

the most important election of your lifetime? **5 spiritual leaders weigh in**



what is

enlightenment

redefining spirituality for an evolving world

is

G O D

a pacifist?

