sergeant's description of the deep brotherhood he experienced with his platoon to a police officer's account of the “collective resonance” that enveloped her and all the other participants at a heated crime scene. On the “Concepts” page, you'll come across research papers and essays with

“What's new today in the world is that now the first and most accessible gateway into deeper spiritual experience is not individual meditation but group work.”

Otto Scharmer

titles like “Group Magic: An Inquiry into Experiences of Collective Resonance” and “Exploring Essence: Collective Wisdom and Group Experience.” Under “Social Applications,” you'll learn of an experiment in dialogue that brought together leaders on both sides of the abortion debate—with some surprising results.

Taking in the site as a whole, what becomes undeniably clear is that this phenomenon is real. It is happening. And it is more widespread than one could have imagined. What started as one foundation's attempt to increase its understanding of “group magic” has become a nexus for a thriving, connecting, and rapidly expanding community of individuals for whom furthering the advance of this new collective potentiality has become nothing less than a life's mission. Through their efforts, a growing body of knowledge is emerging about the mysterious ways in which collective wisdom works and how it can be cultivated, enhanced, and directed toward the greater good.

THE MAGIC IN THE MIDDLE

*A remarkable thing happened that evening in the second round of conversation. It was an almost indescribable feeling—like another being was in the room. I guess we could call it the collective, but that doesn't do it justice. It was palpable in an almost physical way. I could feel its energy and I could feel a commitment to it—a kind of love for it. People sensed it and spoke up about it. One person described the 'being' as glue. He said, 'It's what joins us together—a larger whole that we always knew was there, but never really appreciated.' And this 'being' had a momentum of its own, so I didn't need to take responsibility for making something happen. It was happening by itself. I could just run along behind it.*⁴

Emmett Miller, M.D., Nevada City, CA



I THINK IT REALLY COMES DOWN TO GRACE,” Juanita Brown explains. “You can set the conditions that make it more likely for that ‘magic in the middle’ to happen, but you can’t predict that it will happen. I do think, though, that you can increase your chances quite substantially by being highly intentional in setting up the preconditions.” For Brown and many others who’ve dedicated their lives to working with groups, identifying what exactly makes collectives tick has become a primary point of focus. Some, like Brown, have developed elaborate sets of guidelines for creating just the right preconditions for group magic to emerge. Others seem to prefer a more open-ended approach in which a facilitator follows his or her instincts in guiding the group into greater depth. But while no two approaches seem to concur on every element of what makes group magic happen, among collective consciousness researchers one hears a lot of talk of shared intention, trust, vulnerability, not knowing, authentic participation, interest, and perhaps most fundamental of all, listening.

“It’s a different kind of listening than we’re used to,” describes Anne Dosher, a community development specialist and an elder in the growing “women’s circle” movement. “It’s listening for a deeper meaning, knowing that out there in the field there is something wise to be learned, and listening for when that begins to be spoken, listening for the shift in meaning.” Otto Scharmer observes: “This type of listening focuses on the essential self of another. It’s that part in the other person that is connected with his or her highest future potential that you can help to come into the present moment when you focus your attention and intention

on it.” By whatever words it’s described, what’s clear is that by some means or other, an unusual quality of shared attention must be evoked in a group for our higher collective potentials to come into being.

In attempting to cultivate or evoke this quality of deep attention, many group facilitators have emphasized the importance of creating a trusting and supportive environment, in which diversity is honored above all else and every voice is given an equal hearing. In the midst of this “safe space”—so rare in our competitive world—individuals find themselves free to express an unusual authenticity and vulnerability, which seems to break down social walls and allow for a remarkable coming together. But among those who work extensively with groups, there are also those who feel that what is more important than creating any particular atmosphere is bringing the group together in a common interest or aspiration that focuses their attention on something higher or larger than themselves. In this common higher focus, they report, individuals naturally seem to forget about their personal agendas and concerns, the group’s attention unites, and unexpected potentials emerge.

Both of these approaches no doubt hold their value, but it does seem that the latter might ultimately prove to have more real-world applicability. For while, in grappling with life’s stickier dilemmas, we may not always be able to create a “safe space” where everyone feels personally acknowledged, heard, or valued, it is at least plausible that we might be able to identify common purposes capable of capturing our collective attention and interest long enough to open the doors to group wisdom.

The Soul of Teamwork

by Ross Robertson



"Basketball is a sport that involves the subtle interweaving of players at full speed to the point where they are thinking and moving as one."

Phil Jackson, *Sacred Hoops*

Los Angeles Lakers coach Phil Jackson—by percentage (.738) the winningest coach in NBA history—is renowned for his ability to turn megastars into team players. And his secret is spiritual. "The most effective way to forge a winning team," he writes in *Sacred Hoops: Spiritual Lessons of a Hardwood Warrior*, "is to call on the players' need to connect with something larger than themselves." Blending principles from Zen Buddhism and the teachings of the Lakota Sioux with his experience from over twenty years as a professional player and coach, Jackson led Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls to three consecutive titles not once, but twice, from '91 to '93 and '96 to '98. Then he did it yet again with the Lakers and Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant, from '00 to '02. Before Jackson arrived, both the Bulls and the Lakers were teams that, despite the presence of breathtaking talent, had failed to achieve the harmony needed to win championships. Yet under his guidance, schooled in his characteristically unselfish, team-oriented style, they went on to record-breaking success. So what does this remarkable head coach have to say about the heightened group consciousness that can awaken when teams come together beyond the divisive forces of the ego? *WIE* spoke with him last December, as the Lakers were coming off a ten-game winning streak, to find out.

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT?: In *Sacred Hoops* you write about "the energy that's unleashed when players put their egos aside and work toward a common goal." You also refer to "a powerful group intelligence [that] emerges that is greater than the coach's ideas or those of any individual on the team." What is that powerful energy and intelligence that emerges in a collective when the ego is set aside? How is it experienced?

PHIL JACKSON: When a player surrenders his self-interest for the greater good, his fullest gifts as an athlete are manifested. He's not trying to force a shot, or do something that's not in his repertoire of basketball moves, or impose his personality on the team. It's funny—by playing *within* his natural abilities, he activates a higher potential *beyond* his abilities, a higher potential for the team. It changes things for everybody. All of a sudden, the rest of the team can react instinctively to what that player is doing. And it just kind of mushrooms out from there—the whole begins to add up to more than the sum of its parts. We see this a lot in critical situations. When players are totally focused on the team goal, their efforts can create chain reactions. It's as if they become totally connected to one another, in sync with one another, like five fingers on one hand. When one finger moves, the rest of them all react to it.

For example, we have a ballplayer on this team who loves to chase balls for steals on defense. If he's worried about scoring points at the other end of the floor, or worried about what happened on the last play, he won't do it. But when he commits himself on defense, his teammates react to his natural opportunism and come to cover for him, because they know intuitively what he's going to be doing. Everybody is activated, and good things start happening. It's interesting—the other players are *consciously* aware of the fact that they're anticipating their teammate's behavior. Somehow, mysteriously, they just know the timing is right. They simply feel something out ahead of themselves and make their move. It's not an out-of-body experience or anything like that. They just feel the tremendous pull of an activity, of what has to happen next. At that moment, they're

called to activate themselves. I think that's what players mean when they say "I had to go; I had to commit." It doesn't even occur to them that they shouldn't.

WIE: What does it take to bring about this shift, this conscious shift of attention from the concerns of the individual to the success of the team? Superstars, especially, tend to have big egos and to want to stand out from the group. How have you managed to convince them to, as you put it, "surrender the 'me' for the 'we'?"

JACKSON: Well, one has to demonstrate that if a person does this, they're rewarded for it, because the team succeeds. The fact is, selflessness is the soul of teamwork. We have a practical rule in our game: when you stop the basketball, when it resides in your presence and you hold it for longer than two counts, you've destroyed our rhythm. When the ball is in your hands, you become the focal point. And when *you* become the focus, our system breaks down. It's that simple. Suddenly the defense can catch up, and the spacing is destroyed. So it's the unselfish players—players who are more interested in reading what's happening and keeping the flow going on the floor—who are the most valuable players that you have. They may only be averaging seven points a game, four points a game, or whatever, but their ability to play in a selfless manner gives the team its real opportunities. In those individuals, the power of *we* instead

CHAOS, COMPLEXITY, AND THE EMERGENCE OF HIVE MIND

There was a high-frequency energy being passed between people, and I could sort of see into people's minds. And there was a period of time where the whole group had a very discontinuous awakened experience, where we could basically perceive the same reality together but express it in each of our own unique ways. It was almost as if we were suddenly surrounded by this ambient energy that allowed each person to leap, inside of themselves, into a much vaster way of being in expressing themselves and interacting with one another.⁵

Jaime Campbell, Santa Fe, NM



ATEMPTING TO UNDERSTAND A PHENOMENON as mysterious as collective wisdom, it turns out, is a bit like trying to understand God. Although everyone kind of knows that their concepts will only take them so far, it doesn't stop anyone from putting forth their best guess—with confidence. If you ask a handful of collective wisdom researchers what exactly is happening in these experiences, you'll end up with a list of explanations that run the gamut from the scientific to the sublime.

At one end of the spectrum, there is what we might call the “additive model,” which suggests that collective intelligence is simply the compounding of our individual intelligences. Get a few individual minds together, the reasoning goes, and you've got a group mind. Two heads are better than one. And three are better than two. Robert Kenny explains: “Sometimes people who have these experiences simply say that a collection of individual minds kind of aggregate in some form or combine and become a group mind, a kind of new entity with its own particular characteristics.”

At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who suggest that by coming together in a receptive state, we are simply making ourselves available to a deeper collective consciousness that is already there. Tom Callanan states, “I believe that collective consciousness already exists, and our individual consciousnesses are nodules that are poking up out of that like little islands. We imagine that we're separate, so we go about trying to build bridges across the gaps between our islands. But through conversation you actually sink to the level of collective consciousness where you're already connected. There's no need for the bridges.”

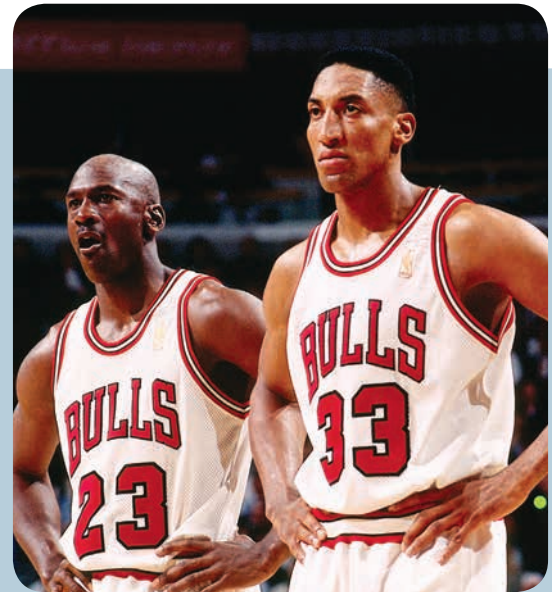
Between these two poles are countless other theories and subtheories attempting to make sense out of this mysterious

phenomenon, including at least a handful of models rooted in the “new science.” But none seem to have conferred legitimacy to this otherwise esoteric field like the new sciences of chaos and complexity have. “I would say that collective intelligence is a systemic phenomenon. It's a nonlinear dynamic,” Juanita Brown explains. “If you think of it in terms of living systems or chaos theory, it's like the collective intelligence emerges as the system connects to itself in a variety of diverse and creative ways. If you are collectively focusing attention around a real-life question, *and* you intentionally increase the cross-pollination between individuals—the synapses, let's call them, in the social brain—the likelihood

Despite our perception of being “independent thinkers” most of us rarely, if ever, have a truly independent thought pass through our heads.

of collective insight emerging increases. So it's a product of the systemic interactions, not simply the product of one plus one.”

In the emerging science of complexity theory, the notion that wholes are greater than the sum of their parts is no longer a matter of poetic fancy. Studying the complex behavior of beehives and ant colonies, cities and economies, researchers are discovering that when individuals combine forces, higher-order collective properties emerge that cannot be explained by studying the individuals in isolation. A close look at an ant colony or beehive reveals a remarkably orderly and surprisingly complex society—surprising, that is, given the fact that ants and bees have brains that are less than one-millionth the size of a human brain. Does that mean that they are all just working automatons taking orders



from the more intelligent “queen”? Not likely. It turns out that the queen herself is equally unintelligent and has no executive power whatsoever. “Mother” would perhaps be a better name for her, as her anointed role owes entirely to her maternal capacities.

How, then, does a hive decide to swarm and go in search of a new home? And moreover, how does it choose its new home once it gets there? How does an ant colony know how to organize itself into an elaborate city with the garbage dump in one place, the cemetery in another, and the dwelling units wisely as far away from both as possible? The answer is what has become known in complexity theory as “hive mind.” But the implications may not be as esoteric as they sound. *Wired* editor Kevin Kelly, writing in his 1997 book *Out of Control*, states that the general scientific view is that this emergent “mind” has a “technical, rational explanation” and is not a product of “mysticism or alchemy.” To most scientists in this field, the simple explanation for emergent complexity is that when you get a large enough group of individuals following the same few simple instructions, complex patterns can emerge that begin to look like higher intelligence—or at least intelligent behavior. But is there actually anything like a thinking mind driving the hive’s behavior? And moreover, does the hive mind have anything resembling self-awareness? Does it know that it’s knowing? In the eyes of most scientists, the answer to all of the above is “no.” For them, the hive mind is simply a metaphor. There is no ghost in the collective machine.

So, despite the obvious analogies that beg to be drawn between hive mind and human collective intelligence, it does seem worth questioning whether in fact the group mind that emerges between conscious, self-reflective humans can ultimately be accounted for by the prevailing theories of emergent complexity alone. It is of course plausible that the awakening of collective intelligence experienced between human beings is in fact something like the hive mind made conscious. But there are at least a few scientists who see something else at work in these experiences.

continued from page 67

of me is more advanced. They feel more responsibility to the group, and that’s why you’re better off with maybe two very, very talented and perhaps selfish people on the team than five or six or seven. That’s why teams that are less talented but more selfless and group-oriented can have more success. You might say the San Antonio Spurs were a successful team last year because of that ability that they had. The Bulls were a very successful team because of that ability. And the Lakers, when I first started watching them in the late nineties, were not successful—even though they were very, very talented—because they couldn’t do that.

You see, the real reason the Bulls won six NBA championships in nine years is that we plugged into the power of *oneness* instead of the power of one man. Sure, we had Michael Jordan, and you have to credit his talent. But at the other end of the spectrum, if players 9, 10, 11, and 12 are unhappy because Michael takes twenty-five shots a game, their negativity is going to undermine everything. It doesn’t matter how good individual players are—they can’t compete with a team that is awake and aware and trusts each other. People don’t understand that. Most of the time, everybody’s so concerned about not being disrespected. But you have to check that attitude at the door—that defensiveness, that protection of your own image and reputation. Everybody needs help in this game. Everybody’s going to get dunked on. We’re all susceptible to falling down and being exposed. But when we lose our fear of that, and look to each other, then vulnerability turns into strength, and we can take responsibility for our place in the larger context of the team and embrace a vision in which the group imperative takes precedence over personal glory.

THE FIELD AND THE FLOCK

In last night's discussion, we all went into new territory. It was as if a profound unified structure in consciousness descended down into us and between us, and at the same time mysteriously seemed to be functioning within its own dimension. No one could be said to be creating this, but everyone who gave themselves to its expression became animated through its explosive power. As we established ourselves firmly in this liberated field, extraordinary things began to happen. One woman who was in a struggling emotional state transformed into a joyful radiance. Another woman who was sincerely concerned by world issues shed tears as she collided with the profound meaning in what was happening.⁶

Patrick Bryson, London



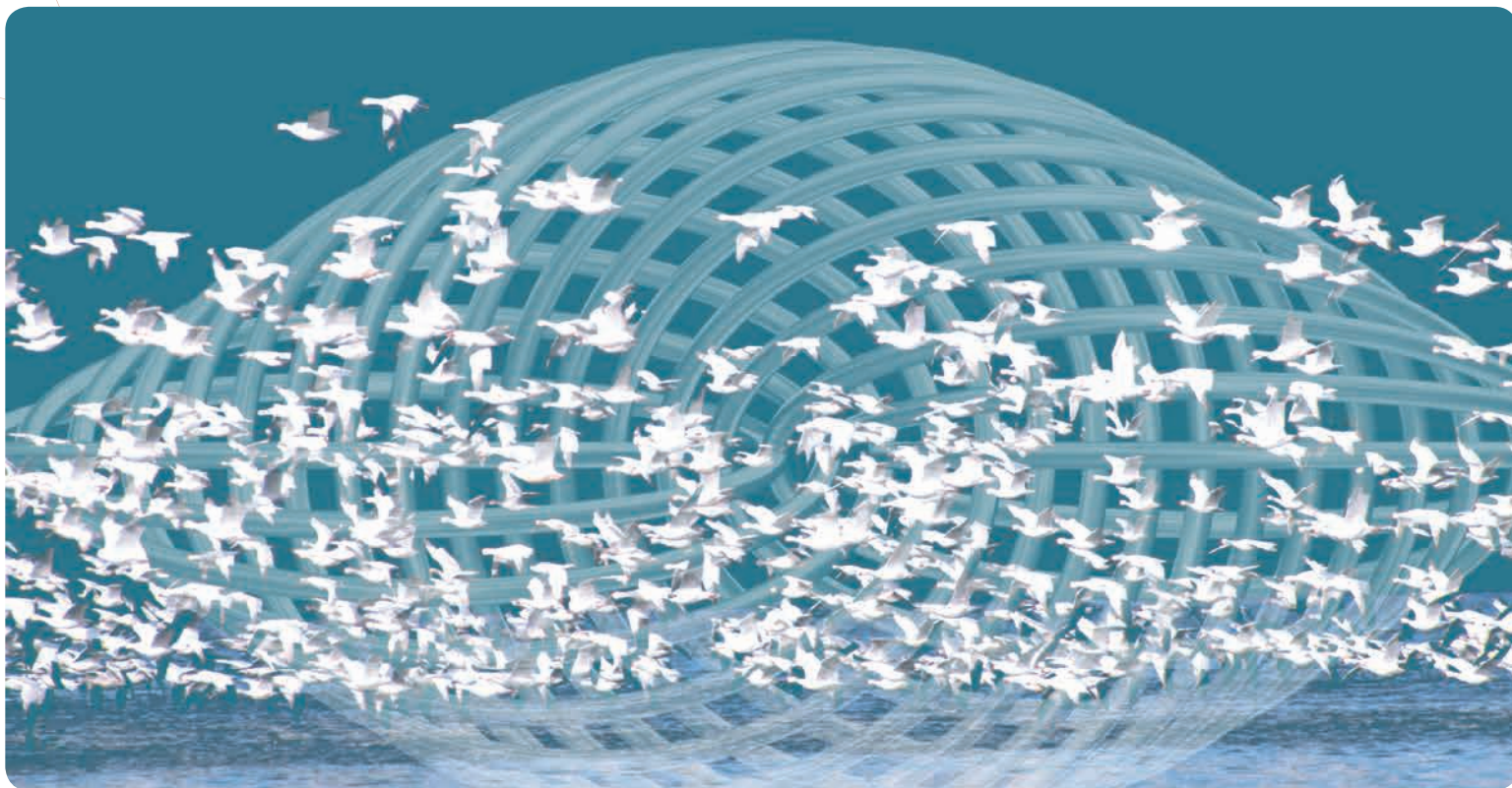
I F SCIENTIFIC MODELS OF EMERGENT COMPLEXITY ultimately feel a bit too reductionistic to explain collective intelligence among humans, according to biologist Rupert Sheldrake, they don't really account for the group behavior of most other animals either. "When you look at a flock of birds flying, you can get an entire flock of hundreds of birds suddenly changing direction, suddenly banking, turning almost at the same time. They all know where to go without bumping into each other. This is more complicated than you might think, because it happens too quickly to explain it just in terms of the birds looking at their nearest neighbors." Sheldrake explains that early attempts to create complexity-based computer models that simulated flock behavior, though initially impressive, ultimately failed because they tried to reduce the flock phenomenon to a few simple instructions followed by each individual. "By basing their models on nearest-neighbor interactions, they produced animations that looked a bit like flocks, but were biologically naïve. The best state-of-the-art models of flock behavior are 'field models' where you treat the whole flock as if it's in a field, the field of the whole group. This is what I think of as a morphic field, a field that organizes systems where the whole is more than the sum of the parts."

For most who have witnessed the emergence of collective intelligence, Sheldrake's notion of group fields seems to have some resonance. Indeed, one of the most common ways people describe the experience of collective consciousness is as an increasing awareness of being in a field together, a field of knowing and

seeing that unifies the group. But what makes this notion of collective fields particularly intriguing, in light of collective wisdom experiences, is the way it seems to account for one of the most remarkable phenomena of group experience: the sense that, once it emerges, the collective mind seems to take on a life of its own.

Central to Sheldrake's theory of morphic resonance is the notion that collective fields, once created, should begin to impact other groups engaged in similar activity around the world. His well-publicized research seems to demonstrate convincingly that once one individual or group breaks through to new knowledge or capacities, it becomes easier for others to access that same knowledge or capacity. And, in speaking with practitioners of collective wisdom, again and again one hears stories that seem to confirm Sheldrake's theory.

Jerry Sinnamon, a Connecticut hospital administrator faced with the challenge of transforming his failing institution, described how, through a series of dialogue-type workshops with hospital staff, a new collective vision for the hospital progressively developed—despite the fact that each workshop comprised an entirely different group of people. "It was almost as if the same group was meeting month after month, when in fact there was no overlap of attendees between workshops whatsoever," Sinnamon describes. Regardless of the individuals involved (and there were a thousand in total who participated over the course of two years), each successive group seemed to pick up where the previous one had left off, moving the inquiry forward. Sinnamon recalls, "It was as if



the collective consciousness of the organization was building this new vision for what the hospital could become. And as a result of this process, we not only rebuilt our reputation in the local community, but we ended up actually gaining an *international* reputation as a healing place.”

Among the researchers and practitioners of collective intelligence I spoke with for this article, such phenomena seemed to be almost a given. Dialogue pioneer Sue Miller Hurst described a

“When groups get really good at this, it can lead to very fast decision making, because you’re drawing on intuition, as opposed to a linear process of rationality and discursive logic.”

Robert Kenny

series of workshops she led in which each new three-day gathering seemed to begin where the previous one had ended, in spite of the fact that each workshop was attended by a completely new group of participants. “It’s as if there was a hideout who’d been at the last one, who came there and said, ‘Okay, you guys. This is what we’re going to do.’” Chris Bache described a similar phenomenon in his university courses, the development of what he called “course mind.” According to Bache, a kind of learning

field develops around each course that, over the years, makes it easier and easier for students to grasp the material. “I find that every few years I have to redesign my entire course, because the students are starting out at a higher level of understanding and receptivity. They get it faster. Now, this could be caused by improved pedagogical delivery or by cultural shifts that are taking place in the background. But I’m convinced that one of the things that’s happening is that the learning which previous students have undertaken actually makes it easier for subsequent students to pick up these same concepts. So you can move through things more quickly.”

As mind-bending as these stories are from a conventional scientific standpoint, for Sheldrake they are not in the least bit surprising. In fact, when I described this phenomenon to him, rather than offer an in-depth explanation, he simply responded, “Yes, that’s the sort of phenomenon you’d expect with morphic resonance. Theoretically, this kind of thing is what my hypothesis actually predicts.” And while the existence of such phenomena is not ultimately a proof of Sheldrake’s field theory itself, it does seem to suggest that whatever this collective mind is, it appears to exist independent of the ongoing participation of the individuals who gave birth to it. And that in itself is a mystery worth pondering, a mystery with far-reaching implications.

A NEW CONTEXT FOR TRANSFORMATION

"Atom-splitting" is too mild a description for the sheer force of this collective consciousness. Not a gross physical sense of force, but a force of intelligence that no words can encompass. It permeated every possible space within the small room we were meeting in. It said "no" to separation; it engulfed any insistence that we need to produce anything to make this happen. It is us. It is our life on the edge of creation. Our minds, hearts, voices—all were one in this, united in a vortex of boundless positivity, on a mission to evolve by any means necessary.⁷

Jody Paterson, London

WHILE THE JURY'S STILL OUT ON WHAT EXACTLY collective wisdom is, one thing no one seems to be debating is the fact that it is a powerful force for change. Throughout the literature of this emerging field are countless testimonials to the awesome power of collective mind and its mysterious capacity to transform the individuals and groups it touches. And among those who have experienced it, the conviction it evokes is nothing short of religious.

First, there is the impact on the individuals involved. "A year of therapy could not do what being held in a group can do," Anne Doshier observes. "I've seen miracles happen. I've seen people being born again. Once they were given an opportunity to be in a circle where they were held to be responsible, they became healed and connected and able to find a purpose for their lives." For Doshier and many others, the discovery of collective consciousness is not simply a new and helpful complement to the spiritual path. It is the very foundation for individual transformation. As Otto Scharmer sees it, "What's new today in the world is that now the first and most accessible gateway into deeper spiritual experience is not individual meditation but group work. What happens is that, in quite a spontaneous way, you tap into this deeper process of awareness and consciousness as a group. And *then*, once you

COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS ACROSS THE AGES

3RD MILLENNIUM B.C.E.

"Meet together, speak together, let your minds be of one accord, as the Gods of old, being of one mind, accepted their share of the sacrifice. May your counsel be common, your assembly common, common the mind, and the thoughts of these united. . . . Let your aims be common, and your hearts of one accord, and all of you be of one mind."

Hinduism. Rig Veda 10.191.2-4

1ST CENTURY C.E.

"Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Matthew 18.19-20



3RD CENTURY C.E.

"If two sit together and the words between them are of Torah, then the Shechinah is in their midst."

Judaism. Mishnah, Abot 3.2

6TH CENTURY C.E.

"And when a company meets together in one of the houses of God to pore over the Book of God and to study it together among themselves, the Shechinah comes down to them and mercy overshadows them, the angels surround them, and God remembers them among them that are His."

Islam. Forty Hadith of an-Nawawi 36



1841

"In all conversation between two persons, tacit reference is made, as to a third party, to a common nature. That third party or common nature is not social; it is impersonal; is God. And so in groups where debate is earnest, and especially on high questions, the company become aware that the thought rises to an equal level in all bosoms, that all have a spiritual property in what was said, as well as the sayer. They all become wiser than they were. It arches over them like a temple, this unity of thought. . . . All are conscious of attaining to a higher self-possession. It shines for all."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

have done that, you can say, 'Well, I want to sustain this quality in my own life, so therefore I will pick a practice or two to do on a day-to-day level.' I think that for many people today, the collective is the most important teacher on this whole journey, because it allows us to explore a territory that is much less accessible, if at all, for individuals."

Beyond the individual benefits, of course, there is the benefit to the group itself. "When groups get really good at this and practiced at it, it can lead to very fast decision making," Robert Kenny points out, "because you're drawing on intuition, which is a way of direct knowing as opposed to a linear process of rationality and discursive logic." Part and parcel of this collective intuition seems to be the capacity for truly original thinking that can often lead to breakthrough solutions. Glenna Gerard, coauthor of *Dialogue: Rediscover the Transforming Power of Conversation*, explains, "When the group has really come together and there is collective wisdom present, there seems to be the ability to generate thinking that transcends what any one individual has thought before. It really is new thinking." But to Gerard, what is perhaps most distinctive about the kind of intuition that emerges in groups is its ability to reflect a sense of the whole. "I think one of the functions of collectives is that we become

able to add what we see through our different individual lenses into the center, and the collective then becomes an instrument for perceiving the whole." This kind of vision can have dramatic effects. "When this happens, individuals act differently, both in the circle and then as they move out of the circle," Gerard continues. "There seems to be some heightened, embodied knowing about interdependence. Such individuals become agents of the community. They don't give up their individuality, but for example, when they speak about the purpose of the team, they speak from a shared understanding. Their actions and choices are informed not only by how *they* see something but by how that's going to sit within the whole. There is this kind of collective responsibility."

The potential for groups to access a larger, holistic perspective is something that has excited collective consciousness researchers and practitioners from the beginning. Indeed, it was this capacity for discovering wholeness that served as much of the catalyst for David Bohm's own enthusiasm for the power of dialogue. For Bohm, as for many of those who are working in the field today, it was this higher order of thinking that held out the greatest promise not only for the transformation of individuals and groups but for the healing of our fragmented world.

1889

"O contending peoples and kindreds of the earth! Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you. Gather ye together, and for the sake of God resolve to root out whatever is the source of contention amongst you. Then will the effulgence of the world's great Luminary envelop the whole earth, and its inhabitants become the citizens of one city, and the occupants of one and the same throne."

Bahá'í Faith. Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh



1923

"Through the process of absorbing anthroposophic ideas, a real spiritual being emerges in the room. . . . We can feel as if there were a being looking down on us, floating above us, being spiritually truly present. . . . People awake through each other. They awake through each other by finding each other again and again . . . only there we become real awake human beings. . . . Then real communal Spirituality descends to our workplace."

Rudolf Steiner



1949

"[In this] new world . . . what would bind and hold all together would be . . . a common consciousness consolidating a common life. All will be united by the evolution of the Truth-Consciousness in them; in the changed way of being which this consciousness would bring about in them, they will feel themselves to be embodiments of a single self, souls of a single Reality; illumined and motivated by a fundamental unity of knowledge, actuated by a fundamental unified will and feeling."

Sri Aurobindo



1954

"In the passage of time a state of collective human consciousness has been progressively evolved which is inherited by each succeeding generation of conscious individuals, and to which each generation adds something. Sustained, certainly, by the individual person, but at the same time embracing and shaping the successive multitude of individuals, a sort of generalized human superpersonality is visibly in the process of formation on the Earth."

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

1972

"There is a larger Mind of which the individual mind is only a sub-system. This larger Mind is comparable to God and is perhaps what some people mean by 'God,' but it is immanent in the total interconnected social system and planetary ecology. . . . A certain humility becomes appropriate, tempered by the dignity or joy of being part of something much bigger. A part, if you will, of God."

Gregory Bateson

A TIPPING POINT

I'm noticing a new way of working together, where our interest in what is possible—from the most creative to the most practical—comes deeply alive and our flow of ideas is like a dance, where we are each paying attention to one another, taking in the thinking and research that each individual has done prior to the meeting, and responding in such a way that we really come together. It is so far from any meeting I've ever had in any other work setting—and I don't know how it is happening—but we're able somehow to bring forward the ideas we have without being attached to them, and without our identity being wrapped up in them. It is as if this creative mind just sweeps down on us, and the more we pay attention to each other and keep open the space between us, something else happens.⁸

Laura Hartzell, Lenox, MA



IT'S RARE TO FIND CONGRUENCY IN ANY FIELD, let alone one that is still in its first stages of emergence. But among the twenty-plus researchers and practitioners I spoke with for this article, and the many more I read, nearly all had arrived at the same burning question: How can we use collective wisdom to change the world? Perhaps it has to do with the awesome power revealed in these experiences. Discovering a force with such potent capacities, it seems natural to ask how one might harness such a power to create positive change. Or perhaps it owes to the collective nature of the phenomenon itself. It makes sense, after all, that if such a thing as a group mind came into existence, its concerns would necessarily be collective ones—that its emotions, its will, its conscience would inherently be tied to matters of greatest significance to the whole. But whatever the source of its unified aspiration, what's clear about this collective consciousness is, when it puts its mind to something, it's a force to be reckoned with. As this fledgling field enters its second decade, several major movements and initiatives are already under way, with a vision for bringing the power of the group mind to the complex dilemmas facing our beleaguered planet.

"Any innovative path forward through these very complex issues—whether it's the environment or water or AIDS or the

kind of divisiveness that's being exacerbated around the world right now—is going to come through real conversations about questions that matter." As co-originator of the burgeoning international "conversation movement" known as the World Café, Juanita Brown is a woman who knows whereof she speaks. Along with her partner, David Isaacs, and other World Café hosts around the globe, she is applying what she's learned in her twenty-five years as a senior-level corporate strategist and researcher toward the creation of a dialogue modality capable of nurturing large-scale social change.

And it seems to be working. Since its inception in the mid-nineties, the World Café's innovative approach to large-group inquiry has spread to five continents and been engaged across a broad range of organizational and social settings. In the Middle East, it was recently used to assist in bringing new perspectives to tough Israeli/Palestinian conversations. Mexican government and corporate leaders have applied its methodology to scenario planning and national social development. And in Singapore, it is now being used in several government ministries to support the nation's goal of becoming a "learning society."

And the World Café is but one of a handful of collective intel-

ligence movements with aspirations to transform our global culture. Mitch Saunders' Laboratory for Social Invention project is attempting to harness collective thinking to prevent civil war in Venezuela, Liberia, and Indonesia. Harrison Owen's "Open Space Technology" has been used to successfully bring about a ceasefire in a bloody, seven-year-long conflict between two ethnic nationalities in the oil-rich Niger Delta region. And here on the home front, organizations like Sandy Heierbacher's National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation are working to reinvigorate the democratic process by mobilizing groups of citizens to think together about the country's future. From Dynamic Facilitation to Deep Dialogue to Appreciative Inquiry, new collective technologies are spreading across the country and to the corners of the earth, mobilizing and empowering countless organizations and communities to reach for innovative solutions to their most troubling social dilemmas.

In keeping with the inherently cooperative emphasis of the collective wisdom movement, most of these approaches tend to be self-organizing or "bottom up," lacking any central governing structure to steer them. And this absence of a strategic body guiding and controlling the effort is certainly an important part of the magic that is allowing it to spread so far and so rapidly. But while this grassroots collective activism no doubt has the potential to play a major role in catalyzing large-scale change, there are at least a few individuals who feel that a more centrally organized approach is also needed to grapple effectively with the magnitude and complexity of the challenges we face. Inspired by the possibility of creating a unified planetwide transformative team, a small group of dynamos out of Boston are about to launch what may be the single most ambitious collective wisdom effort yet. Determined to grapple head-on with the most troubling problems facing the world today, Peter Senge, Joseph Jaworski, Otto Scharmer, and their team of colleagues are rolling out the Global Leadership Initiative—an effort that aims for nothing less than to "generate a 'tipping point' in humanity's ability to address its most critical global challenges." By developing a network of leaders "from all sectors of the human community—who understand how to harness the collective power of small groups to co-create better futures," over the next five years, they plan to "launch ten

international projects that will address inherently global challenges, such as AIDS, malnutrition, water, and climate change." And what's more, they intend to do it with "a standard of excellence and professionalism unsurpassed by any other organization or institution."

In our cynical age, it's not often that you find a group of people so confidently optimistic about their capacity to bring about significant global change. But before you write off this activism-on-steroids as the product of naïveté, hubris, or hyperbolic idealism,

What's clear about this collective consciousness is, when it puts its mind to something, it's a force to be reckoned with.

consider that the individuals at the helm are some of the most influential organizational minds in the world. In their work at MIT, Generon Consulting, and the Society for Organizational Learning, these management moguls have been pushing the envelope of collective learning and innovation for two decades. At the vanguard of large-scale systems change and leadership development, they've worked closely with multinational corporations, government agencies, and NGOs throughout the world.

At the heart of this initiative is a deep conviction in the potential for small groups to generate breakthrough thinking. Over years of "action research," they've developed what they feel is a "rigorous" state-of-the-art methodology for "creating unified learning fields in which teams made up of highly diverse individuals become capable of operating as a single intelligence." Using collective wisdom to actually solve our most pressing global problems, it turns out, is a dream that may not be as outlandish as it seems. Even a few years ago, it would have been hard to imagine such an idea being taken seriously by business and government leaders. But these are indeed rapidly changing times. And given the receptivity these pioneers are finding to their vision, there is at least the possibility that a lot more positive change may be in store for us all.

REACHING TOWARD OMEGA

As we spoke, and the circle widened, it seemed like one structure of relationship was giving way to another, and one could observe the shifting of boundaries from the old to the new. The fact that we were conscious of it, consciously groping our way into a new dimension, was perhaps the most extraordinary quality of what was occurring: imperfect beings, aware of our conditioning, consciously choosing to evolve. . . . Our attention expanded, and we could see the structure of universal spirit, incarnate as many, using us as its mouthpiece, revealing the perfection of Being—a vast impersonality that rendered our notions of personal significance completely obsolete. One knew that this bigness is our destiny.⁹

Melissa Hoffman, Lenox, MA



IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY, French Jesuit priest and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin put forth a radical new vision for our human future. “We are . . . moving forward towards some new critical point that lies ahead,” he wrote in *The Human Phenomenon*, “a harmonized collectivity of consciousnesses equivalent to a sort of super-consciousness. The idea is that of the Earth not only becoming covered by myriads of grains of thought, but becoming enclosed in a single thinking envelope so as to form, functionally, no more than a single vast grain of thought on the sidereal scale, the plurality of individual reflections grouping themselves together and reinforcing one another in the act of a single unanimous reflection. . . . Beyond all conflict of empires, peace in conquest and work in joy await us in an interior totalization of the world on itself—in the unanimous building up of a spirit of the Earth.” It was a vision with far-reaching collective implications, culminating in a final “unanimization” that he called the “Omega Point.”

And while Teilhard’s vision would not come to be realized in his lifetime, nor has it as yet in ours, his words, written over a half-century ago, continue to shine as a beacon for anyone who has ever experienced collective wisdom and pondered its larger implications. For although our understanding of this mysterious collective consciousness is still only beginning to take shape, what is clear to most of those who discover it is that the experience itself seems to be pointing us somewhere. Carol Frenier, in synthesizing the personal accounts of over 150 individuals for the Collective Wisdom Initiative, found that the vast majority of those who have experienced the emergence of collective wisdom feel that the purpose of this wisdom is “to midwife a new social/spiritual order of an evolutionary magnitude . . . that is already emerging of its own power.” What exactly is the nature of this new order, this evolutionary leap? And what role might we play in “midwifing” it into existence?

The answer, it turns out, may lie in the very nature of collective experience itself. For if, as all the reports suggest, the collective

“If human beings are kind of neurons in some giant global brain, then maybe someday the planet will, in some sense, have a unified consciousness.”

Robert Wright

mind really does think better, create better, and function better than any of our individual minds, and if our own individual capacities are actually enhanced by our conscious participation in this collective intelligence, then wouldn't the first evolutionary question be: What would it take for us to remove any barriers to the emergence of collective consciousness, not just as an occasional peak experience, but as a permanent ongoing capacity? What would become possible if even a small group were able to live and work together on an ongoing basis with unbroken access to this higher communal mind? And moreover, what if such a phenomenon were to begin to occur on a wide scale? If the growing body of evidence for Rupert Sheldrake's theory of morphic resonance is real, what could prevent such an occurrence from spreading through an ever-increasing number of groups throughout the globe?

In his landmark book *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny*, Robert Wright argues convincingly that the march of human history has not been random in direction but has in fact been progressing along a very specific trajectory—toward increasing cooperation and unity. As the parameters of our capacity to feel and express “brotherly love” have expanded from kin to tribe, from tribe to nation, and beyond, he writes, we have gradually “become embedded in larger and richer webs of interdependence”—on a course that leads, at least plausibly, toward the sort of ultimate Omega Teilhard envisioned. As Wright speculated in a recent interview, “Five hundred years from now, maybe the whole kind of techno-social organism on this planet will be sufficiently cohesive to have a unified field of subjective awareness. Maybe it will be *like something* to be planet Earth. If Teilhard is right that, more and more, there is such a thing as the collective mind of the planet, and that human beings are kind of neurons in some giant global brain, then maybe someday the planet will, in some sense, have a unified consciousness.” Could it be that we really are on a journey to Omega? Is it possible that the murmurings of shared wisdom arising in small groups throughout the world are but the initial stirrings of a much greater wave of collective consciousness trying to be born? Whatever the ultimate verity of Teilhard's vision, in our increasingly connected world, it is at the very least, to use Wright's lingo, a *noncrazy* idea.

However, if imagining a grand Omega centuries down the line feels a bit decadent given our current global predicament, at the heart of the experience of collective wisdom is another under-

standing—one with subtler and perhaps greater implications for the lives we're leading right now. What does it mean, after all, that we can come together in a collective higher mind? If the nature of our individual consciousness is such that it can merge with or be transcended by the collective, what does that say about the nature of who we are? As Chris Bache pointed out, “experiences like these teach us that whatever individuality is, we have to think of it in a way that is more like an open system than a closed system.” What if, in the face of this knowledge of our permeability and interdependence, the ground of our identity were to shift away from our cherished sense of separate individuality to the whole in which we are embedded? What if our overriding preoccupation with our personal welfare—the ego's endless chain of wants, desires, and fears—were to pale to insignificance in the face of a concern for our larger, collective identity and destiny? What kind of human world would come into existence then? Freed from the moorings of self-concern, what could our individuality express? And more importantly, where could we go collectively that we could never reach in our present, fragmented condition? Admittedly, given the current state of human affairs, this vision too seems a far cry from fruition. But in light of the remarkable potentialities emerging in our midst, it is hard to imagine a possibility more worthy of our collective aspiration. ■

FIND OUT MORE

www.wie.org/collective

To learn more about collective intelligence, visit our website, where you'll find audio clips from interviews, web links, a bibliography, and a host of other resources on this emerging phenomenon.

For reprints of this article, please email wief@wie.org

1,6,7,9: Descriptions by participants in “Experiments in Enlightened Communication,” hosted by *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine and its parent organization, the Impersonal Enlightenment Fellowship. www.andrewcohen.org/misc/enlightenedCommunication.

2: Beth Jandernoa describing her experience during the first International Women's Dialogue, involving twenty-one women who worked in large-systems change from around the world. Appears courtesy of the Fetzer Institute.

3: Tom Callanan describing his experience during an *Introduction to Dialogue* training with Glenna Gerard and Linda Ellinor. Reprinted from *Centered on the Edge: Mapping a Field of Collective Intelligence and Spiritual Wisdom*, Fetzer Institute, 2001 www.collectivewisdominitiative.org/CenteredOnTheEdge/home.htm

4: Emmett Miller, MD, describing his experience of a World Café that he and his wife organized to build community in the rural town of Nevada City, CA. www.theworldcafe.com

5: Spiritual teacher Jaime Campbell describing a spontaneous collective awakening she experienced during an intensive group workshop she was leading.

8: *WIE Digital* staff member Laura Hartzell describing her experience of working on project teams.

THE SCIENCE OF COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

by Robert Kenny

WITH MORE AND MORE PEOPLE TALKING about collective consciousness, it seems natural to wonder, *Is there any scientific research to back it up?* The answer, increasingly, appears to be “yes.” In fact, a growing body of recent research suggests not only that a field of awareness and intelligence exists between human beings but also that through it we influence each other in powerful ways.

Just as Gene Roddenberry imagined a future in which *Star Trek*’s Spock could “mind meld” with others, more of us are now becoming aware of our remarkable capacity to intuit each other’s thoughts and emotions, as well as to consciously think and create together without communicating through the five senses. Collective consciousness becomes most apparent in our ability to intuitively sense and work with the interactions between our and others’ physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual “energy fields.” Although science has long been convinced of the existence of gravitational, electric, and magnetic fields, significant research in the frontier science known as parapsychology, or the study of psychic (“psi”) phenomena, indicates that other types of fields—including thought fields—may also exist.

A fundamental psi phenomenon is extrasensory perception or influence, perhaps made possible by the apparent ability of consciousness to operate beyond the constraints of space and time. Examples include telepathy and remote viewing. The existence of psi (or tele-prehension, as Ken Wilber calls it) has been convincingly demonstrated in numerous scientific studies carried out by Marilyn Schlitz, Dean Radin, and others. In typical remote viewing experiments, for example, one individual is sent to a distant, undisclosed location while another individual, who remains in the lab, attempts to “remotely view” and describe that distant location in detail. Across a large number of experiments, remote viewers have been able to describe another’s surroundings with a statistically significant degree of accuracy. Intriguingly, pairs who had an emotional bond have obtained the strongest results. These findings suggest that groups whose members build a sense of connection and trust with each other may

have an increased capacity to access and understand each other’s perspectives, to “see through each other’s eyes.”

Biologist Rupert Sheldrake and others have conducted several ingenious experiments that show how widespread psi abilities are—even in animals. Using synchronized video cameras placed in the homes and workplaces of dog owners, he has proven that dogs go to wait at the front doors of their homes at the precise moment their owners decide to return home from work, even when those times are varied daily. Sheldrake, Radin, and others have conducted numerous telepathy experiments on human beings as well, demonstrating that people can sense the thoughts and intentions of others across space and time. This research includes studies on a common experience called “the sense of being stared at.” By separating two people in a laboratory setting, with the first person hooked up to equipment that monitors his or her nervous system and the second person staring at the first person at random intervals on a closed-circuit television, researchers have collected evidence for the existence of this phenomenon with statistical “odds against chance” of 3.8 million to one.

Sheldrake has also demonstrated in a number of studies that we can assist each other’s learning across distances, without any external interaction or communication. In one study, for instance, a group of individuals completed a newly created crossword puzzle, and their average completion times were recorded. The same puzzle was then broadcast to millions via TV, for the viewers at home to complete. Subsequently, a new group, who had not seen the puzzle at all, finished it significantly faster than the original group, suggesting that as a result of so many individuals having done the puzzle, knowledge of the puzzle was somehow etched into the field of collective consciousness, making it increasingly easier for others to solve.

Radin, the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR) Lab, and Roger Nelson’s Global Consciousness Project have taken research into consciousness “field effects” even further—into the realm of mind/matter interactions—by conduct-

ing a series of intriguing experiments with random number-generating (RNG) computers. RNGs can basically be thought of as sophisticated coin-flipping machines, programmed to issue zeroes or ones randomly. That is, just as if you were to flip a coin one hundred times and could expect the “heads” and “tails” sides to come up fifty times each, so it is with an RNG—producing, on average, an equal number of zeroes and ones. Ordinary people, however, have used the power of thought alone to create order out of this randomness, causing RNGs that were sometimes thousands of miles away to issue significantly more of one number over many trials, simply by *intending* to do so. Bonded pairs—couples in a relationship—produced effects that were six times stronger than individuals. Like the remote viewing experiments, these results indicate that people with an emotional connection, when acting in concert, are more influential than individuals acting alone.

Perhaps not surprisingly, groups produce far stronger RNG results than either individuals or couples, even when the group members are unaware of the RNGs and therefore cannot *intend* to influence their output. For example, when merely the *attention* of groups has been captured by



high-interest public events, RNG effects have been three times greater than when individuals have demonstrated an *intentional* influence on RNG machines. During certain widely televised events that have captured mass attention, such as Princess Diana's death and the 9/11 tragedies, the combined output of sixty RNGs around the world significantly deviated from chance. For example, on October 3, 1995, the day that the verdict was read in the O.J. Simpson murder trial, Radin, Nelson, and University of Amsterdam professor Dick Bierman decided to run RNGs in each of their labs to test their hypothesis that something significant would happen in the field of collective consciousness. An analysis of their combined results clearly confirmed that hypothesis. As Radin describes it in *The Conscious Universe*, "Around the time that the TV preshow began, at 9:00 AM Pacific Time, an unexpected degree of order appeared in all the RNGs. This soon declined back to random behavior until about 10:00 AM, which is when the verdict was supposed to be announced. A few minutes later, the order in all five RNGs suddenly peaked to its highest point in the two hours of recorded data precisely when the court clerk read the verdict." These results suggest that millions of minds, when united with a specific focus, can have a powerful effect on the material world, mysteriously influencing normally random physical systems toward higher degrees of order.

Just as we can create order in physical systems through focused attention or intention, a number of experiments have suggested that two or more people can create synchronization or coherence between their nervous systems. For example, in research funded by the Institute of Noetic Sciences and others, Marilyn Schlitz and William Braud have shown that individuals who are calm and relaxed can intentionally reduce the anxiety of others in distant places, and that people consciously focusing their attention can help others in remote locations to concentrate their wandering minds. In another arena—"distance healing"—67 percent of 150 controlled studies have shown that individuals and groups can use intention, relaxation, enhanced concentra-

tion, visualization, and what is described as "a request to a healing force greater than themselves," to heal others to a statistically significant degree. Healing effects and tele-prehension have increased when participants felt empathy and rapport or when they meditated together.

On community, societal, and even worldwide levels, more than twenty experiments, published in respected scientific journals, have demonstrated that Transcendental Meditation groups representing one percent of a target population have caused significant improvements in measures of quality of life and physical and mental health and have reduced crime, accidents, conflict, and war in the entire target population, apparently by reducing stress in the collective psyche.

These and other studies provide strong evidence that we can develop and work with our collective consciousness to produce a number of important interpersonal, organizational, and social benefits—from increased empathy, understanding, and respect to enhanced health, cooperation, and creative collaboration. In our increasingly diverse workplaces, communities, and global institutions, where we are challenged by extremely complex and urgent problems, cultivating these capacities will not only

promote the common good but also could ensure our survival.

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A Kind of Innocence



The Grateful Dead, Golden Gate Park, 1967

We'd Never Seen Before

by Ross Robertson

Thoughts on the Grateful Dead, the Beatles, and Collective Consciousness

Suddenly people were stripped before one another and behold! as we looked on, we all made a great discovery: we were beautiful. Naked and helpless and sensitive as a snake after skinning, but far more human than that shining nightmare that had stood creaking in previous parade rest. We were alive and life was us. We joined hands and danced barefoot amongst the rubble. We had been cleansed, liberated! We would never don the old armors again.

Ken Kesey, *Garage Sale*

PICTURE YOURSELF ON A SLOPE overlooking a broad amphitheater. Sunset. Below you, the tribes are gathering from far and wide. Many thousands make their way into the sanctuary, beating drums, burning incense. It is time for the ritual of return. And you—threads of kinship weave through you as through the others. Unbinding your hair, you run to meet the growing crowd. High priests on the altars strike up the ancient songs, and everyone starts to move in patterns that you've never seen, but that seem familiar. It is a dance whose origins none remember, as old as the tribe itself. But instinct leads you into sync with each other in a sudden togetherness. The music enters you as if in slow motion, flowing with a pulse that both is and is not your own. No, this isn't 15,000 BC on the eve of the summer solstice. Nor is it the Zion orgy scene from *The Matrix Reloaded* on the eve of the final battle with the machines. You're in twentieth-century America: this is a Dead show.

Religious historian Mircea Eliade referred to shamans as "technicians of ecstasy," and that's exactly what San Francisco's Grateful Dead were, on a grand scale. Their hands held instruments, but they played the crowd, captivating masses of people into a high that I could only call spiritual. From the beginning, it just came through mysteriously—came through everyone into a life of its own. Even those Deadheads of my own generation, who



The Grateful Dead, Fort Point, San Francisco, 1965

missed the sixties bus by a long shot, had this same experience. I saw my first show in—get ready—1992, when I was in high school. I grew up in the eighties; I needed to believe in something. And the Dead were astonishing, playing like Titans or gods beyond the borders of the mundane and the everyday. Like magicians, you couldn't figure out how they did what they did, but it worked, and you wanted in on the secret.

Shamans, or magicians—they created an atmosphere of wonder. Their music was a gateway to another mind entirely, a mind with fewer boundaries, full of space and unexplainable inventiveness. At a Grateful Dead show, you weren't who you thought you were. Some startling being was there instead, strangely recognizable. You'd close your eyes and follow where it led. When you opened them, surprise! Somebody else was always there, right next to you, making contact. You'd thought you were in it by yourself, blessed with a private experience, but the Dead proved you wrong. If heaven were a dance party, this would be it—I'd never seen so much joy in my life, surging up through people. It just made you want to move toward others. Joy out in the middle, between everything, that no one could own, but

that was there for everyone—there to catch and twist and chase breathless. “What possesses our audience I can never know,” drummer Mickey Hart writes in *Drumming at the Edge of Magic*. “But I feel its effects. From the stage you can feel it happening—group mind, entrainment, find your own word for it—when they lock up you can feel it; you can feel the energy roaring off them.”

We all felt it, something we’d never felt anywhere else. What was *it*, though? What was the secret of that magic identity we all took part in, that thrilling, almost unbearable loss of control? Usually, the thought of losing control is terrifying. But the Dead made it easy to jump into the center, extended and vulnerable. They played and our attention leapt away from ourselves; there was a whole world there to meet, to encounter. Most of us are so used to thinking of ourselves as fundamentally independent creatures, with independent psyches, that the mere mention of “collective consciousness” or “group mind” is usually cause for a quick change in the topic of conversation. But with the Dead, these questions became interesting. *Who am I really?* you had to ask then, as your assumptions fell to pieces and the familiar sheaths of anxiety and isolation dropped from your shoulders. What am I so afraid of? The Dead themselves surely had all the same questions. They were regular boomers, if a bit on the fringes—rebellious kids into the Beats, blues, and jazz, leaning over the cusp of an era. That is, until they stopped playing bars and started playing the Acid Tests.

Actually, the Grateful Dead were taking LSD before Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters organized the first of their infamous Acid Test parties in August 1965. But it was as the Pranksters’ house band that they stretched their fledgling wings and took off into the uncharted stratosphere. As Tom Wolfe writes in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, they weren’t the only ones going airborne:

Suddenly acid and the worldcraze were everywhere, the electric organ vibrating through every belly in the place, kids dancing not rock dances, not the frug and the—what?—swim, mother, but dancing ecstasy, leaping, dervishing, throwing their hands over their heads like Daddy Grace’s own stroked-out inner courtiers—yes! . . . Everybody’s eyes turn on like lightbulbs . . . fuses blow, minds scream, heads explode, neighbors call the cops, 200, 300, 400 people from out there drawn into . . . a mass closer and higher than any mass in history.

Indeed, it was these prototypal, expect-the-unexpected hippie raves, presenting a garbage can’s worth of dosed Kool-Aid to all comers, that gave the Dead the freedom to play without expectations. Instead of sticking to individual solos over background accompaniment, like most rock bands of the day, they took the lessons of John Coltrane and free jazz to heart, improvising all together, all at the same time. To do that successfully, they had to listen intently to each other, each individual responding spontaneously to the movement of the whole. And it was while jamming this way—having no idea where they were going but intending to go there together—that they stumbled upon the fantastic sense of a creative intelligence far greater than themselves as individuals, an intelligence that enveloped the group. When it was really happening, lead guitarist Jerry Garcia remembered, the music “had the effect of surprising me with a flow of its own.” When it was really happening, they flew as one. “Those hookups are like living things,” bassist Phil Lesh said. “Like cells in the body of this organism. That seems to be the transformation taking place in human beings. To learn to be cells as well as individuals. Not just cells in society but cells in a living organism.”

This collective mind knew no boundaries and created a deep togetherness, not just between the band members, but in the audience as well. “The audience is as much the band as the band is the audience,” drummer Bill Kreutzmann said. “There is no difference. The audience should be paid—they contribute as much.” Even more surprising is the fact that the musicians themselves couldn’t enter that space *without* others there to listen. Jerry confessed that he’d “never experienced the click of great music without an audience. . . . We exist by their grace.” It’s difficult to imagine the conscious attention of an audience being that crucial to the performers’ ability to perform, though perhaps the Dead could be seen more accurately not as performers at all but as key participants in truly synergistic events. Jerry described it this way, in a 1972 interview with *Rolling Stone*:



University of Nevada, Las Vegas, May 1993



Deadheads at Berkeley's Greek Theatre, July 1984

To get really high is to forget yourself. And to forget yourself is to see everything else. And to see everything else is to become an understanding molecule in evolution, a conscious tool of the universe. And I think every human being should be a conscious tool of the universe. . . .

When you break down the old orders and the old forms and leave them broken and shattered, you suddenly find yourself a new space with new form and new order which are more like the way it is. More like the flow. And we just found ourselves in that place. We never decided on it, we never thought it out. None of it. This is a thing that we've observed in the scientific method. We've watched what happens.

Though LSD was the mother that gave birth to this experience of communion, the experience itself gained independent life through the Dead's music. I myself went to a whole host of shows before I'd ever done drugs, and I still came back transfigured. "Music is a thing that has optimism built into it," Jerry said. "You can go as far into music as you can fill millions of lifetimes." Many people never, or only rarely, touch into such a "flow state" in their lives—a state that, as religious and spiritual traditions the world over explain, is the ecstatic reflection of a higher level of consciousness and represents the unknown, boundless potential lying dormant in all of us. That's why it's so striking that the Grateful Dead continued providing such experiences to people for thirty years, up through Garcia's

untimely death in 1995. Perhaps today they are doing so once again, back together on the road for the first time since then.

And they're not alone. Now, hundreds of so-called "jam bands" formed in the Dead's mold are out there, too, bands whose dedication to collective improvisation is equaled only by their fans' Deadhead-level devotion. "For many people these days," says Grateful Dead scholar John Dwork, "jam band concerts are . . . the equivalent of church, or at least that's what they go looking for. That's what we need

in our lives—community, ecstatic dance, soulful singalongs, communion with something sacred or special, a heroic adventure, a place to hang our hearts." I saw thirty Dead shows in three years for those exact reasons—the Dead were my heroes, standing resolutely against the tides of superficiality and materialism that threatened to sweep me off my feet. I wanted the myth of the sixties to be real—that idealism, that sense of a higher purpose. I wanted to believe in something, and I found it in the Dead.

"That seems to be the transformation taking place in human beings. To learn to be cells as well as individuals. Not just cells in society but cells in a living organism."

Phil Lesh

Fittingly, renowned mythologist Joseph Campbell found something there too. Despite his extreme distaste for popular culture (he only ever saw two movies, didn't read the newspaper, and hadn't attended a pop concert in decades), he went to see the Grateful Dead and felt "in immediate accord" with them. "I just didn't know anything like that existed," he said—anything like "25,000 people tied at the heart" in a truly contemporary mythic ritual. It was, he felt, the "antidote for the atom bomb."

What Campbell discovered was something Deadheads have always thrived on: an archetypal spirit of intimacy and



ritual celebration, carried through music. In truth, music of all kinds has borne just such a spirit throughout human history. Much of indigenous and shamanic ceremony is based on this very capacity of sound and rhythm to transport individuals together into extraordinary states of consciousness. Classical Indian musicians consciously reach toward their audiences in improvised performance, stretching themselves to meet—and lift—the mind of the whole. Even the simplest song can gather people inexplicably to each other, as in December 1914, when German and Allied soldiers on the front lines in France put guns down and left their respective trenches to meet briefly as friends. These “Christmas truces,” as they came to be known, started in many cases with common carols sung, across the intervening distance, in the troops’ different languages.

But it was the sixties, and rock and roll, that elevated this age-old phenomenon to a new scale of popular intensity. At Watkins Glen, New York, in 1973, the Grateful Dead played to some 600,000 people, a crowd that stretched over two miles from the stage. It was an occasion that still stands as the largest rock concert in history. (Woodstock, by comparison, hit roughly 400,000.) “We have four or five times as many people here as we have at our [auto] races,” said the county sheriff, “and we are getting less than half the trouble. These kids are great.” I

can scarcely imagine that many people in one place, much less that many people in one place with their minds trained on a single object. If you want to try, consider that the average sports arena holds only 50-60,000—and multiply by ten.

Who knows what unseen influence such gargantuan incidents might have had on the culture at large? Is consciousness a

cumulative thing? One person meditating alone can have a tangible effect in a room. Even the Trips Festival of early '66, the largest-ever Acid Test, involved only 3-5,000 people. Up until that point, Phil recalled, “nobody could have guessed that you could give thousands of people acid in one room and not have it blow up from the psychic energy . . . the cords of our equipment were literally jumping out of the wall sockets.” So, 600,000 at Watkins Glen? What unknown miracles of consciousness might have broken forth then, subterranean, invisible?

Of course, the Grateful Dead weren't the only sixties band to work miracles.

How about the Beatles, whose fans, admits Grateful Dead publicist Dennis McNally, “made the enthusiasm of Deadheads look quite demure”? If the Dead can be measured on the Richter scale of their psychic influence on large numbers of people, then surely, so can the Beatles. And by this standard, are the boys from San Francisco even in the same league as the lads from Liverpool? As far out as the Dead were, they never broke free of a relatively marginal





The Beatles at New York's Shea Stadium, August 1965



counterculture. The Beatles, on the other hand—*everybody* loves the Beatles. “There was an alchemy in the way they came together that made two plus two equal not four but forty,” journalist Mark Hertsgaard writes. They gave the words “come together” a whole new meaning.

In the summer of 1965, when the Grateful Dead (then known as the Warlocks) were still earning their first stripes in the bars and clubs of the San Francisco peninsula, the Beatles played not the largest, but the first-ever concert held in a sports arena in the U.S., at Shea Stadium in Flushing, New York. This was ten years before I was born (yep, I had to watch it on DVD). But in spite of all the decades in between, I could hardly believe what I was seeing. Here were four kids barely into their twenties, caught in the midst of a passion that had everything—and perhaps very little—to do with them. They were at the eye of a cultural hurricane; how could four people alone cause such lunacy? To see otherwise decorous young women unleashed as hysterical, sexual beings—*en masse*—would have frightened me if it hadn't so furiously held my attention. The marvelous thing was, none of it seemed to be going to the Beatles' heads, though it did go to John's elbows, with which he played a madcap keyboard solo. “We like lunatics, it's healthy,” he quipped. Beatlemania got so big, so fast—bigger than they could handle, really. But for some mysterious reason, they didn't *have* to handle it, that pressure high enough to launch Paul's Hofner bass to the moon. They just climbed aboard and rode it straight to the center of the unexplainable. At Shea Stadium, I could see the boundaries between them broken

and obliterated; and them, sweating, reeling, singing, helplessly amazed. It set the crowd on fire with a kind of innocence I'd never seen at a Dead show, another kind of wonder.

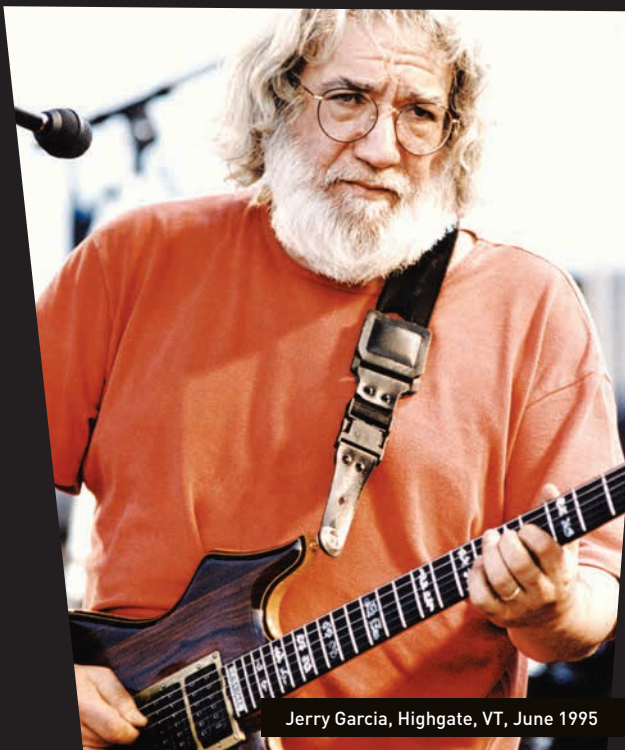
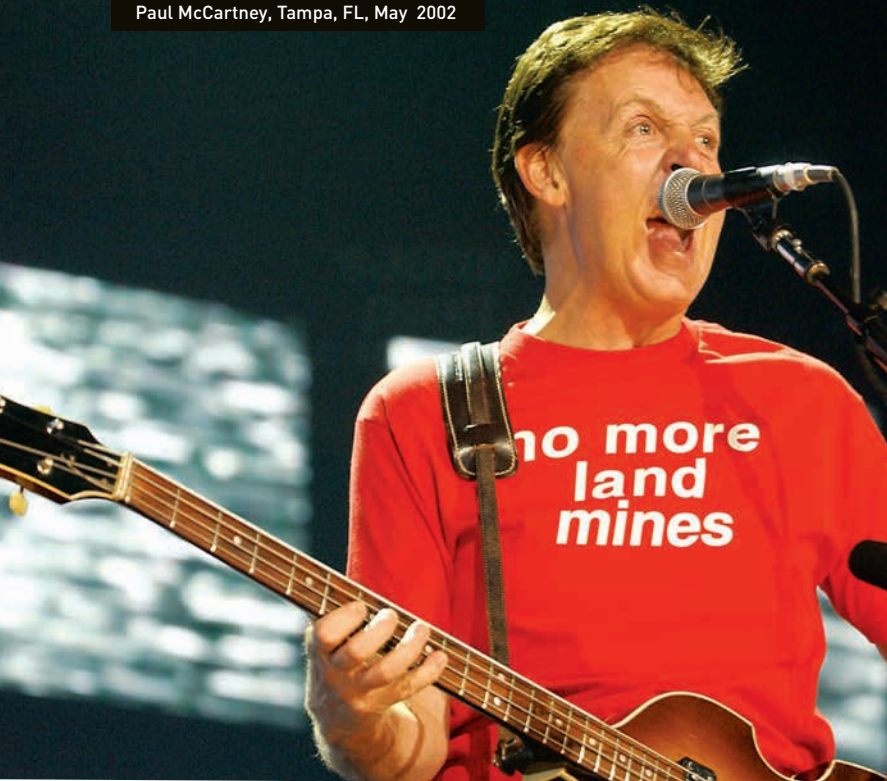
There were 55,000 people there, screaming so loud the Beatles could barely hear themselves playing. At least Deadheads listened to the music; Beatles fans couldn't even get to the first note without succumbing to something like a virus that made them yell till they were hoarse, some sort of “emotional epidemic.” It was as if they were ripping holes clean through the walls between them: Who knows the depth of impact this had? How about when the Beatles

At least Deadheads listened to the music; Beatles fans couldn't even get to the first note without succumbing to something like a virus that made them yell till they were hoarse.

first performed on the Ed Sullivan show in February 1964, a year and a half earlier? *Seventy-three million people were watching.* That's forty percent of the U.S. population, roughly equal to the total number of televisions in the country that year. During that hour, precincts across the nation reported the lowest crime rate in half a century—even thieves, thugs, and malcontents took a timeout for the Beatles. Billy Joel thought, “This can be done. I can do that.” He was fifteen. Billy Graham, forty-five, even broke the Sabbath to watch.

Who *knows* how they did it. “Probably not since Shakespeare

Paul McCartney, Tampa, FL, May 2002



Jerry Garcia, Highgate, VT, June 1995

has so much intellect been invested in explaining something so simple," Robert Burt writes in *The Beatles: The Fabulous Story of John, Paul, George, and Ringo*. "The Beatles were four guys in a pop group who made happy music and gave everyone a good time for a few years." A few years? The Beatles were still topping the charts at the turn of the millennium with "1," their album of singles. It

"Listening to [Paul's] music is part of the whole fabric of becoming conscious."

John Cusack

had to be more than that. How did they manage to be so fully *with* each other, in such a way that everyone felt it? Not like the Dead were, not as shamans or warlocks, but as ordinary young men? Simultaneously down-to-earth and larger than life, the Beatles swiftly took on the power of a tidal wave in mass consciousness. "They are very like children in many ways," producer George Martin said. "They love anything magical." And the magic of being together, with unusual joy and uncommon trust, fed their music with irrepressible enthusiasm and unceasing originality. As they evolved and matured, a whole generation grew up with them. In

the process, they helped chart a course through the changing tides of a turbulent era. From Motown to R&B, straight-ahead rock and pop to wide-ranging psychedelia, the Beatles spanned what seems like eons in a few short years, tugging an emerging youth culture right behind. That speed of change was almost too much to take, but take it young people did—and so did many of their parents. "It was up to you—which is to say, all of us—to make changes, and you could do it," Hertsgaard writes. "That message resonated deeply and powerfully in the mass psyche, for it put people in closer touch with their higher selves and made them feel part of a larger project of human renewal. The Beatles, in short, brought out the best in people."

Whatever their secret was, Paul McCartney still has it in spades. "I don't feel like finishing or stopping," he said recently, after his 2002 "Back in the U.S." tour, his first in the United States in nearly ten years. And this time, I had the rare fortune to see him in person. Just into his sixties, his talent, sparkle, and poise all seemed only to have grown, captivating whole new generations of fans with the same enchantment that made the Beatles what they were. It seemed impossible; I still can't quite get my mind around it. Even Jerry Garcia, gallant ship's captain, broke slowly under the pressure of a lifetime as a mythic hero, losing the fight after nearly twenty years of heroin addiction. Paul, by contrast, was more in command than ever, playing and singing like a man half his age. Out in front of a band that was tearing and

jumping fresh all over his Beatles and Wings songs, he boosted everything he touched into a sort of intimate glory, whether or not you even knew the tunes. Little Gen-Y *kids* were bursting like popcorn; college students, parents, and grandparents were crying, gasping, dancing, and basking in the sheer generosity of it all. One fan held up a sign, “NYC 1965 Shea Stadium,” and somehow I, as a twenty-eight-year-old, knew why—I felt the same, at the hands of Midas, exhilarated for the first time all over again.

“Listening to his music,” Gen-X actor John Cusack remarks on *Back in the U.S.*, a DVD chronicling this same tour, “is part of the whole fabric of becoming conscious.” The most surprising thing of all is that McCartney is no mere footnote to history, his music no romantic allusion to the timeless relevance of sixties sensibility. Rather, his influence is still active today, still pointing forward in the year 2004. Just last year, for example, he took the residents of Copenhagen somewhere they’d never been before. A Danish friend who lives in Østerbro district, near the Idrætsparken where Paul’s concert took place, told me the story: “After the show was over, the city was saturated with affection,” he said. “The whole place was humming. We’ve never had that kind of experience in Denmark, *at all*.” Crowds that spanned the generations filled the streets, he described. Retailers and merchants across Copenhagen, like the bicycle shop on his corner, opened their doors and put out tables, serving beer and refreshments. Most of the city, it seemed, was out until four in the morning, singing Beatles songs, laughing. “People were just drawn to each other. They gathered in groups. The whole town was one big meeting place.” Though the boomers among them felt a swell of nostalgia for the good old days, it was not accompanied by the usual sense that life was better then than it was now. There were no lamentations for a past lost to the cruelty of time, no sad ruminations on a fall from grace. Instead, he concluded, “It was completely fresh. There was no wrong in this, everything was right. Life is good and love is sweet.” It was as if Paul made everyone young again—not in imagination but in fact, transformed inside their own bodies.

When I was eighteen and a bit younger myself, I went to sing in Russia on a sort of musical peace mission with my United Methodist choir. By then, I was already into the Dead; I remember playing “Uncle John’s Band” in Red Square on a five-dollar Russian guitar. Ten years later, in May 2003, Sir Paul put on his first-ever show in Russia, also in Red Square. Meeting with the ex-Beatle before the concert, Russian President and ex-KGB agent Vladimir Putin “confessed that in Soviet times the Beatles were considered ‘propaganda of an alien ideology,’” CBS reported. When asked if he’d listened to the Beatles anyway, Putin replied, “Yes, of course—it was wildly popular. . . . It was a taste of freedom; a window on the world.” Beatles music, it appears,

was strong enough to puncture even the Iron Curtain. And for a hundred thousand Russians—some of whom fit into the storied quadrangle in front of the Kremlin, the rest of whom gathered behind police barricades to listen—this was the chance of a lifetime, the chance to see a hero who, for decades, was only accessible by bad radio or bootleg. “Next stop the moon,” said Paul. And who would stand in his way?

“I like the fame because of what you can do for charity,” Paul comments during *Back in the U.S.* “And I think if your heart’s in the right place, you can do a lot of great stuff.” Yes, indeed, and he has. As for Jerry, whose creative incandescence will undoubtedly stand the test of time . . . to be honest, I’m ashamed of him. “Fame is an illusion,” he complained in one of the last interviews he ever gave, before a junkie’s isolation became a dead man’s coffin. “It’s very hard to take the fame seriously, and I don’t think anybody wants me to. What’s it good for?” I guess we’ll never know. But what are the moral implications of being a hero? If the power of consciousness itself can elevate whole groups of people so dramatically, who’s to say it can’t push them down with equal weight? “The Dead do something no other musicians of their stature or influence can,” observed the *Village Voice* in 1987. “They suggest the possibility of utopia in *everyday life* . . . indirectly nurture humanity, goodness, joy, truth, and solidarity among their devoted audience. . . . [They] do no less through their music than espouse the quaint notion that art can save your life.” Isn’t it ironic, then, that Jerry couldn’t save his own from whatever demons beset him?

Jerry’s bandmate Phil once said, “we were on the tip of the arrow of human consciousness flying through time.” Perhaps the Grateful Dead, or at least their ambivalent leader, fell off that arrow years ago, while Paul fashioned his into a jet, somehow managing to keep the wind in his hair. But what if that arrow itself—the arrow they both pulled and fired—yet flies, gathering speed, about to break the sound barrier? Back at the Trips Festival in ’66, back in ’67 when the Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper’s*, a mass revolution in consciousness seemed just around the corner. Might it still be there waiting, working even? I don’t know. Maybe none of us do, yet. Nevertheless, merely the potential these bands suggested—the potential makings of a more lasting, collective entry into higher states of holistic awareness—is enough to make us think twice about who we are and what is possible. Think, and wonder, as we walk out the amphitheater gates after the last notes of the encore, wrapped in a blanket or two, looking at the sky, asking questions the Dead and the Beatles made so compelling. ■

Photographs of Shea Stadium concert, August 15, 1965, courtesy of marc weinstein. marc822@yahoo.com

Imagine the freedom:
you, a car, the open road,
the vast cosmos, and
three hundred million
human beings—dry
tinder just waiting for
that evolutionary spark.



Preachers of a New Pentecost

Two evangelists of evolutionary spirituality
are carrying the message of science and spirit
to grassroots Christianity and beyond

by Carter Phipps

"HUMANITY IS THE FRUIT OF FOURTEEN BILLION YEARS of unbroken evolution, now becoming conscious of itself," declares the middle-aged speaker as he walks back and forth in front of the audience, punctuating his points with a dramatic gesture or a momentary pause. The reverend is in his element, and today he can feel that the crowd is in the palm of his hand.

"When the Bible speaks about God forming us from the dust of the Earth, it's actually true," he exclaims, articulating his words like a verbal challenge. "We did not come into this world—we grew out of it, just like an apple grows from an apple tree. That statement from Genesis is a traditional way of saying the same thing. We are not separate beings *on* Earth, living *in* a universe. We are a mode of being *of* Earth, an *expression* of the universe."

Dressed in nondescript slacks and a conservative button-down shirt, Michael Dowd actually looks like the Christian ministers I remember from my youth: the wholesome, boyish looks; the clean-cut aura; the warm, inviting smile that whispers of faith and conviction; the natural sense of connection with his audience, be it one person or several hundred. And of course, there's the passion.

"Do you get this?" he asks the audience, eyes bright, searching around the room for response. "I mean, do you *really* get this? We are the universe becoming conscious of itself. We are stardust that has begun to contemplate the stars. We have arisen out of the dynamics of the Earth. Four billion years ago, our planet was molten rock, and now it sings opera. Let me tell you, this is *good news*! And I love talking about it!" The last words come out as a shout, and he jumps up to add emphasis, overcome by his own ministerial spirit. The crowd at this mid-sized venue in Cambridge, Massachusetts, laughs, enjoying this unusual preacher of an unusual gospel, although old-time Pentecostal-style passion wasn't what they expected when they signed up for an evening lecture on the "Epic of Evolution." And the evening is just getting going.

"We are the first culture that has access to the most esoteric

piece of wisdom in human history: When you look at the night sky, you are not looking at the present moment." The speaker now is a woman, Connie Barlow, Michael's partner in the evening's presentation. "Our grandparents did not know this. Telescopes are time machines. All that scientists can see in the night sky is deeper and deeper back into time. And if you connect the events back in time in a meaningful way"—Connie pauses, readying the punch line—"you get what is perhaps the best description of the universe: *story*. It's a great story." Connie is the science writer and Michael is the former Christian pastor, and over the course of the next two hours, this husband and wife tag team of spirit and science takes turns awakening this attentive audience to our cosmic evolutionary heritage, a story that they say can and will help save this world. "As we integrate the great story of cosmogenesis, the epic of evolution, into our lives," Michael declares, "we will see a worldwide spiritual revival."

There have been tougher crowds for Connie and Michael, venues where they were lucky if they could convince the audience that the dinosaurs *didn't* die out five thousand years ago in Noah's flood. Today's audience—liberal, open-minded, Boston intellectuals—is a little more the norm, if there is such a thing for these two apostles of evolution. It's been two years since Michael and Connie quit their day jobs, gave notice on their apartment, set up a bed in the back of their van, and set off on the road—self-styled itinerant missionaries evangelizing evolution on the highways and byways of America. Over that time, they have seen their share of places and people—school assemblies, Native American reservations, universities, Montessori schools, Quaker meeting groups, alternative spiritual communities, ecological conferences, fundamentalists, liberals, conservatives, all ages and all faiths. But whatever new and interesting audiences they find themselves in front of, their basic message is the same: the universe story—the great story of evolution from the Big Bang to human beings, from



stardust to us—is the foundational *spiritual* myth of our time. It is the gospel of the universe, and Connie and Michael are shouting the good news to anyone who is willing to lend an ear. They are convinced that evolutionary spirituality is going to change not only Christianity but every other religion as well and, in fact, every field of human endeavor. Why? “It is a story,” as Michael puts it, “that includes all of us. In this great story, there is no human story that is left out.”

“You can be certain that at least three to five atoms you just breathed in were once a part of the body of the Buddha or the body of Jesus.”

It is said that those who are most passionate about religion, or for that matter about almost anything, are those who convert to the movement, not those who are born and raised already involved. The most passionate teetotaler is the former alcoholic, the most passionate Christian is the converted sinner, and in this case, the most passionate advocate of evolutionary spirituality is the former anti-evolution fundamentalist. Believe it or not, there was a time when Michael would more likely have been the heckler in the audience warning of the satanic evils of evolutionary theory. “I was once one of those people that you see passing out those anti-evolution tracts,” he admits. “I would argue with anyone who thought the world was more than six thousand years old.” He pauses, then smiles. “So whatever your name for Ultimate Reality is, he, she, or it obviously has a sense of humor.”

It’s been many years since the days when Michael was a newly converted born-again Christian saving the souls of wayward scientists, and he has traveled a long road to his new Damascus. But just don’t try to tell him that his evolutionary faith somehow means he’s not a Christian anymore, or for that matter, not a fundamentalist. “I do not consider myself an ex-Christian or an ex-fundamentalist. I’m not an ex-anything,” he says with a wry

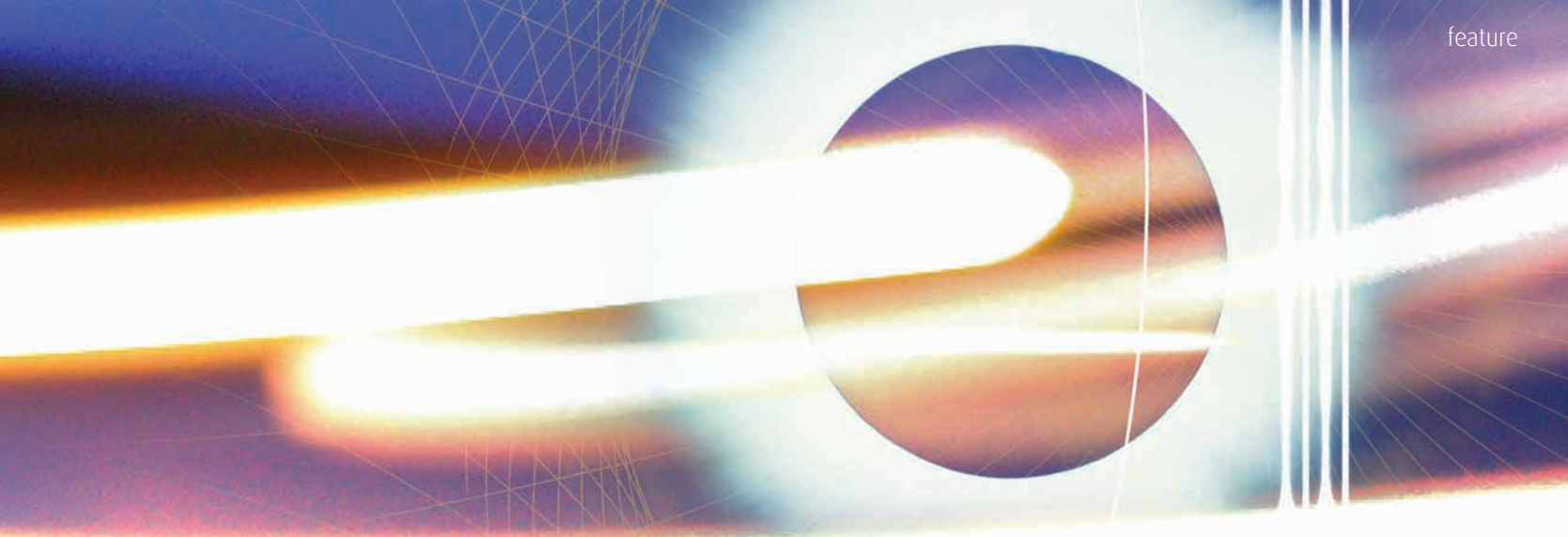
smile. “I’m still a fundamentalist; it’s just that my fundamentals have shifted.”

Indeed, both Michael’s and Connie’s fundamentals have shifted a great deal in the last two decades, and both have been able to parlay their strengths into a message that reaches audiences across the science and spirit spectrum, from Silicon Valley to the Bible Belt. Connie, who refers to herself as a “religious naturalist,” has spent fifteen years writing about the evolutionary

sciences. But much of her worldview was forged in the deep ecology movement, and her spiritual sensibilities are gleaned almost entirely from the natural world. She easily speaks the language of science and draws her inspiration from the powerful insights of great humanists and naturalists like Julian Huxley, Carl Sagan, E.O. Wilson, and Loren Eiseley, at least three of whom have a reputation

of being avowed atheists. Michael, on the other hand, came to his evolutionary faith as a theist, with a deep connection to the Christian notion of transcendence, and he easily speaks the language of religion. Connie approaches this work from the bottom up, a naturalist reaching for the ways of the spirit; Michael from the top down, a God-inspired leader who has come to recognize the inherent divinity of the evolving cosmos. And in that meeting place between transcendence and immanence, they have long shared a common passion—a love for the work of Thomas Berry.

For a small but growing community of ecologically oriented Christians, the life and work of Catholic monk Thomas Berry have been a beacon of light in an otherwise dark theological landscape. With the help of cosmologist Brian Swimme, Berry has promoted a new creation myth for a global culture on the brink of ecological disaster. He calls it “The Great Story,” a revised Genesis based on our unfolding knowledge of the universe. For both Connie and Michael, coming across Berry’s work was a dramatic event that eventually set their feet on the missionary road they travel today. “The first night I heard Thomas Berry’s vision, about an hour into the evening, I began to tremble,” Michael recalls. “Goosebumps broke out all over my arms and legs, and I realized that *this* was



my destiny. I was going to popularize this message for the rest of my life. I had received my calling as an evolutionary evangelist.”

For those who harbor romantic ideas of life on the road as a traveling missionary, a closer look at Connie and Michael's van/office/bedroom/living quarters might quickly disabuse one of such notions. No, it's not painted with Day-Glo colors, and “furthur” is not tattooed above the front windshield—there is nothing retro about the work of these two traveling preachers. It does, however, have a Jesus fish painted on the outside, kissing a Darwin fish, with a small red heart presiding over them both, a testament to the nature of their divinely, and scientifically, inspired mission. But however divine the outside may be, the inside is decidedly not God's gift to comfort. With an improvised bed covering all but a few inches of available space, a clothesline draped from side to side functioning as a pseudo-closet, and hundreds of books and other bits and pieces of traveling gear jammed in, among, between, and around all other available space, Connie and Michael's living quarters look most like a sort of mobile homeless shelter—that is, if the homeless were passionate about evolution. (Don't send donations for an upgrade—soon after the interview, they purchased a new and much nicer vehicle.) However, for anyone whose spiritual longings have ever included the desire to walk out the front door with nothing but the clothes on your back and hit the road in the name of God, the life that Connie and Michael have taken up certainly strikes all the right chords. Imagine the freedom: you, a car, the open road, the vast cosmos, and three hundred million human beings—dry tinder just waiting for that evolutionary spark.

“I want you to take a deep breath,” Connie pauses to let the audience respond. “Okay. You can be certain that at least three to five atoms you just breathed in were once a part of the body of the Buddha or the body of Jesus. You see, we inter-exist; we are deeply interconnected at all levels.”

The Unitarian church is crowded this evening, and the average age is probably about fifty or so—a collection of free-thinking boomers that I imagine run the gamut from peace activists to yuppie executives. Connie, a longtime Unitarian, is in her element

here, dispensing scientific wisdom with the grace of one who knows just what buttons to push in her students' consciousness. Call it the Sagan gene, that unique ability to communicate the nature of the scientific world with a religious depth of feeling, but by whatever name, Connie has it. And in this audience, her presentation goes over a little easier than Michael's, who is giving the congregation all they can handle.

“When I speak in Unitarian Universalist circles,” Michael confides afterward, “for the first ten minutes, I can always count on a certain percentage of the church having a *tilt* experience because of the way I'm communicating. They may love *what* I'm saying, but they balk at my style. It's the Pentecostal passion, the Pentecostal enthusiasm for life and celebration of life.” This passion is a key element of Connie and Michael's ministry. In a postmodern, ironic world that often seems to have associated all deeply felt spiritual conviction with Billy Graham-style fundamentalism, Michael is something of an anomaly. He's not apologetic about his spirituality on any level; his body language, his words, and his tone of voice all convey an unspoken challenge to a culture long wary of anyone expressing too much confidence when it comes to matters of truth. Indeed, one can almost sense from both Connie and Michael the emergence of a new form of spiritual expression, one that may seem to mimic the metaphysical certainty of a much earlier time but that is now informed by an infinitely richer scientific and philosophical worldview. If Nietzsche's existential doubt helped set the tone for our spiritual lives at the dawn of the twentieth century, perhaps a new kind of faith, and a new kind of certainty, is destined to emerge as the prevailing mood in the twenty-first. And that seems to be at least one of the underlying messages—that it's time to venture back into the waters of passion and conviction, fully supported this time with the open-minded curiosity of science and the inspired idealism that comes from appreciating the position in which fourteen billion years of evolution has placed human consciousness. “What Pentecostal offers is a confidence, a groundedness in truth, that the liberal churches have lost,” Michael explains. “Liberal Christians so often lack the passion. They don't speak from that base of certainty. And



now, with this Great Story perspective, we can all begin to speak again with that level of passion and confidence. You see, I am a Pentecostal still. I have the same exuberant, expressive, passionate relationship to God, to life, and to the risen Christ that I know in my heart.”

While that message may be just what the doctor ordered for liberal Christian churches adrift in a sea of theological uncertainty, Michael and Connie hardly see their mission as destined only for the more tolerant, more receptive, ecumenical edges of the Christian community, or even only for Christians. Michael acknowledges that this vision of evolutionary spirituality may be alive in only a small minority today, but as he puts it, “That’s how evolution happens. It happens on the fringes.” And he is simply undaunted by the formidable challenge their mission represents for much of the religious status quo. “I will be forty-five soon,” he declares. “I believe that in my lifetime, we will see the majority of Christians—I don’t know whether it will be fifty-five percent or eighty percent—embracing

finally giving up the irrational fear that if they allow spirituality into their picture of evolution, they are suddenly going to be overwhelmed by the minions of Oral Roberts, taking the country back to the theological dark ages. “Evolutionists don’t realize that they have won the war,” Connie tells me, explaining that there are actually very few people these days who still argue against the big picture of our evolutionary legacy. Too many scientists are stuck in the past, fighting the ghosts of long-discredited creationists. “They are still fighting skirmishes,” she says, “missing the fact that the main argument today is about *how* evolution has happened—not *that* it has happened.”

Given their unique talent for conveying the message of evolutionary spirituality, and their unusual melding of science and spirit in a world where precisely that mixture is becoming the hot ticket of the day, it’s hard to imagine that the mission of these two modern-day troubadours is not destined for great things. No doubt the bigger venues will come, and the reputation of these relatively

unknown wanderers in the religious back roads of a sleepy but slowly awakening America will grow. Until then, if you pass by the local Church of Christ next Sunday morning, or the Rotary Club next Wednesday night, or perhaps the school assembly on Thursday afternoon, and you hear a preacher’s cadence sounding out with all the fire-

and-brimstone passion of a world in crisis desperately needing spiritual salvation, maybe you’re hearing the early warning signs of a new religious vision, hidden now, but slowly building to what promises to be one of the most interesting cultural crescendos of the new millennium. And maybe, just maybe, that voice you hear is not just a call from the future, but the sound of Connie or Michael out on that missionary road, preaching the good news of a coming revelation, an evolution revolution, a new kind of Lord for a new kind of world. ■

You can follow Connie and Michael’s evolutionary tour at their website: www.thegreatstory.com

“I believe that in my lifetime, we will see the majority of Christians embracing a deeply ecological evolutionary cosmology, and seeing their traditions through that lens.”

a deeply ecological evolutionary cosmology, and seeing their traditions through that lens, interpreting heaven and hell, grace and forgiveness, the Trinity, the virgin birth, and all the Christian teachings through that lens.”

Now, if that vision is to be anything more than a good idea, then someone besides the Unitarians, the New Agers, and a few pioneering theologians is going to have to get on the evolutionary train. And that means *really* get on it, not just tacitly accept, as the Pope did not that long ago, that evolution plays a role in life’s development. It means appreciating and embracing the profound spiritual significance of placing human life in a universal, cosmological, and developmental context. And for scientists, it means

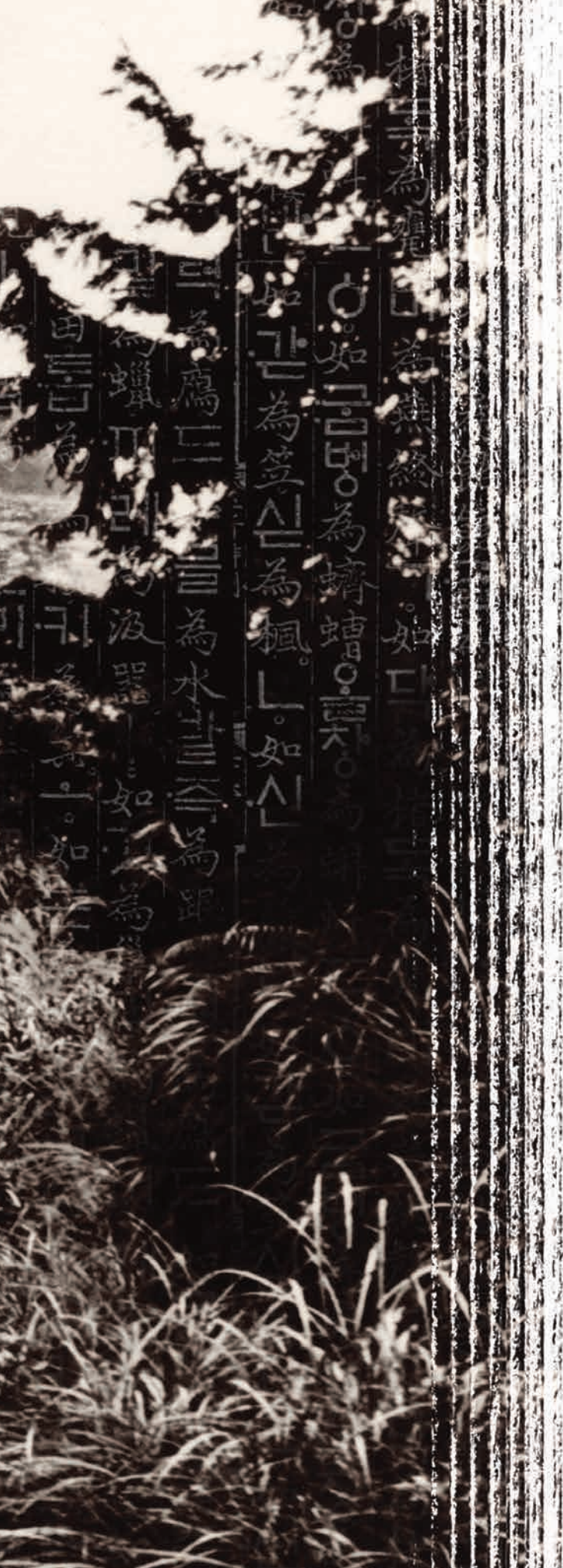


beyond limits

27,000 Miles to Buddhahood

The Tendai Monks of Mount Hiei take
the ultramarathon to a whole new level

by Pete Bampton



The path of a marathon monk is never-ending.

Tendai Saying

MILE 20. But I don't cruise by this mile marker with the same breezy elation as the others I have passed. Another six miles to go? Crikey, I don't know if I can make it! It feels like an unbearable, interminable prospect. I am in trouble. My new British-made state-of-the-art running shoes are turning out not to be a very good fit. What on earth was it that possessed me to buy British, I wonder, as I am overtaken by a fellow countryman wearing Union Jack shorts and a pair of Nikes. My left big toe is crushed under a fold in the leather upper and feels like it is bleeding profusely. It throbs more and more painfully as I pound the asphalt up an on-ramp, which looms before me like a mountain . . . I gaze at the surroundings to try and distract my attention. Ominous tower blocks, barricaded storefronts, and sky the color of wet sugar and cement. I'm in the Bronx now, and the roaring crowds that fueled my heroic ascent up Manhattan's First Avenue have thinned out. And so have the runners. We aren't buoyed by each other's slipstream and spirit anymore. It's every man and woman alone with him- or herself grinding through "the wall," confronting the concerted rebellion of mind and body head-on. A pall of lonesome desperation descends upon me as I listen to the sound of my heavy feet echoing among the oppressive brownstone tenements. Then it starts to rain. The first few splatters are gently refreshing, like manna dropping from heaven, but it soon turns into a torrential downpour of Biblical proportions. Before long, I am soaked to the bone, my aching feet sloshing through streams of water. Our roadside supporters run for cover or batten down beneath umbrellas. No more smiling kids slapping high fives or offering bananas. And no mile marker on the horizon.

No mile marker . . . Where the heck is mile 21? Surely I must have passed it by now? I'm breaking up and my mind has gotten a foothold. *This is hell. You're crazy! You hate this. Why, why, why are you doing this?* I approach the next water station, and as I slow down to reach for a bottle in the pelting rain, I almost grind to a halt. All the momentum of mind and body coaxes me to stop: *You're injured; it's dangerous to carry on. There'll always be next year . . .* Suddenly I realize if I don't snap free of these voices, I'll be dead in the water—literally. I pull up my head and focus my inner antennae beyond the grey smudge of the Harlem skyline. Over there is the finish line in Central Park. A surge of energy arises from nowhere, and I see the next marker just ahead. Mile 21. I splash by with determined elation, riding above the pain in my toes. The rain begins to taper off a little and I speed up a notch. *I'm going to beat my previous time*, I think to myself. And I do. About forty

minutes later I am euphoric as I cross the finish line. I've shaved off fifteen minutes!

The ordeal of this marathon proved once again to be a graphic illustration of the fact that going beyond self-imposed limitations of mind and body could open up hitherto unknown potentials. This was fortifying inspiration for any aspiring spiritual warrior, to be sure. But that was about as far as I had taken it. When I learned about a sect of Tendai Buddhists in Japan known as the Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei, however, I found out that they had taken it, well, quite a bit further. Their lofty goal was nothing less than Buddhahood in this life through the purifying practice of multiple marathons! I was intrigued, to say the least. And as I pursued my investigation further, I soon discovered something remarkable beyond belief, a phenomenon that takes the term "ultramarathon" to a whole new level.

The "One-Thousand-Day Mountain Marathon," as described in John Stevens's book *The Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei* and in Christopher Hayden's documentary film of the same name, was initiated in the ninth century by So-o, the Grand Patriarch



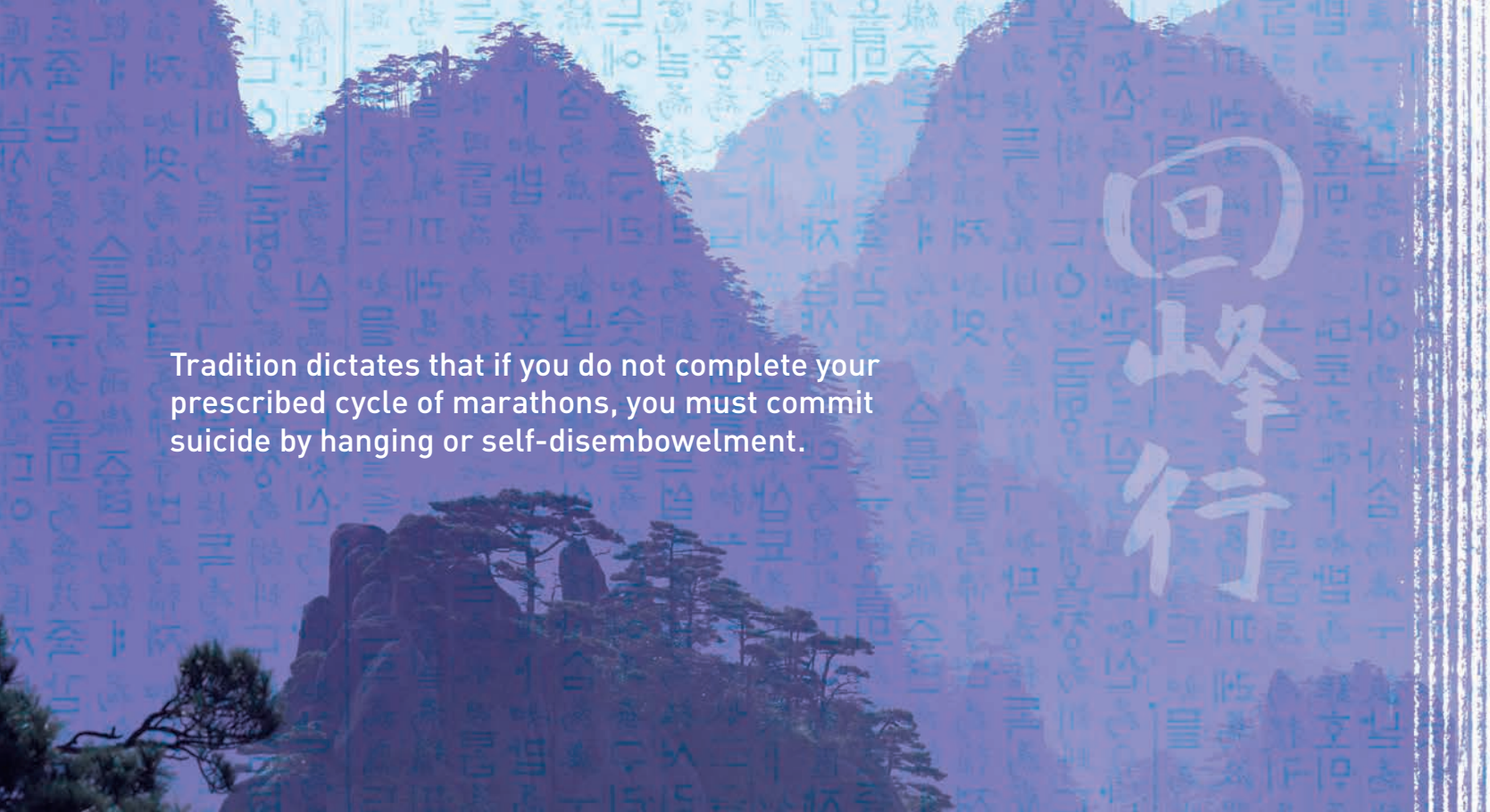
As the monk scales the final grueling steps up to the monastery on Mount Hiei, he is assisted by a novice with a pushing stick.

of Tendai Buddhism. After hearing the legend of "Priest Big Shoes," a revered walking monk in China, So-o had a dream that instructed him to follow in the legendary monk's footsteps. *All of the pilgrimage sites on Mount Hiei are sacred*, the voice informed him. *Visit them often*. And he did. Very often. But in the eleven centuries since So-o first set off up the mountain, few have endeavored to follow in his footsteps. It is only very rare individuals within the Tendai ranks who dare to undertake this formidable challenge. In fact, there have only been forty-six "marathon monks" since 1885. The Great Marathon is revered as the ultimate in austere practices. If you are curious to know why, then let me take you on a journey . . .

Picture this. You awake at midnight. It's the middle of winter. Very cold. You attend an hour-long service in the frigid Buddha Hall, sip on some miso soup, and chomp on a few rice balls. Then you dress in a white vestment—the same garment you would be dressed in at your own funeral. You wrap the "cord of death" around your waist and tuck a sheathed knife inside. Why the cord and the knife? Tradition dictates that if you do not complete your prescribed cycle of marathons, you must commit suicide by hanging or self-disembowelment! You gather candles, food offerings, and a rosary for the 250 prayer stops you will make on your eighteen-mile marathon around Mount Hiei (some of which will be at unmarked graves to honor monks who died by suicide). You put your handmade straw sandals on your bare feet, and take a couple of spare pairs along in case they are destroyed by rain or wear and tear (sometimes you go through five pairs in one trip). Then, you pick up your paper lantern and head out into the icy night for the snowy trails of Mount Hiei.

Your running style dates back over a thousand years, and is poised somehow between walking and running. "Eyes focused about 100 feet ahead while moving in a steady rhythm, keeping the head level, the shoulders relaxed, the back straight, and the nose and navel aligned." You harmonize your pace and breathing with the inner drone of a mantra that you chant continuously. As you gain experience, you flow through the course, maintaining the same speed for climbing up and going downhill.

So this is the first of one hundred successive very early mornings on which you will set off for your marathon, finishing between 7:30 and 9:30 AM. Sound grueling? Well, you're just getting started. *This is just a warm-up!* Once you finish your hundred days, you are qualified to apply for the real deal—the full One-Thousand-Day Mountain Marathon of Hiei. If accepted, you will commit to a seven-year retreat, which will consist of nine hundred more marathons! The first three hundred will be undertaken over three years, one hundred days in a row, at some point between March and mid-October. From your fourth year, you will have earned the privilege of wearing socks and be allowed to carry a walking stick. However, along with these added luxuries, the stakes are upped considerably—you will



Tradition dictates that if you do not complete your prescribed cycle of marathons, you must commit suicide by hanging or self-disembowelment.

now complete two hundred consecutive marathons each year!

If one were to liken the One-Thousand-Day Mountain Marathon to a mere twenty-six-mile marathon in New York City, then on completion of your seven hundredth marathon (at the end of five years), you are approaching mile 18. As you run up Manhattan's First Avenue toward the Bronx, you are about to hit that unpredictable twilight zone respectfully known among marathoners as "the wall." In a regular marathon, this is where you face down the devil as your body and mind start giving out and insisting that you *stop*! You may at times feel like you are going to die, but the only recourse is to *keep going* no matter what. In the One-Thousand-Day Marathon however, "the wall" is a literal confrontation with death known as *doiri*. You do stop moving, but not for a nice cup of tea and a sit-down. Rather, you go into a nine-day retreat that consists of seven and a half days without food or water or sleep (it's been reduced from the original ten days because a few too many monks before you died during the last day). You sit in a full lotus posture and chant mantras day and night. If you live through this forbidding trial, which is designed to bring you to the very edge of your mortality and plunge you into a resplendent vision of the Ultimate, then you will have attained the title of *Togyoman Ajari*, or "Saintly Master of the Severe Practice."

Hunger will be the least of your agonies. By the fifth day, you will be so dehydrated that you will taste blood. But at least you will be allowed to wash your mouth out with water, even if you

can't drink it. Two devoted novices will make sure that you stay erect and awake. Your only break from the sitting position during this ordeal will be the 2 AM pilgrimage to the Holy Well. You will draw water, which you will then offer to Fudo Myo-o, the Unshakable King of All Light, a deity whose awesome energy you aspire to embody. This walk will take about fifteen minutes on the first night. On the last night, it will take you roughly an hour and a half, moving at a snail's pace across the stone floor, assisted by the novices. According to the marathon monks who have preceded you, you will find yourself in an extraordinarily rarefied, crystal-

On your last day, as you scale the final set of very steep steps and reach the temple on Mount Hiei, your mortal coil will have traveled roughly 27,000 miles—a distance greater than the circumference of the earth!

line state of consciousness. You will feel yourself absorbing mist through the pores of your skin, hear ashes falling from incense sticks, and smell food being prepared in dwellings far away. You will probably lose about a quarter of your body weight.

Once through the Wall of Death, grateful to be alive and moving toward the light—around mile 23 in the New York City marathon—you might be lucky enough to find yourself sailing on a second wind, tapping into mysterious sources of energy and resilience that lie beyond the seeming depletion of the physical



During the arduous Fire Ceremony the [almost mummified] monk chants 100,000 mantras while casting the prayer sticks of his devotees into the scorching flames.

body. As a marathon monk though, second wind or not, this is where you really break into supernatural territory. After the “seven hundred days of moving and the nine days of stillness,” followed by a brief respite of three weeks to recover your body weight, you enter the sixth year. You are required to complete one hundred consecutive thirty-seven-and-a-half-mile marathons that take fourteen to fifteen hours to complete. And on the heels of that comes the seventh and final year, the marathon monk’s equivalent to that last all-or-nothing dash through Central Park to the finish line. It consists of two one-hundred-day terms. In the first you will face the absolute ultimate in ultramarathons: a daily

maintain your body weight and stamina. Nobody will know how you do this. Including you!

The final one-hundred-day term, back on the slopes of the mountain, tapers off like a soft alpine breeze, consisting of mere eighteen-mile daily marathons. Then, on your last day, as you scale the final set of very steep steps and reach the temple on Mount Hiei, your mortal coil will have traveled roughly 27,000 miles—a distance greater than the circumference of the earth!

Wouldn’t you just long to be able to yell out with all your exploding liberated heart and soul, “Hallelujah!” or “Yessssssssss!” or some Zen equivalent like “Kensho!” at this inconceivably glorious moment of victory? Well, if your soul is set on scaling the sunlit summit of Buddhahood, you’ll restrain yourself. Not just because it isn’t kosher to openly express your emotions in Japan, but because, for the hardest of the marathon monks, it isn’t quite over yet.

If you are one of the rare few whose warrior spirit remains unquenched by the ordeal of the Great Marathon, then you can choose to cap it all, two to three years later, with the trial to end all trials: the daunting and fearsome Fire Ceremony. Indeed, this ritual is so forbidding that only six marathon monks since World War II have undergone it. If you choose to embark upon this final rite of passage, you’ll begin by fasting on root vegetables, boiled pine needles, nuts, and water for one hundred days. Why? This fast serves the purpose of drying you out (almost mummifying you in the process) so that you will not

Once through the Wall of Death, grateful to be alive and moving toward the light, you might be lucky enough to find yourself sailing on a second wind, tapping into mysterious sources of energy and resilience that lie beyond the seeming depletion of the physical body.

fifty-two-and-a-half-mile marathon through the city of Kyoto. No, that’s *not* a misprint. That’s *two New York City marathons a day for one hundred days in a row!*

Accompanying you in this death-defying endeavor will be a trusty novice carrying a folding chair. If you are lucky enough to encounter red traffic lights, and other temporarily insurmountable obstructions, the novice will unfold the chair so that you can sit and catch the odd power nap. This is just as well, because you

“expire of excessive perspiration” during the Fire Ceremony. The ordeal lasts eight days. It will require you to sit before a roaring fire, casting your devotees’ prayer sticks into the scorching flames while chanting 100,000 mantras to Fudo Myo-o, who burns up evil passions and illuminates the darkest corners of existence. You are allowed a little sitting-up sleep (in front of the fire). Most monks regard this as the greatest challenge of them all.

Imbibing the phenomenon of the Marathon Monks left me marveling in wonder and disbelief. The more I tried to imagine what it would be like to undertake such an ordeal as the One-Thousand-Day Marathon, the more I felt in awe of their achievement. I also found myself reflecting on the role of ascetic practice in spiritual life. The Buddha, who wandered all over northern India during his long ministry, did fast himself to the door of death before finally rejecting extreme asceticism and proclaiming the Middle Way, the enlightened path between all pairs of opposites. Ascetic practice may not have given him Enlightenment, but as John Stevens points out in his book, there would be no doctrine of the Middle Way if Gautama had not so exhaustively pursued the ascetic path. In this way, it was an essential part of his trajectory toward an absolute transformation, and maybe this is why austere practice has always remained at the heart of Buddhism.

One of the most moving scenes in the documentary film, made in 1993, is where we hear the simple yet profound words of a radiant ninety-six-year-old Tendai abbot: “It is not the pain that matters. Pain is only a symptom of the effort that you put into the task,” he tells us. “When a person sets his mind totally on achieving something, he begins to realize the inner power that he has.” But what is particularly beautiful, and deeply inspiring, in the case of the Marathon Monks, is that this “inner power” is realized for the benefit of all. The first five years are a solitary ordeal. The monk is alone in surmounting the limits of body and mind and in so doing becomes as one with the mountains, the stars and the sky, the stones, the plants and the trees. In the last years however, after traversing the near-death experience of the *doiri*, the monk’s austerities become a practice for bestowing merit, as he glides through the city streets of Kyoto spreading blessings to all.

So what do these intrepid spiritual athletes have to say about their experience? One monk, when asked what he had learned, replied with disarming humility: “Gratitude for the teaching of the enlightened ones, gratitude for the wonders of nature, gratitude for the charity of human beings, gratitude for the opportunity to practice—gratitude, not asceticism, is the principle of the [One-Thousand-Day Marathon].” ■

Epilogue:

Sakai the Supermonk

The most remarkable portrait in John Stevens’s book is of a monk called Sakai. After a stormy life in the world, Sakai ordains at the late age of forty. He undergoes intense trials under the tutelage of his abbot Hakozaiki, who is revered and feared as the harshest taskmaster on Mount Hiei. At one point, Sakai is attacked by a wild boar and as a result suffers from a festering wound that swells his first two toes to twice their normal size. The toenail on his big toe falls off and Sakai screams in pain with every step. Unable to continue, Sakai pulls out his knife and lances the wound. Blood and pus gush out and he almost loses consciousness, but he points the knife at his throat so that if he falls, he will remain faithful to his vow to kill himself if he fails to complete the course. After a while, he recovers and proceeds, albeit slowly, to the temple, where a crowd of devotees await his arrival. Sakai apologizes for the delay saying that he had “overslept.” This experience gives him faith that he is being propelled by a higher force. Despite the fact that his injury never properly heals for the duration of the One-Thousand-Day Marathon, amazingly he completes his term. This earns him the respect of his master Hakozaiki, and the old abbot presents him with a *haiku* in his honor:

The path of practice:
Where will be
My final resting place?

But even this is not enough to quell the spiritual ardor of Sakai. Not long after finishing his first one-thousand-day term in 1980, he decides, at the age of sixty-one, to go for a second! *Yes, that means he does the entire Great Marathon again!* He finds it easier than the first and shaves a year off his time—it takes him only six years! Sakai’s only gripe is about the increased pollution in Kyoto; “I nearly choked on the smog,” he says. But when asked about the practice, Sakai’s spirit shines: “Human life is like a candle,” he says. “If it burns out halfway it does no one any good. I want the flame of my practice to consume my candle completely, letting that light illuminate thousands of places. My practice is to live wholeheartedly, with gratitude and without regret. Practice really has no beginning or end; when practice and daily life are one, that is true Buddhism.”

the vanguard generation

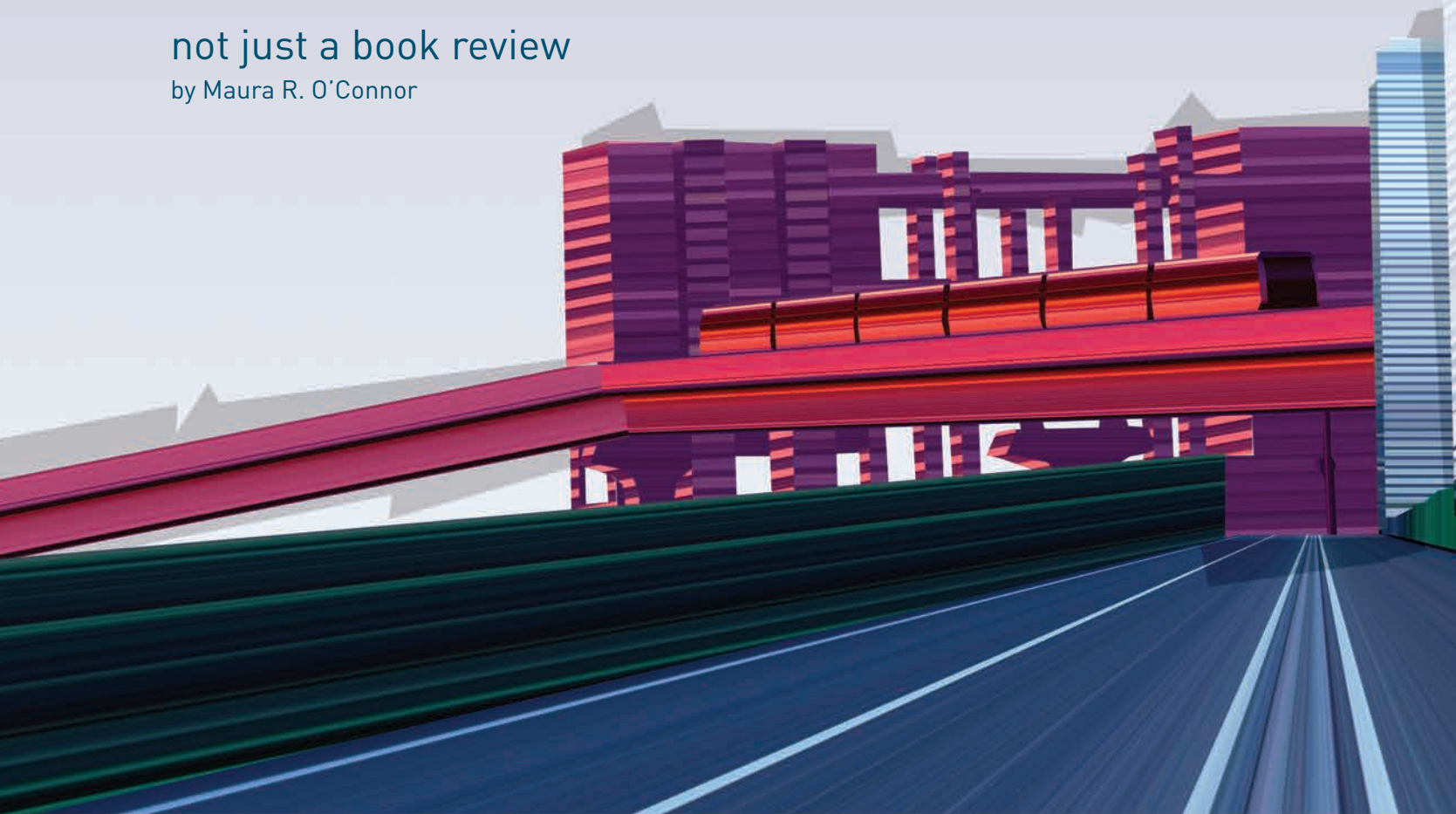
AN IRONIC ARMY

I was born fifteen years after the Summer of Love, in 1982. I didn't even exist on the same planet with John Lennon, who died two years before I was born, or Bob Marley, who died a year later. In other words, I missed the hippie boat by a long shot. But as I attempt to survey the spiritual landscape of young people today, I realize that landscape is under the shadow of this cultural milieu. The words "the sixties" don't just refer to a time in history to me. Instead, they connote a collective mood, one that was informed by idealism, originality, possibility, and the naïve self-assurance and spiritual curiosity of thousands. A mood that was always just out of reach in my own

experience growing up. And just so you know, I'm not one of those credit-card-carrying-Phish-show-attending neo-hippies who are trying to relive the sixties in their own ironic way. But there's no denying the nostalgia, intermixed with cynicism, that the period inspires in me, emotions I couldn't make sense of until this topic came up during a conversation with one of my favorite writers, the philosopher, teacher, and cultural critic Thomas de Zengotita. He said to me, "You not only have to live with the memory, you have to live with endless representations of it, which are diverse enough and rich enough that you can feel nostalgia for a time you never lived through. And

not just a book review

by Maura R. O'Connor







that's a very strange position to be in. It makes it very, very hard for you guys to feel like, 'Okay, we can wipe the slate clean and start again.'" As it turns out, I've just got a case of postmodern envy: the envy of anything real.

Don't get me wrong. The question is not whether young people at the beginning of the twenty-first century can re-create the spiritual enthusiasm or cultural revolution of the sixties, but whether these lofty terms can attain new meaning and relevance for those of us born in the age of irony and relentless skepticism. Can we afford to believe in change—again? Can we afford to believe in anything, if what Zengotita called “our ironic defense against the possibility of being duped” has become our most useful asset, an impenetrable method of psychological survival? For a long time now, the answer has been no—and the characterization of Generation X as lacking moral fiber and spiritual ambitions, or ambitions of any kind, is a testament to that. But will the next wave of youth, my own Generation Y, follow in their footsteps, as we have done in so many other ways? Or will we stake new ground? Never before has this question been so critical. In their recent book, *The World's Youth*, scholars Reed Larson and T.S. Saraswathi write, “In the end the future is in the laps of young people. We are handing the next generation of youth a world rife with serious problems—global warming, looming environmental catastrophes, poverty, numerous international conflicts—just as similarly daunting problems were handed to us. Nothing less than a full mobilization of all young people to higher goals and ideals is required for humankind to make it through the new century.”

As the pressures of the present moment in history become more and more overwhelming to contemplate, our ironic defenses seem increasingly absurd in contrast. Faced with an unprecedented complexity of horrors, nothing could be more frightening than to think of ourselves as the vanguard generation, responsible by default for the future of the human race. In fact, it sounds like a joke. With originality and idealism left as luxuries that young people in the sixties were fortunate enough to enjoy, all we have in our arsenal as the most privileged youth on the planet is irony and a lack of purpose.

However, recently I've wondered if those qualities that char-

acterized young people in the sixties—unabashed idealism, thirst for change, and a willingness to challenge the status quo—can really be gone. Isn't it more like we've stalled, so to speak, in the midst of the postmodern mood—a mood that Zengotita described as, “Hey! Wait a minute. Chill man.” And if these qualities aren't gone, then what is keeping them from reemerging, especially at a time when positive participation and change is so painfully and desperately needed? As Zengotita pointed out to me, “This mood in particular is very hard to overcome—it's like you can't be a virgin again. You know enough history to know how typical it is for human beings to fall into mass delusion and commit horrendous acts. This is what really shaped postmodernism to begin with.” The present mood of hyper-apathy among us has created terrible conditions for spiritual pursuits, to say the least. But perhaps we've reached a breaking point. Recently there has been a deluge of books about young people and spirituality, often written by those chill Gen X'ers themselves. In 2002, *Radical Spirit: Spiritual Writings from the Voices of Tomorrow* was published, containing testimonies written by, for example, Ocean Robbins, Julia Butterfly Hill, and Stuart Davis. *Blue Jean Buddha: Voices of Young Buddhists* follows the same anthology-style format, but is written by those who have followed the Buddhist spiritual path. Noah Levine, the 31-year-old author of *Dharma Punx*, is included in *Blue Jean Buddha*, as are other young authors like Diana Winston. And then there is an entire genre of Christian literature written by and for young people, including *Red Moon Rising: How 24-7 Prayer is Awakening a Generation*, and *The Rock Cries Out: Finding Eternal Truth in Unlikely Music*. Could books such as these be evidence that today's youth are beginning to want or need a larger spiritual context for our lives? I decided to investigate a couple of them and speak with their authors with one purpose in mind: to find out if the mood among us was shifting and, if so, to discover where it was headed.

DHARMA PUNX

The first work I turned to was the autobiography *Dharma Punx*, by Noah Levine. Though at face value this story of a California punk rocker who became a Buddhist seems atypical, it actually



points to a larger trend among young people who are increasingly attracted to the Buddhist path. The first generation to discover the ancient tradition at the hands of American teachers, most of them are under the age of thirty, and their numbers have multiplied at such a fast rate in the past decade that they now compose fifty-six percent of all American Buddhists. *Dharma Punx* has become increasing popular among these new young Buddhists, but it also claims to be the larger story of Generation X.

The book begins when Noah is five years old, sitting under his mother's deck holding a steak knife, listening to his step-dad shouting at his mom, and contemplating suicide. This is the age,

and father's narcissistic lifestyle and the hippie new-age values they supposedly embodied. His mother was an "addict," always involved with boyfriends that she met on meditation retreats, and his dad (author Stephen Levine, a famous Buddhist teacher in his own right) was distant, consumed by spiritual pursuits while Noah was growing up. "I totally rejected meditation and all the spiritual shit they built their lives on . . . we saw that peace and love had failed to make any real changes in the world." Later on, he writes, "I felt that peace was for hippies and that as a punk rocker it had been my duty to fight against those passive, useless people, to foster some real changes. . . ."

Noah writes about his turn to Buddhism as a shift from the outer punk rock rebellion to the inner rebellion against the mind that is the core of the Buddha dharma, a transformation that, in no uncertain terms, saved his life. When I met him in New York, he said, "I knew, for whatever reason, that I had a choice to either take on spiritual practice, or perish." Considering his former attitudes toward "spiritual shit" and his undying allegiance to the punk rock ethos, there's an irony in the fact that he's now the

"Nothing less than a full mobilization of all young people to higher goals and ideals is required for humankind to make it through the new century."

Noah writes, that he first knew he wanted to die, started smoking cigarettes, lighting fires, and stealing from both parents and friends. When he was ten, he discovered punk rock and "found [his] place in this fucked up world." These early chapters of Noah's story resonated with my own experience growing up, as they undoubtedly would with many other Gen X and Y'ers. Our rebellion started prematurely young, with an almost compulsive need to identify with anything different from what we perceived as "normal." Privileged but dissatisfied, intelligent but short on life experience, our "war" lacked a proper outlet or a consciously articulated purpose. Thus rebellion imploded, resulting in a kind of indulgent self-destruction always aided by drugs and alcohol. At the age of seventeen, Noah landed in juvenile hall after living on the streets as a junkie. There he began to meditate and eventually got sober through AA. After several trips to Asia to visit monasteries and meditation retreats, he became a Buddhist practitioner and teacher.

Fifteen years later, Noah uses *Dharma Punx* to explore the motivations behind his teenage rebellion; he writes that it was fueled by a hatred for the hypocrisy he perceived in his mother's

student of dharma teachers who are both friends and peers of his own father, including Jack Kornfield, Ram Dass, and Sharon Salzberg. Aren't these the same people, as Noah himself claims in *Dharma Punx*, whose values he was always rebelling against? When I posed this question, he simply said, "I'm not going to hang out with these people all the time, and I don't really want to be like them, because my attitudes are different. But they have this wisdom that I want."

Like Noah, many of us have grown up with a negative idea about what being "spiritual" means—that you have to become a kind of über-romantic idealist, fundamentally out of touch with the reality of the world. One of the great appeals of *Dharma Punx* to Gen X and Y'ers may be that it negates this cliché by representing a spiritual ethic and attitude towards life that is decidedly rooted in realism. As Noah writes in the preface, "This is not a fictional tale of romantic suffering or a Hollywood love story. It's about real people, real loss, and genuine spiritual growth." This realism is in part relayed through Noah's candidness when writing about his life experience, of which nothing is left out. Drugs, spiritual experiences, punk music, sex, despair, or elation—it's all there.



Granted, there are times in the book when his candidness lapses into a kind of confessionalism, weighed down by a tedium of details about his personal life. (“Ondrea offered to make me some food, but I wasn’t hungry yet. The burrito I’d eaten for lunch had been more than enough.”) But this tone in *Dharma Punx* is undoubtedly representative of our entire generation. Our sense of individuality has become the source of greatest meaning and value in our lives, and as a result, we’re inclined to be narcissistic. Yet part of what makes his book interesting—and again, a reflection of our generation—is that this extreme self-interest exists simultaneously with an enormous emphasis on the importance of working for the benefit of others.

quote, where they said, “Nothing less than a full mobilization of young people to higher goals and ideals is required for humankind to make it through the new century.” True to his style in *Dharma Punx*, Noah replied, “My immediate reaction is, like, wonderful, but it’s not going to fucking happen. That’s what the Buddha was saying. Everyone’s not going to do it. It’s too hard. But I have hope. I don’t feel totally hopeless. I feel totally committed to that revolution among young people and . . . I don’t really see it.” “But

Generation X and Y personify pop culture; take it away, and we become somewhat incomplete, and very bored.

For the past six years, Noah has dedicated himself to community service programs working with AIDS patients, teaching children and teens the philosophy of the dharma, and traveling to juvenile halls and prisons around the Bay Area in order to “plant the seeds of mindfulness, the greatest gift I could ever give.” Such “socially engaged Buddhism” has become central to the younger generation of Buddhist practitioners, no doubt inspired to some extent by Noah’s example. It was this passionate commitment to engaged service in the world—or as Noah phrased it, “finding freedom and then spending the rest of our lives giving it away”—that led me to seek him out in person. What would his perspective be, I wondered, on young people’s potential to respond to the world’s ominous future?

The night I arrived in New York City to speak with Noah, he was holding a dharma talk in a large art gallery in Soho. He cut a striking figure in his white creepers, signature shaved head, scores of tattoos, and big smile that revealed several gold teeth. Noah is a punk of the old school—you can see it even in his stance. With legs planted wide apart, he looks ever ready to start bending a knee, nodding his head in sync with a furiously fast drum beat, just before he lets loose and joins his comrades by jumping into a throbbing mosh pit. He seemed to emanate sincerity and a feeling of good humor throughout his talk, qualities that were further confirmed for me when we met the following day at his friend’s house.

I began by asking what he made of Larson and Saraswathi’s

do you think that Buddhism is capable of offering solutions to the problems that face us?” I asked him. He paused for a minute and then said, “No. I know it would be much more popular to say, ‘We have this tradition that can solve the problems of the world,’ but I don’t think that’s what the Buddha taught. We’re here in samsara, and this is a realm of suffering, of ignorance and greed and hatred. It always has been and it always will be. The spiritual tradition of enlightenment, from that perspective, isn’t about trying to make samsara into nirvana. It’s about personal freedom. That means the best thing we can do is free ourselves from the cycle of death and rebirth.”

RED MOON RISING

Red Moon Rising: How 24-7 Prayer is Awakening a Generation is the darling of Relevant Media Group, Inc., publisher of *Relevant* magazine. Run entirely by a staff under thirty, *Relevant* has been attempting to make Christianity worthwhile to young people for whom God has become extraneous. They’ve also figured out something that many Christian adults, with their crusades against the culture industry, find hard to accept: Generations X and Y personify pop culture; take it away, and we become somewhat incomplete, and very bored. By publishing books like *Red Moon Rising* that have provocative spiritual subject matter, but also savvy graphic design, *Relevant* has managed to capture the attention of



young people through a fusion of high and low culture. This is an impressive accomplishment, because that fusion is a delicate matter and most young people these days are equipped with bullshit detectors more sensitive than seismometers. But so far, their efforts appear to be working—since its birth one year ago, *Relevant* magazine's circulation has grown to 70,000.

Red Moon Rising is written by Dave Roberts, a leading UK journalist, and Pete Greig, the founder of a youth movement called 24-7 Prayer. It is the story of how the movement, since its creation five years ago by a bunch of hip Gen X'ers in Europe, has become a worldwide phenomenon, with tens of thousands of participants. It all started with Pete Greig standing on a jut of land in Portugal, surrounded by the ocean and the stars. He writes in the beginning of the book about a vision he had that night: "First my scalp began to tingle and an electric current pulsed down my spine, again and again, physically shaking my body . . . my eyes were open, but I could 'see' with absolute clarity before me the different countries laid out like an atlas. From each one a faceless army of young people rose from the page, crowds of them in every nation awaiting orders."

Seven years later, in July 1999, Greig visited Hernnhut, Germany. During the eighteenth century, Hernnhut was the site of a nonstop prayer vigil held by Moravian refugees that lasted 125 years. Inspired, 272 years later, Greig planned a weeklong twenty-four-hour-a-day prayer meeting to be held that September in England, Greig's homeland. The meeting started off rocky, but after the first night of constant prayer, "word soon spread that the best slots were the ones in the middle of the night." He writes, "In that timeless zone, between 2 and 4 AM, there was often an electric sense that you were keeping watch alone with God . . . the momentum grew as people became more immersed in the reality of what meeting God in that room could mean." Hence, 24-7 Prayer was born. As the movement grew rapidly, Greig realized that this was the army he had envisioned in Portugal years before—an army of young people praying to God on the whole world's behalf.

Today, temporary prayer meetings are held for weeklong increments in up to forty-six different locations worldwide at any given time, from Kentucky to Sweden to South America. There's also an ongoing version, called "boiler rooms," which serve as pseudo-

churches whose doors are open all the time, without exception. On top of that, there is a strong emphasis within the 24-7 Prayer movement on spreading the word of God in the streets. Many of them evangelize in party towns like Ibiza, where there is an incredible concentration of what they call "immoral" behavior going on. And for every seven hours of prayer, a participant is asked to do one hour of community service. 24-7 Prayer's website organizes all of these events—boiler rooms, prayer rooms, evangelistic missions—and it is visited by over two million people every month, a number directly equivalent to those who go to Oprah.com. I find it hard to believe myself, but what this means is that there won't be a week, a day, an hour where someone won't be praying in a prayer room until . . . well, it's anybody's guess. The movement's growth shows no sign of slowing down.

As someone who has hardly ever prayed to God—and even then with little conviction—I had to wonder what it is about the act that ignites such excitement and spiritual passion in these young people. What I gathered from the testimonies of participants in 24-7 Prayer is that prayer leads to a direct communion with God—a communion that transcends denomination or personal history and is therefore capable of uniting everyone who takes part. The authors of *Red Moon Rising* believe that as more and more of today's youth discover the power of prayer, this collective ongoing communion will ultimately transform the world. "In the prayer room, we pick up God's mannerisms; we grow in His likeness. We actually become the answer to many of our prayers. And of course that's the greatest miracle of all." Such passages inspired real amazement in me. Here was a movement that resulted in transformation, unabashedly claiming it could save the world by creating a collective force of positivity, and they said so without a trace of the cynicism, doubt, or irony so typically pervasive in the voices of young people.

The book's title, *Red Moon Rising*, comes from the Old Testament Book of Joel, which prophesies, "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered" (Joel 2:31–32). The authors refer to this passage in their preface: "Such a moon rises over every generation awaiting the one that will finally fulfill the Great Commission, taking the good news of Jesus to every culture and ushering in the kingdom of heaven." I would be lying if I said I didn't have a hard time relating to these kinds of ideas. Like most in my generation, I too have a built-in defense

“I think that the gap between the beauty of what’s possible and the pain of what’s taking place is where our challenge lies. It’s our call to action.”

Ocean Robbins

mechanism against what Zengotita called “the possibility of being duped,” and the idea that the “Great Commission” entails bringing Jesus to every culture in order to ensure their salvation so that they can be delivered at the time of the Apocalypse sounds off an alarm bell in me. But *Red Moon Rising*’s concepts of salvation and intercession raise more important questions that go beyond my mere discomfort with them; weren’t they partly the reason Christianity had become so, well, irrelevant to many young people in the first place? And at this stage, weren’t they seen as out of touch with the contemporary culture most of us have grown up in?

When I finally had the opportunity to interview Greig and Roberts, I asked them. “How do you respond to young people who have grown up with a postmodern worldview, and who would see the 24-7 Prayer movement as regressive?” Greig replied, “I understand the cynicism towards institutional and oppressive religious structures. But I am forced to conclude that the gospel is as dangerous and dazzling in the twenty-first century as it was for a first-century leper, St. Francis of Assisi, or Martin Luther King. Surely the keys to our future lie buried in the rich soil of the past.” “But,” I had to ask, “do you really think Christianity is the only way to respond to the trials of the twenty-first century, despite the fact that it is a two-thousand-year-old tradition, and that such an attitude would be viewed as fundamentalist by many in our generation?” Responding rhetorically, Roberts said, “Where are we going to discover a philosophy for the twenty-first century? Will it be a brand-new insight from a new source? I am not convinced that there are new insights to be found, nor that any generation would have the perspective and intellectual depth to fully evaluate such claims.”

THE MORNING OF OUR LIVES

What does it take to create change, to shift a mood? Zengotita said to me, “You can’t force a historical moment into existence. The talent is always there, and there are just some moments where things start to swim into focus. But if the moment’s not right, you can strain and strain and you’re not going to lay an egg. When it’s ready to happen, then it will start happening.” If ever there was a right or ready moment, it’s now. Tired of irony, hungry for the real, young people are poised on the brink of change, our quiescent potential beginning to stir restlessly. Can these two books help us to manifest it? Can they aid in this gargantuan task?

I think Noah Levine spoke for many of us when he honestly proclaimed during our interview, “When I look at the world, I don’t see an easy solution. So I feel like I’m happy working one-on-one. Do I feel I can inspire a generation, or save the world? . . . I don’t have those sorts of goals really.” Indeed, *Dharma Punx* will speak to those of us who are moved by his brand of compassionate realism. But as our future grows darker, it may be crucial that we make the effort to reevaluate what we’re actually capable of.

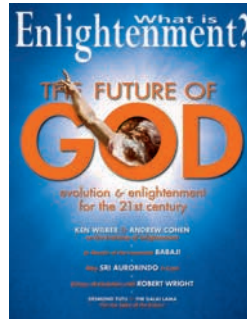
Where *Dharma Punx* refuses to go, *Red Moon Rising* blazes forth. In many ways, it looks like the solution we may be waiting for: the 24-7 Prayer movement has indeed transcended young people’s postmodern condition by awakening a positive force inspired by the Divine and creating a collective movement among the young mobilized under one goal. But is the goal of our generation as a whole really to usher in the return of Jesus? In the twenty-first century, it’s not salvation we’re concerned with, but how to respond to the world conditions we’re facing. And these may indeed require *new* insights, and *new* solutions.

Shortly after I finished reading these books, a friend told me I should speak with the youth leader Ocean Robbins. I knew that Ocean had started the nonprofit Youth for Environmental Sanity (YES!) when he was only sixteen years old, and had been an activist nearly all his thirty-two years. But as he wrote in *Radical Spirit*, he also puts enormous emphasis on the importance of having a spiritual foundation in life. When we spoke together I asked Ocean what this spiritual foundation could look like for young people in this day and age. He replied, “I think that the gap between the beauty of what’s possible and the pain of what’s taking place is where our challenge lies. It’s our call to action. Living a spiritual life today means living by the awareness of both the world as it is and the infinite possibility of humanity.” In many ways, the question of how to respond to the future is a matter of how squarely our generation can stand in this “gap” that Ocean describes.

In the face of such a challenge, we could resort to our hyper-apathy, our habitually ironic defense mechanisms, no matter how unbearable they’ve become. But I can’t help but think how ironic it is that the most rebellious thing we could do is believe that things can change, that new original possibilities are available to us if we aspire to manifest them. As the vanguard generation, faced with the potential for untold devastation, we have to. ■

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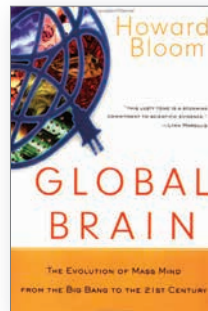
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BOOKS

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GLOBAL BRAIN: *The Evolution of Mass Mind from the Big Bang to the 21st Century*

by Howard Bloom
(John Wiley & Sons, 2001, paperback
\$16.95)

The possibility of turning human society into one global mind through the internet has been inspiring visionary scientists, politicians, futurists, businessmen, sci-fi writers, and just plain folk for decades. But evolutionary biologist Howard Bloom, the highly acclaimed author of *Global Brain*, claims that networking, and a resultant global mind, has been the name of the game since the dawn of time.

In 223 brilliantly written pages backed by more than 100 pages of references, Bloom goes to town to prove his point: that global connectivity has been built into the fabric of evolution from the word “go,” that is, from the Big Bang onward. According to Bloom, evolution is never an individual affair. Rejecting the commonly accepted notion that evolution is a result of the survival war waged by the “selfish gene,” he argues that it is and always has been a collective endeavor, strongly dependent on elaborate networking. Elementary particles network; bacteria network; animals, from the most primitive to the most complex, network.

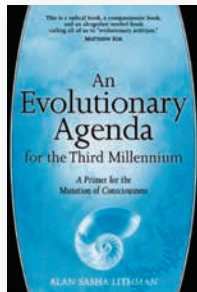
Stay with Bloom, and you’ll find yourself in a mind-boggling tour spanning fourteen billion years and the whole range of life—from elementary particles to politics, zoology to religion, and the laboratories of scientists to

the inner mental chambers of Islamic terrorists. At the end you’ll witness a crescendo of poetic exuberance, as Bloom sets forth his credo about mankind being evolution’s “self-awareness, her frontal lobes and fingertips.” He writes, “We are second-generation star stuff come alive. We are parts of something 3.5 billion years old, but pubertal in cosmic time. We are neurons of this planet’s interspecies mind.”

Bloom never moves away from the principles of scientific inquiry and is careful to back all of his statements with hard data. He also claims no spiritual inclinations, presenting himself as a confirmed atheist. (Read his analysis of the motives behind organized religion and you’ll see what he means!) Yet his conclusion—that all the myriad forms of life are parts of one mass mind, one “global brain” of the highest intelligence—is deeply spiritual. So is his belief that evolution is now entering a new phase, that of conscious evolution, in which humanity is the means of nature’s self-reflection.

Bloom is a superb, entertaining writer who combines scientific rigor with an inspiring, poetic vision. The result is a stimulating, fascinating, and very enjoyable book.

Igal Moria



AN EVOLUTIONARY AGENDA FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

by Alan Sasha Lithman
(White Cloud Press, 2003, paperback \$16.95)

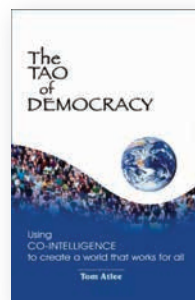
An Evolutionary Agenda for the Third Millennium is a prophetic vision of the final unfolding of human evolution as we quickly approach what author Alan Lithman sees as the end of the Egoic Era. This era began at the very inception of the universe, when the universe itself recoiled from the sheer magnitude of the force of the Big Bang. According to Lithman, the aftershock of this traumatic cosmic birthing is the same egoic force within human beings that always instinctively resists any form of change.

Lithman believes that human beings today represent a new species, *Homo Transitionalis*, a transitional species whose main function is to transcend ego and egoic tendencies in order to make it through these turbulent times so that the human race can survive and mutate into its final egoless form. If we are successful, if we curb the tide of destruction that is threatening to cascade down around us, we will be the first branch of the infinite evolutionary tree to have consciously willed its own mutation.

Lithman's call to arms is fueled by his own profound awakening to, and passion for, the reality of evolution. He prescribes an agenda of "evolutionary activism" to facilitate transformation at the personal and collective level, even including a radical shift in our economic

structure and stock markets, that will usher in a postmonetary social system. Much of the book's cosmology and evolutionary history seems purely, and at times implausibly, speculative, which for some could weaken the impact of Lithman's vision. At the same time, the vast sweep of time he synthesizes and the enormous responsibility inherent in this evolutionary project are truly awe-inspiring.

Jeff Carreira



THE TAO OF DEMOCRACY

by Tom Atlee
(Writers' Collective, 2003, paperback \$15.95)

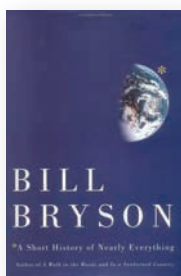
The Tao of Democracy is a wonderfully well-written and accessible synthesis culled from years of Tom Atlee's research on dialogue and deliberation. His lifelong experience and passion for what can happen when people come together are literally infectious. As a result of his own political activism from the sixties onward, and especially his watershed experience of the Great Peace March for Global

Nuclear Disarmament in 1986, where he first experienced the liberating wisdom of group synergy, Atlee has immersed himself in learning everything there is to know about group intelligence.

Many inspiring stories illustrate how people with diverse and even opposing positions have been able to miraculously come together with remarkable results. Collective Intelligence is what Atlee calls the greater wisdom, resolution of conflict, and subtle levels of problem solving that emerge in these deliberative groups. He describes a wide variety of methods to catalyze the authentic dialogue that leads to these communal expressions of intelligence. Described in detail are such methods as Dynamic Facilitation and the organized conversations known as World Cafés. One of the most impressive examples is Citizen Deliberative Councils, where diverse strangers discover the mystery of their shared humanity and collaborative aliveness on the way to resolving specific societal problems. Atlee hopes to see the convening of these councils become much more common, as the results they have produced in several countries have been profound.

The Tao of Democracy inspires action. The extensive bibliography and wealth of references make it an ideal handbook for anyone interested in pursuing the experience of group wisdom. And it is indispensable for those who want to get involved in the bigger picture of transforming our future through transforming democracy.

Elisa Mishory



A SHORT HISTORY OF NEARLY EVERYTHING

by Bill Bryson

[Broadway Books, 2003, hardcover \$26.00]

"I didn't know the first thing about the only planet I was ever going to live on." Such was the rather unsettling thought that gripped popular travel author Bill Bryson as he flew across the Pacific one day. Subsequently spellbound by an urge to fathom just about everything that science has learned about our planet, a three-year quest for knowledge ensued and *A Short History of Nearly Everything* is the result.

And what a wild and rollicking romp it is! From the Big Bang through eons of grinding evolution, Bryson serves as

our newly erudite, wisecracking tour guide on a voyage that catapults us into the mind-boggling infinitude of space and squeezes us into the infinitesimal micro-world of the molecule. We follow paths forged by obsessive scientists as they attempt to map the transit of Venus, the depths of the ocean, the code of our DNA, and well, just about everything else! Along the way Bryson engages us in rapturous meditations on the inconceivable wonders of proteins and protons, quarks and quasars, and more seemingly mundane phenomena such as water, air, and the weather. Scientific giants (and very eccentric human beings) like Newton, Darwin, and Einstein pop into life on the page and many amazing (and often disconcerting) facts are liberally sprinkled throughout. Did you know, for example, that Yellowstone National Park actually sits on top of the submerged cone of a smoldering supervolcano that is overdue for a blowout? Or have you ever been intrigued at all by the likely scenario that will unfold when the next asteroid with our name on it comes around? You get the idea. *A Short History of Nearly Everything* is one of Bryson's most educational and entertaining travel books to date—a never-a-dull-moment journey that makes the usually arcane world of scientific discovery accessible, fascinating, occasionally frightening, but always lots of fun.

Pete Bampton

tion of Oneness perceives the remainder as "other." This he calls "original perception," and its occurrence in a human being creates the first concept of self.

He gives a powerful and compelling explanation of the dizzying process through which this original sense of self continuously divides, ultimately forming the nearly infinite mass of self-concept that makes up the hopelessly fragmented modern human personality. Dr. Eisen sees this process in the human psyche as the most recent product of billions of years of evolution. According to him, duality has been evolving since the inception of the universe in order for oneness to satisfy its insatiable desire for self-knowledge. Our role as human beings is to return to original perception, which is achieved through deep spiritual practice, and which finally allows the universe to awaken to itself.

This brief description is a vast oversimplification of a very complex thesis giving the impression of a linear progression of thought, which is not true to the text. In the author's own words, "This is not an easy book to read. . . . [It] should be better organized, but it is not." In writing *Oneness Perceived*, Dr. Eisen has elected to follow his own thought process rather than impose any potentially more logical structure to the writing. Those who do not share Dr. Eisen's love of intellectual pursuit may find themselves at times overwhelmed and confused by the sheer volume of the ideas and concepts that are explored. But others will find a thrilling ride through the passionate and inspired contemplations of a powerfully enlivened mind as it careens, often wildly, through a torrential stream of insight and realization.

Jeff Carreira



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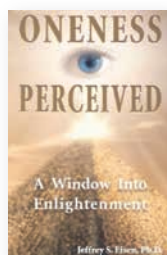
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ONENESS PERCEIVED: A Window Into Enlightenment

by Jeffrey S. Eisen, Ph.D.
(Paragon House, 2003,
paperback \$19.95)

In *Oneness Perceived*, Dr. Jeffrey Eisen examines the question: What is the relationship between Oneness and duality? According to Eisen, the illusion of duality, or "twoness," is created when some por-



HARDCORE ZEN

by Brad Warner
(Wisdom Publications, 2003, paperback \$14.95)

A down-and-out rocker-turned-Zen teacher, Brad Warner is up front in expressing his fundamental philosophy of life: "The act of regarding *anything at all* as more worthy of respect than anything else," he explains, "is the first step down the short and slippery path to the utter annihilation of all mankind." By merging "the so-called postmodern worldview" of universal egalitarianism with his mystical insights into the fundamental oneness of existence, he dismisses the need for hierarchical gradations of value and depth, allowing him to proceed through his autobiographical exegesis on Zen with unencumbered irreverence. Although professing a deep reverence for the Buddhist *Heart Sutra*, whose famous proclamation that "form is emptiness and emptiness is form" struck Warner so profoundly when he first heard it that he "literally had to fight to keep from crying," he uses his understanding of its meaning to exult in arrogant ridicule of nearly everything in the world of form.

Hardcore Zen is an essay in the punk-rock ethos of rebellion and the questioning of all authority, and how those qualities naturally align with the pursuit of Zen realization. But in his nondual, indistinct universe where "*nothing* is sacred and *nothing* is profane," Warner clearly feels free to rebel against any sense of dignity. His treatise, while in many ways a witty and compelling elucidation of Zen, is ultimately undone by its pervasive and relentlessly crass immaturity. Titling his chapter on reincarnation "In My Next Life I Want to Come Back as a Pair of Lucy Liu's Panties," for example, he points out that "you don't need to get a turkey baster full of hot grease shoved up your ass" in order to experience the inherent joy of "our ordinary, boring, pointless lives." Continuing his inspirational call to awakening, he says, "You're alive when

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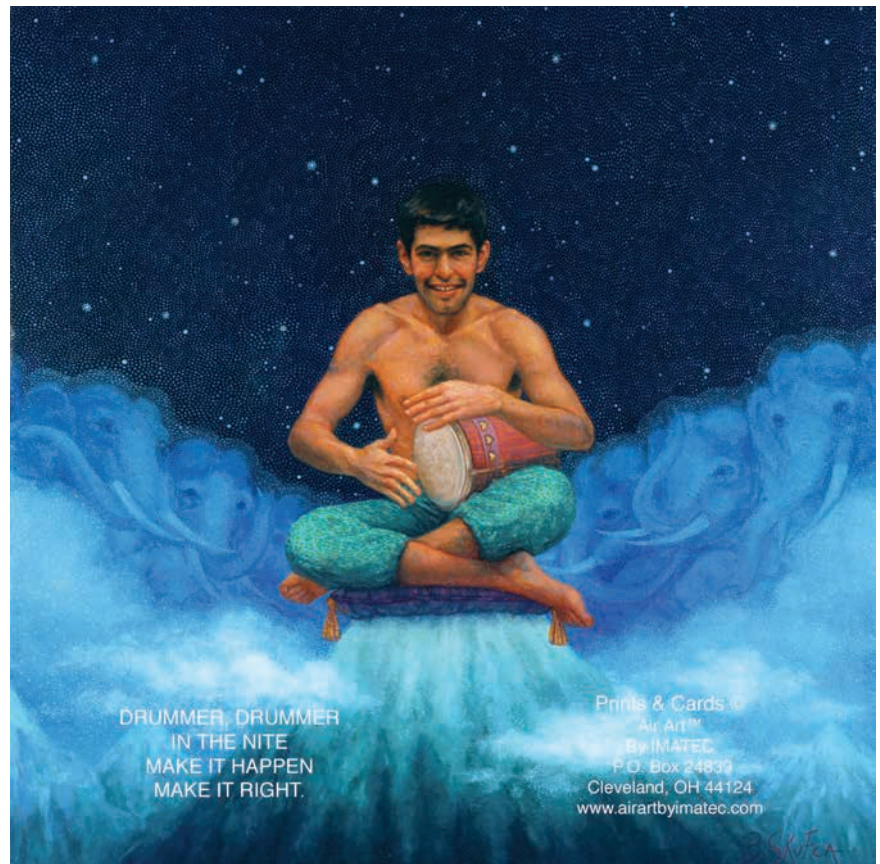


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you're sitting in your bedroom cleaning wax out of your ears. You're alive when you're looking at your turds floating in the toilet. . . ." Of course, like any good, ironic Gen X'er, Warner appears to be perfectly self-aware of the crude, smart-ass nature of his work. And this might even make for amusing reading, in line with the shock tactics traditionally characteristic of Zen, if he didn't revel in it so much. Determined to somehow provoke his readers into mystical illumination by his self-indulgent exhortations, Warner essentially buries under obnoxious heaps of puerility what might otherwise be a candid and even—dare I say it?—*sincere* explication of his two decades of Zen practice.

To be fair, though, he does concede that his book might not appeal to everyone. "Maybe you wish you'd bought that new Ken Wilber book instead of this one," he suggests. *Don't worry, Brad*, I think, as I toss his tome in the recycling bin. *It was a free review copy.*

Tom Huston



SPIRITUALITY & REALITY

The SGA Journal | Our Global Future
(Published by Spirituality & Global Affairs,
2 issues/year \$16.00)
www.global-spirituality.org

Finally, a spiritual journal for policy wonks! Now, that's significant. We're talking about a new breed of policy wonk—agents for a coming global civilization who realize that we need a new understanding of human life to create a new world. This journal starts where the UN dares not go: calling us to loosen the bonds of our ethnic and national

identities in order to become “true citizens of the world identified with and loyal to all living beings.”

Heavy on content, and definitely not light reading, *Spirituality & Reality* has recently been taken to a new level, with a beautiful new design and a wider range of features by editor-in-chief Nancy Roof, the sole interviewer and writer. Roof seems to have pulled off this transformation almost single-handedly, which may be why some of the features are a bit too wonky—reading more like notes from policy speeches or talks than articles themselves. Nevertheless, it’s an important contribution to creating dialogue toward a new global reality.

Elizabeth A. Debold



NO MAPS FOR THESE TERRITORIES

Directed by Mark Neale
(New Video Group, Inc.
DVD Release 2003)

The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel. Those words, the opening sentence of the 1984 book, *Neuromancer*, introduced the world to a promising young science fiction writer by the name of William Gibson. The book, though hardly a bestseller, quickly developed a cult following and presaged today’s digitally dominated world with remarkable accuracy. “Cyber-space” was a term Gibson invented. “The Matrix,” a global, interconnected, shared, virtual space existing inside computers, was another that crossed his pages over a decade before the internet became a popular term and another half-decade before Neo and Trinity fought the machines. Yes, Gibson wrote science fiction, but in 1984, *Neuromancer* spoke the language of a world whose science was still years away, and no one had ever seen fiction that described it.

But that was then and this is now and notions once obscure are now common-

place. Time has revealed Gibson to be a postmodern techno-prophet and his once cult following has become mainstream. So what does this cyberseer have to say about our current out-of-control, accelerating, techno, global society that looks more like the world that he wrote about every day? That question is the premise of the documentary *No Maps for These Territories*, which is basically an extended interview with the author himself. But don’t expect a nice studio conversation on a plush and scrubbed TV set. No, the production, the sound, and the visual images throughout the film are like Gibson’s stories—edgy, interesting, disconcerting, disorienting, and always changing. And they echo the theme of the film itself: that we are out beyond the known, making it up as we go along. There are simply no maps for the territories our society is now traveling in, Gibson tells us, “no myths for these countries of the mind.” There is a unique insecurity about these accelerating times and Gibson articulates it like few others do.

Toward the end, the film loses its focus, degenerating into less compelling biographical material. It is not Gibson’s life that is so interesting; rather, it is his ability to capture the zeitgeist with such startling accuracy. “I think that most people, myself included,” he says, articulating common anxieties about changing technology, “are most comfortable living about ten years back from whatever point in time we’ve reached.”

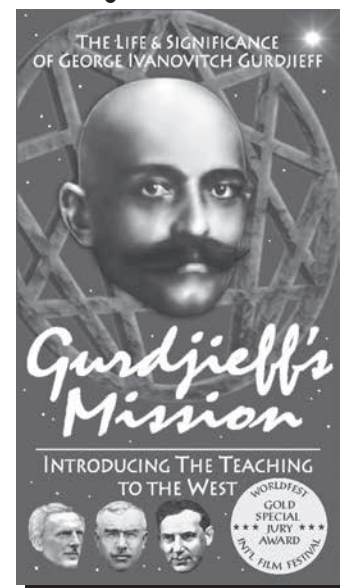
Gibson understands the impact of technology on the human psyche. Is it good? Is it bad? He won’t say. He doesn’t evaluate or prescribe much. He reveals, he disturbs, and he illuminates, but he does not enlighten, nor does he attempt to. That is the power of his work and also, I suppose, its limitation. But if you don’t expect definitive answers, Gibson can open your mind to the thrilling and terrifying undercurrents that are today remaking human society into something new, something fundamentally unknown—though perhaps a little less unknown, thanks to the unique and evocative nature of his prophetic words.

Carter Phipps

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WINGED MIGRATION

Directed by Michel Debats
and Jacques Cluzaud
(Columbia TriStar DVD Release, 2003)

The desire to fly, it seems, is an indelible feature of human longing, born out of the ageless coexistence of hominids and birds. But there's a world of difference between modern man's impulse to fly *like* a bird (à la Wilbur and Orville Wright), and actually flying *as* a bird (à la actor Jacques Perrin's wondrous *Winged Migration*). Believe it or not, Perrin's 2003 release manages to magically transport audiences not only into the oft-sought celestial realms of our feathered kin, but also into the equally thrilling phenomenon of "flock mind"—the perceptual lens of a species whose many members live and move as one. For those of you who didn't get a chance to view the acclaimed *Winged Migration* on the big screen, you still have a chance to experience this film-making triumph on DVD.

Thanks to Perrin and an impressive team of cinematographers, ornithologists, inventors, flight engineers (more than 450 personnel in all)—and a small cast of specially reared birds—we earthbound humans can experience what it's like to fly into humanless territories and inhabit our planetary landscape from the vantage point of a species that is not our own. The 89-minute film follows over fifteen bird migrations, journeying across forty countries through the stark and remote reaches of seven continents. Remarkably, for all its soaring visuals the film employs virtually no special effects—a jaw-dropping fact given the camera's remarkable intimacy with the birds in flight. This is also what lends the film its deeply affecting magic—with the exception of three

obvious and poetically placed sequences, every shot communicates not the product of studio-manipulated imagery to which film audiences have become so acclimated, but rather the very real relationships that the crews established with their winged subjects. It's worth seeing the DVD version for this reason alone; it tells the larger story that makes the film truly special, and portrays the extraordinary degree of human effort, innovation, risk-taking, and care that ultimately allowed two species to fly as one.

Melissa Hoffman



THE LAST DAYS

Directed by James Moll
Produced by Steven Spielberg
October Films, Video and DVD formats
(DVD includes outtakes and behind-the-scenes footage, survivors' photo gallery, production photo gallery), 1998

"Why did I survive? Why did God spare me?" Uttering these heartbreaking words, Holocaust survivor Bill Basch slowly walks, head down, through the eerie, empty paths of Dachau, fifty-three years after being liberated from the concentration camp that was part of Hitler's "Final Solution." With an unselfconscious dignity and excruciating intimacy, five Hungarian-American survivors of the Holocaust, or "Shoah" in Hebrew, recount their lives before, during, and after the last days of Hitler's war on the Jews in this tour-de-force of documentary filmmaking. The product of

Steven Spielberg's *Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation*, which has videotaped and archived the testimonies of fifty thousand Holocaust survivors, this film expresses Spielberg's passionate conviction that "we have a responsibility to listen to the voices of history so future generations will never forget what so few have lived to tell."

Indeed, *The Last Days* is remarkable in that it transmits the ravages of ~~mankind's incomprehensible barbarity~~ through the unguarded and nuanced testimony of those whose lives were torn from their communities and brutalized beyond reckoning—those whose experiences, told with disarming and devastating humanness, make the Holocaust *real*. Renee Firestone, another survivor, describes suddenly catching sight of her father across an open yard at Auschwitz for the first time since the family's arrival there. "Seeing this once handsome man, this man who was the kindest human being, I just couldn't imagine how he would feel if he saw us, with his shaved head in this rag. And at that moment our eyes locked and I could see his tears rolling down his cheek. That was the last time I saw my father."

Masterfully wrought, *The Last Days* penetrates the viewer to the very core, juxtaposing the survivors' testimonies with archival footage and additional dialogues, some with American GIs who liberated the camps and who describe, as if it has just happened, the horrors they were "completely unprepared to find there." In a rare interview with a former Nazi doctor whose clinic conducted human experiments at Auschwitz, one glimpses the measured and cold-blooded brutality that made the Holocaust possible. "For those that wanted to experiment on humans," he explains with chilling detachment, "it was a thankful place." *The Last Days*, which received the 1998 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, is one to remember and revisit, for it is a cinematic testament created

with love and solemn dedication about one of the darkest chapters in human history, honoring those who perished and those who survived, and reminding us that every human being alive today must "never forget."

Jessica Roemischer



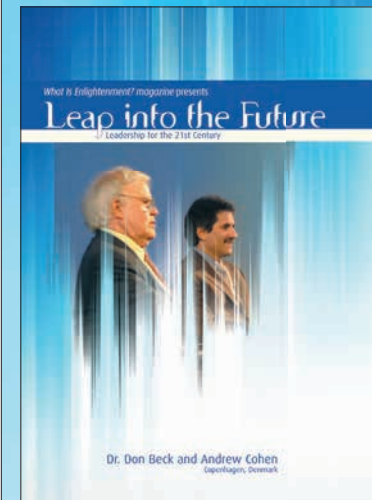
BORN RICH

Produced and directed by Jamie Johnson
Documentary, HBO Release 2003

What happens when someone has more money than most people make or spend in a lifetime? What does one do with one's life if, technically, one doesn't need to do anything? These are the questions explored in *Born Rich*, a documentary film financed, directed, and produced by Johnson & Johnson heir Jamie Johnson. Through interviews with nine twenty-something heirs, Johnson prods the minds of the young and rich to find out what motivates them, providing a rarely seen view into the world of the elite and an intimate examination of the psychological trials and tribulations that result from having gobs of money. The candid interviews that cover everything from whether or not there is a moral obligation to work to the politics of prenuptials are often hilarious, sometimes absurd, but always intriguing. Despite the predictable narcissism in some of Johnson's interviewees that comes from being "born with a silver spoon," the real value of this documentary arises from the poignancy in their confusion and their honest attempts to understand their station in life, which will speak to anyone who watches—regardless of how much money they have in their bank account.

Maura O'Connor

What Is Enlightenment? magazine presents



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a 21st century love story

"Extravagant, profound, emotionally sweeping, A 21st Century Love Story: Part One is a vivacious mixture of spirituality and romance, written with an edgy faux innocence and an incandescent wit. Evan and Ella's intimate email repartee is a work of high postmodern playfulness and deep pathos, grappling with nothing less than life's biggest questions with a pop sensibility . . . Will Ella's father survive his life-threatening illness? Does Evan's spiritual insight have anything to offer the situation? Questions like these hold our attention—and our hearts—from beginning to end, sweeping us through roaring tides of life as our beloved author-protagonists strive to claim a little peace in the tumult for themselves. The last few emails captivate like only the authentic passion of young lovers would dare, culminating in the burning question that takes their dialogue to a nail-biting level of dreamlike lyricism: Will he go to New York to see her? Evan and Ella—if you're listening, the world is dying for an answer."

—The Los Angeles Gazette

From: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>
To: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>
Date: Mon, 16 Feb 2004 23:42:08 (EST)
Subject: La Vida Loca

Hi Evan,
I don't know why you get so frustrated when Courtney argues with you and of course she still brings up how you didn't go to New York with her. It's your own fault that you didn't explain to her why...I mean you actually did the right thing but she doesn't know that. She just thinks that you flaked out on her. I really like Courtney even from just the one time that I met her so I kind of empathize with how she is feeling. Maybe she is picking up on what I'm picking up on which is your ambiguity about the whole thing...which let me be honest with you, isn't really the best way to pick up chicks...

Something has happened here though since I last wrote--I decided that when I go back to school I'm going to become a doctor. I'm pretty sure I won't have to do a lot of pre-med even because of all my science credits. I can't not do something useful. I've been meditating for three months now and things don't seem to get any better. You know what

I mean? It's like I'm having these incredible meditations and then I get up and I'm living in the SAME house with the SAME sick dad, same mom, the same everything. I'm going crazy here. You may think I'm already crazy but I've made my mind up, maybe you should think about doing something instead of going to that zen center because no matter how much zazen you're doing everything is going to be so f-ed up. Maybe I'll go to Africa or something...E

From: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>
To: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>
Date: Wed, 18 Feb 2004 13:12:27 (PST)
Subject: Re: La Vida Loca

Ella honey, I'm sorry. My son Evan is no longer with us. Were you a friend of his? He never mentioned you. I'm just going through his email now, trying to respond to some of his bills. I didn't know he had two girlfriends. That's interesting. Oh, dear me. Poor Evan. But I know he's with Jesus now, and no longer wondering about different religions and things and getting involved with strange people.

Bye-bye dear,
Claire M. McAllister

From: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>
To: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>
Date: Wed, 18 Feb 2004 19:58:47 (PST)
Subject: smash the mirror

hey ella!

i'm back from the dead. (reincarnation rocks!) so yeah, let's face it, courtney's wacked. i think you know why i didn't explain to her the details of the new york thing. i mean, come on. if she knew how much time i spent giving attention to you instead of her, she'd be pissed. well, more

1c+



pissed. the other day she came in while i was writing to you and...nevermind. you say you like her, huh? well, hey, you can have her! what's your mailing address again?

so...you wanna play doctor, do you? ;) what happened to the dolphins and all the other marine bioforms? don't they need care and attention too? i'm certain those killer whales would find being caressed by your hands nice. but what's this?? you want me to quit zazen? uh, don't count your breath. i agree that the world is a mess, and there's a lot that could be done to make it a better place. but what is more important: trying to do good deeds within a dream? or simply WAKING UP and resolving all "problems" in an instant? don't give up on meditation too easily, ella. if you really want to help people, helping them to wake up from this samsaric hellscape is the biggest help you could possibly give anyone. and you can't do that unless you're Awake yourself. even in africa.

love,
evan

From: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>
To: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>
Date: Thu, 19 Feb 2004 20:06:33 (EST)
Subject: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

Reincarnate Surf Boy,

I took great pleasure in finding a, how shall I say, Fundamental Flaw in your email. I don't understand how "waking up" could help someone who is dying from a preventable disease. Like Aids or hepatitis. I'm not gonna give up meditating but I'm not gonna fool myself either... And now that you've finally admitted that Courtney is "wacked" we should go to China or Siberia to offer up our youthful energy... Know what I mean? What's keeping you from leaving California?

From: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>
To: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>
Date: Sat, 21 Feb 2004 23:21:52 (PST)
Subject: thumbing thru maxim in god's waiting room

heya dr. ecco,

so, you found a Fundamental Flaw, did you? when i first read that, i just laughed. because, you know, obviously that's not possible. but then i realized that maybe i was just being arrogant. so i decided to take it up with da man upstairs. here's the transcript of our exchange:

Welcome to Creator Chat 2000

8:59:28 PM PST, 02/21/04

"Evan" has entered the chatroom.

Evan: are you there, god? it's me, evan.

9:00:00 PM PST, 02/21/04

"God" has entered the chatroom.

God: I'm everywhere, Evan. Always.

Evan: straight up, dude.

God: Indeed.

God: So...you have a question?

Evan: tons of 'em. i was talking with my friend ella,

God: Ella Fine Paris, born 03 February 1981 on Earth.

Evan: and she said that she wanted to become a doctor, right?

Evan: so i... dude, you're on the ball! i didn't know her middle name was "fine"!

God: I have the whole world in My Hand, Evan.

Evan: right. cool. anyway, ella was saying that she didn't understand how waking up from the nightmare of samsara could help people suffering from "preventable disease." i tried to explain that the diseases themselves are just another part of samsara, and that waking up from the dream of name and form frees you from EVERYTHING, but she didn't really go for it. can you help?

God: What's "samsara"?

Evan: what? i thought you knew everything?

God: Hold on a sec. Consulting my *Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy* here... Aha, got it! Um, hmm. That's interesting. Ha ha ha. Oh, God, this is funny stuff. Um, I think you'd do better chatting with "Shiva" or someone. Ha ha ha!

Evan: uhh...

God: Well, I enjoyed our chat, My son. But I've got to run. It's time to watch My "Bruce Almighty" DVD again. God, that James Eugene Carrey cracks Me up. With him I am well pleased.

Evan: but what about my question?

God: Adios. Goodbye. Auf wiedersehen. Au revoir. Sayonara. Amen.

9:02:00 PM PST, 02/21/04

"God" has exited the chatroom.

Evan: jesus. some people...

well, looking back on it, i guess my conversation with god didn't help much after all. anyway, your question--how could "waking up" help someone

who is dying from a preventable disease?--is a good one. but i think you're again missing the transcendental point...

and all that's keeping me from leaving california are the sweet waves, babe, the sweet sweet waves.

sincerely yours truly amen,
evan

From: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>

To: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>

Date: Sun, 22 Feb 2004 16:20:38 (EST)

Subject: God's on my side

ring ring ring ring ring.

God: Whazup JC?

Ella: It's not JC, it's Ella Fine Paris.

God: Heheheh, man that is a freakin' sweet name!

Ella: That's not why I'm calling.

God: Uhuh, whatever girl...

Ella: I'm leaving soon and I'm not going to tell my friend Evan.

God: Ooooooh! That shit is wrong!

Ella: Why should I? He doesn't even know that my dad is gone!

God: Girl, y'all didn't teeelllll him.

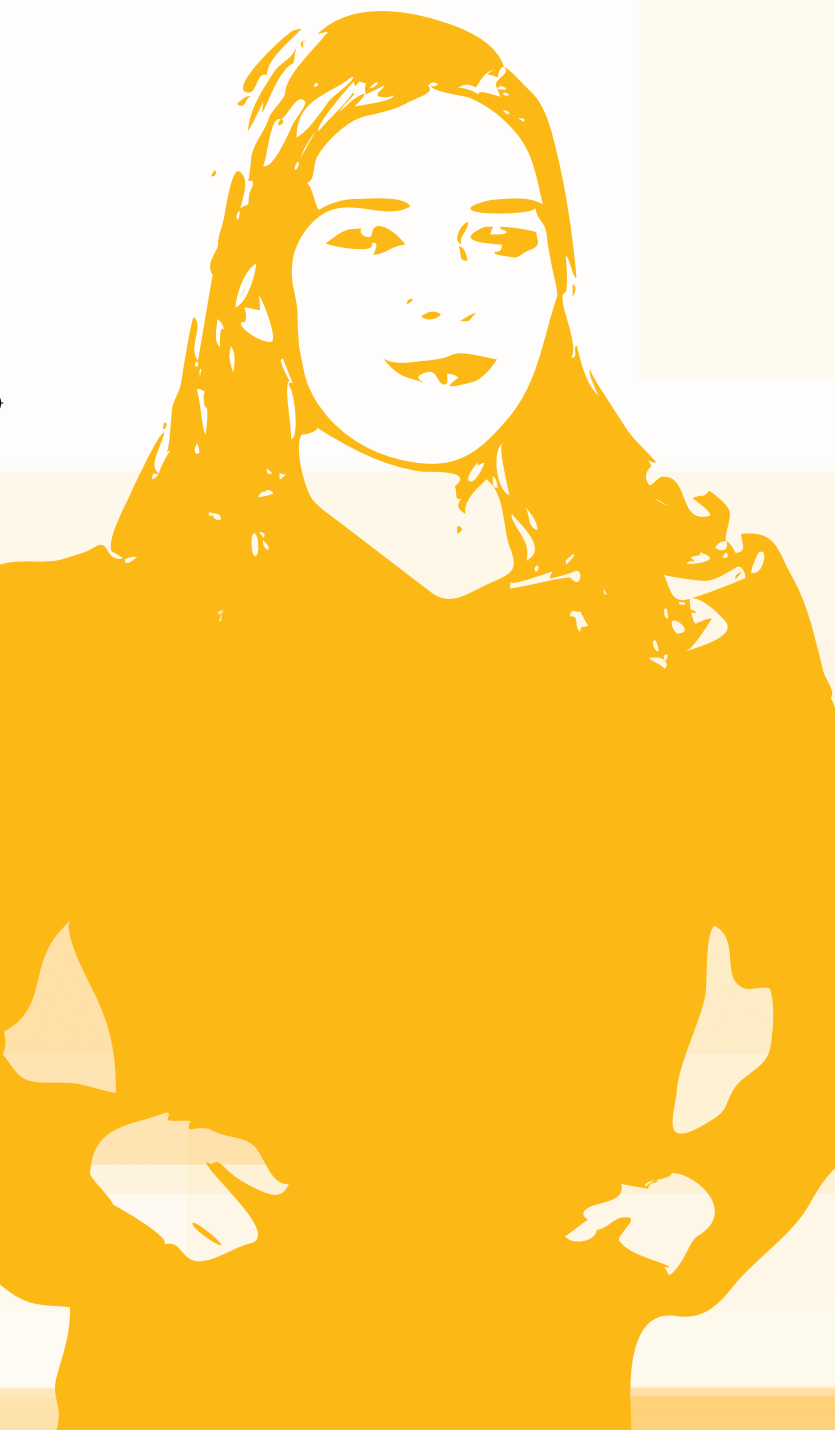
Ella: He wouldn't understand. He's always talking about how death is fake and nothing matters, and committing fake suicides, it's all a big joke from where he's standing! Or sitting I should say.

God: Well, let's see, "How does that make you feel, Ella...Fine?" Heeheehee.

Ella: Look, I'm not calling you for psychotherapy! I need you to tell him I'll be gone soon. I'll be in a small clinic with no internet service and unless he comes with me I probably won't see him for six months at least and everything will be different then!

God: I knows about yo' little plan to go to some stinkin' part of the world and do some good for the peoples...

Ella: And you know it's the right thing to do



right?

God: Hhmmmm...

Ella: Don't answer that! How can you agree with him, he talks like he's already enlightened or something but look! He's still messing around...

God: Girl, you have got my blessing, but you listen to me for a minute. They is Lots of people out there doing some good shit but they just be repeatin' history cause they hearts ain't pure. You gotta do better than that--you's gotta make sure you is doin' it for the right reasons, a'ight?

Ella: Yeah! That's awesome God! Can you tell Evan that you said that to me because that just makes so much sense!

God: Look, I have got to go girl...

Ella: Don't forget about telling him!

From: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>

To: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>

Date: Tue, 24 Feb 2004 06:54:05 (PST)

Subject: name and form

dear ella,

did your dad really die? i thought you were serious when i first read it, and it kind of just stunned me, but then i was doubting it, or questioning it, just because the rest of your letter is also really funny. but you wouldn't joke around about that. are you okay? what happened? you don't have to talk about it if you don't want to. but if you want, give me a call. you know the number.

but what is this you keep talking about? you'll be gone soon? how soon?? and most importantly, *where?* and don't you need to become a doctor first? why don't you come back to california, ella? stanford doesn't just have a good biology dept.--as you know, they've got a med school too, of course. or you could even go to ucsf! how about it? i miss you, babe. i really do. and i'm very sorry about your dad. i know how much you cared about him. but please try to remember that the body is only

a temporary mechanical vehicle--it ain't us! as the sufi mystic Hazrat Inayat Kahn said:

"Every experience on the physical, astral, or mental plane is just a dream before the soul."

do you believe it?

call me when you can.
all my love,
evan

[Transcription of a telephone call between Ella Paris and Evan McAllister: Tuesday, 24 February 2004.]

Evan: Hey, whazup?

Ella: Hi.

Evan: Hey, Ella!

Ella: Hey yourself! God it's been a long time since I've heard your voice.

Evan: Yeah, you too. Wow, like a month, right? A lot has happened since that night.

Ella: I know. Um, thanks for your email. It was really nice.

Evan: Hey, it's "Drown" by the Pumpkins on now. Can you hear it? God, I love this song. So . . . are you, like, doing okay?

Ella: I'm fine. I just got back from taking my mom to pick out the coffin.

Evan: *<pause>* Jesus. I'm so sorry, Ella.

Ella: My mother picked out an unfinished pine one because they just burn it anyway at the cremation.

Evan: Geez, that's terrible. Man . . . I don't know. God, I'm so sorry. I've never had to experience what you're going through.

Ella: What do you mean? You always fake those suicides; obviously you think about it.

Evan: But thinking about death is different than experiencing it.

Ella: I know. That's why it always makes me feel uncomfortable when you talk about how death doesn't really exist. I don't know.

Evan: *<pause>* Ella . . . I'm sorry. Do you--you get what I mean, right? When I talk about death being illusory? I don't mean it doesn't exist. I just mean that--

Ella: Yeah, but isn't thinking about death that way just a white-boy privilege? Isn't it just a luxury?

Evan: White-boy privilege? Buddha Shakyamuni wasn't a white boy; Hakuin wasn't a white boy!

Ella: But you definitely are.

Evan: But Ella . . . I don't know. Okay, maybe it *is* a luxury. But, like . . . why does that matter? That's not the point. Or . . . how you have time to *realize* the point doesn't matter as much *as* the point. Or--am I making sense?

Ella: I don't know. Sometimes I don't know why we even like each other anymore.

Evan: But! But, Ella, wait a minute. Hold on. Just hold on a second. Chill.

Ella: I am chill. But I also want to figure out why it's like this.

Evan: We have so much in common, Ella, and when we jus--

Ella: But we don't agree on *anything*. I don't even *like* the Smashing Pumpkins! I even think it's kind of dorky you still do, and that's the

most superficial example out of *hundreds* of other differences between us!

Evan: But Ella! Come on! Screw the Pumpkins-- we've got a deeper connection than favorite bands or movies or anything like that, even though we do have a lot of those in common too. Like, the Who, for instance. But just slow down a second, just wait. Remember--do you remember when you were actually still living here? It wasn't *that* long ago. Remember when we first *met*? I mean, remember that whole night? On the water? Jesus, we couldn't stop talking. And it was *all* because--

Ella: What? Some philosophical connection?

Evan: No, not *just* a philosophical connection, but . . . I don't know, it *felt* deeper. But we definitely were talking philosophy a lot, obviously, of course. But it was . . . It had *depth*. It was meaningful to--to both of us, and you know it. Remember? And yes, some of that's lost in translation in emails but, I mean, even when we talked last month, that night you were at the hospital . . . I mean . . .

Ella: Maybe I'm just being insecure. Maybe I'm just being a typical girl.

Evan: A typical girl? Yeah. Wait, but you're not! You're completely atypical, and that's why I like you so much. I can't--I mean, there's *no one* I can talk to about things, important things, the way we can.

Ella: Evan, if you like me so much, why do you still want to be with Courtney? There. *<pause>* I said it.

Evan: Heh. *<long pause>*

Ella: You know what, don't answer that because I don't even want to know.

Evan: Ella, I . . . well, you're *three thousand* miles away! Come on, you know. Like, we've never even *dated*, you and me.

Ella: I think I've got to go.

Evan: But--

Ella: My mom needs some help.

Evan: Okay, Ella, wait. Then can you call me back? Ella? Can you call me back? *Ella?*

Ella: You know why I'm going to go away? So I don't have to deal with this kind of shit. First it's like, "Oh! It's so deep and profound!" and then you turn around and say, "But we haven't even dated yet!" *<scoffs derisively>* I'm sorry if this is going to make you not like me anymore, but I can't waste any more time.

Evan: *<muttering>* Jesus Christ. *Women.*

Ella: I heard that!

Evan: Ella, Ella, Ella . . . just give me a second, just listen, okay? I'll tell you. I'm sorry. Look, I'm only dating Courtney because



. . . Christ, I don't *know*! Out of habit! Ella, Courtney and I have been fighting for weeks now. It's fucking ridiculous. And I *prefer* talking about deep and profound matters, of course, like, obviously . . . but it's you that--I mean, I care about you. I want to be with you.

Ella: You're such a liar. <laughs>

Evan: God, I'm ready to go to a monastery or something. No--no, listen! I'll break up with Courtney. I don't care; I'll break up with her. There. Done. Not a problem, like that. But what about *us*, then?

Ella: What about us? You figure it out! I've really got to go. I have to go to the place where they burn up people's bodies. What's that called? Jesus, I forget.

Evan: Oh, God.

Ella: Look, I'll talk to you later I guess . . . I really miss you.

Evan: Oh man, Ella. I get it now. I'm sorry. Okay. Okay.

Ella: A *crematorium*! Oh, that's it!

Evan: Wow. Ella . . .

Ella: Call me later, okay?

Evan: Okay.

Ella: I'm sorry if I've been emotional. Bye.

Evan: Me too. Okay. I'll call you! Ella . . . I love you.

Ella: <hangs up>

Evan: I think.

TO BE CONTINUED . . .

email them: ellaparis@hotmail.com
glassyzen@yahoo.com

headlong into the unknown when he interviewed his subjects. Now, we get a conversation between a guru and a pandit who already know exactly what the other thinks and couldn't agree more. Please break out of this prison! I want you to be dynamic again!

Dan Thoma

Portland, OR

JIM GARRISON'S SUGAR-COATED DREAM

Including an article extolling the virtues of the American empire in an issue concerned with "ethics in a postmodern age" is clearly ironic. To argue that the American empire is a good thing because empires that might have been established by earlier foes would have been worse makes absolutely no sense. It is like saying that if I am robbed at gunpoint, I should be grateful that I was not shot and accept the robbery as a good thing. It is interesting that Mr. Garrison acknowledges that it is difficult to maintain an empire and that nations will resist. It is also interesting that he notes that this resistance will be more difficult in "a world of instantaneous communication and porous borders, in which information and people can move about virtually unimpeded. . . ." Notice that he is acknowledging that freedom is the enemy of empire, and while he does not say it, it is clear that the constraint of freedom is necessary to maintain it. While Mr. Garrison attempts to wrap his stance in the cloak of an unselfish overriding vision, he ignores the fact that such a vision based on domination cannot endure. He also ignores the fact that this very vision is already beginning to unravel, as the current administration desperately tries to induce the United Nations, disparaged both by that same administration as well as by Garrison himself, to save them from ignominy.

ous defeat in Iraq. Yes, the concept that America could be a transitional imperial power that would lead to a universal democracy is enticing. However, the reality of what is currently happening belies this sugar-coated dream.

Richard I. Wark, Ph.D.

via email

ALMOST LAUGHABLE

I found Jim Garrison's article on "America as Empire" not a little chilling, a prime example of implicit and unexamined attitudes prevalent in the U.S. that often manage to profoundly alienate other folk around the world. I take issue with the claim that an American empire could ever be a positive thing for the world, or that empires in any shape or form ever really serve their subject peoples, however benign their stated intentions. To brag that America is the greatest empire in history is indeed worrying. It proves that a most dangerous nationalistic and patriotic mindset is still very much alive in the U.S. I don't want to go to the other extreme of demonizing all things American, but the dropping of A-bombs, the debacle that was Vietnam, the support for numerous murderous dictatorships, the present administration's determination to block all global moves toward a more sustainable environment, and its blithe bullying of the UN surely render the concept of an American overlordship morally superior to all others almost laughable.

Alan Rycroft

via email

ED. NOTE: We received many similar letters from readers who were critical of Jim Garrison's "America as Empire" (Issue 24, February-April 2004). So we passed them along to Garrison himself, who sent us this response:

KEEPING THE BALANCE

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the various letters sent to WIE in response to "America as Empire." They represent deeply felt perspectives that need to be honored, and with which I empathize. There is no doubt that in its march to power, the United States has acted ruthlessly, cynically, and cruelly. It is also the case that its power has often been expressed through the exercise of military force—especially during the Cold War, when it also backed up numerous brutal dictatorships and authoritarian regimes around the world, suppressing democracy and human rights. All this is true, but the opposite is also true. The United States has been a beacon of light to people from every corner of the world, millions of whom risked their lives and fortunes to travel to her shores in order to partake in the dream of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Almost everyone in America is the descendant of such a person. The United States pioneered the modern ideals of democracy, and it was the first nation in history to codify into its constitution the sovereignty of the individual as the cornerstone of good governance.

What is essential to understand about America is that it is a unique combination of light and dark dimensions. Light is always accompanied by a commensurate proportion of shadow. This complexity, and the maturity to hold the polarities inherent within it, are what constitute wisdom in the exercise of power. Now that the United States wields more power than any empire in history, it must take great care in ensuring that its light and dark dimensions are kept in balance. The international community is justifiably concerned with the United States because, under the current administration, the dark dimension of the American character dramatically outweighs its light dimension, due in large degree to the President's response to the trauma of 9/11.

The light side of America has to be recovered, which is why I believe that the upcoming election is the most critical election in our lifetime.

Jim Garrison

FAN MAIL

I recently picked up a copy of your current issue "Morality Bites" and read it cover to cover, twice. Your magazine is stimulating me in profoundly intellectual ways, and I'm enjoying every challenging minute of it . . . as much as my graduate studies! I just ordered all your back issues. Thank you for impacting me.

J. Yossi Goodman

Denver, CO

Just want to say that the new issue is great. The change to somewhat shorter articles and a more "sexy" format and subjects is wonderful.

Bob Nozik

via email

I am a New Zealander living in Korea, and English magazines are generally unavailable here. So I was ecstatic to find your magazine online, filled with articles of an exceptionally high standard. I admire all those associated with the magazine for your online service to humanity!

Lawrence Ritchie

via email

"A 21st Century Love Story" is an excellent read! Is there a book of these email dialogues available . . . or will I really have to wait three months for the next part?!

Mei Chen

via email

ED. NOTE: Unfortunately, there are no plans for a book at this time, though Evan and Ella both like the idea. In the meantime, you can write to them by email.

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Andrew Cohen

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The New Enlightenment

by Andrew Cohen

ALTHOUGH MOST PEOPLE DON'T KNOW IT YET, the age of *personal* or merely individual enlightenment is over. In the twenty-first century, the context for deep, authentic, serious spirituality—which means *transformational* spirituality—is *evolution*, evolution not only of the individual but *beyond* the individual.

It's only relatively recently that we've discovered that we are part of a vast fourteen-billion-year developmental process that's unfolding, right now, *as ourselves*. The awakening to this evolutionary context shatters the deeply conditioned notion that we are separate individuated entities that somehow exist independent of the conditions in which we find ourselves. The postmodern ego is nothing less than a master magician, creating the ultimate illusion: individuality! And for our postmodern selves, the painful experience of psychological and spiritual alienation has reached its historical apex. In our pursuit of personal, social, philosophical, and spiritual freedom, many of us have abandoned our great spiritual traditions and, as a result, have lost touch with our own individual and collective soul, unexpectedly ending up quite alone on the desert island of our own ego. For those of us who desperately want to move forward, who can't go back to the way things were before we had seen through the limitations of familial, tribal, religious, and nationalistic notions of self—*where* are we to look?

Those of us who have begun to see through the apparent solidity of these established structures feel we can no longer carry on in the old way. And if we are spiritually inclined, but can no longer tread the beaten path, we find ourselves compelled to seek for a higher and deeper consciousness. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, for those human beings at the leading edge, the passionate pursuit and defense of individualization has reached a dead end. And because of that, the very movement toward higher development now calls for a leap beyond the personal sphere in a way that has simply never happened before. The pursuit of holiness, the pursuit of enlightened consciousness, has traditionally been the path of the heroic and extraordinary *individual*—the holy One, the enlightened One. But now the evolutionary imperative of our time seems to be compelling us to develop beyond what we could call personal realization to something else altogether: a profound awakening that *transcends* the individual.

One night, when I was in my mid-teens, I spontaneously experienced what's been traditionally called “cosmic consciousness.” For a brief time, I knew without any doubt that I was simultaneously the whole universe and its witness. To know the immensity of the love that is this duality is physically overwhelming. In my early twenties I became a dedicated seeker, and when I was thirty I found what I was looking for. Soon after I began to teach, I made an intriguing observation: the spiritual experiences that those

who had gathered around me were *sharing together* seemed to be of greater significance than any experience of higher consciousness they had had individually—no matter how powerful it may have been.

“We were literally sucked into a field of consciousness so powerful and radically different that the experience was of being gently yet completely destroyed, one's identity disappearing, and then finding oneself literally in a new world.”

It took me a few years to understand what was happening and to be able to put it into context. But soon it became obvious that a mutation was occurring. I was bearing witness to the fact that the mind of enlightenment seemed to be taking a leap beyond the individual.

“The words that were spoken had infinite depth and meaning and resonated with a timeless presence. As soon as we acknowledged this, the presence between us seemed to amplify in strength and started to look through our eyes with the keenest interest in its own expression.”

“This new consciousness that emerged between us is so powerful that I experienced it as almost uncontainable. I trembled inside. At first there was so much fear of this overwhelming force, but it demanded a response and it felt completely impossible to say no to it. The mind expanded rapidly in all directions, leaving no room for any self-reference or boundaries between us. A sense of self emerged that was literally indefinable; it did not seem to have a beginning or end.”

Evolutionary biologists tell us that it is stress that causes development, compelling the emergence of new and more complex forms of life. Evolutionary psychologists tell us that it is changing life-conditions that miraculously catalyze higher manifestations of emotional, psychological, and spiritual potential in the human being. As the feature article in this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* suggests, at the frontiers of human development, consciousness itself seems to be leaping beyond the confines of individuation, dramatically revealing new, thrilling, and unimagined possibilities of higher integration. In spite of the overwhelming dangers that lie ahead, I can't think of a more thrilling time to be alive. ■

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.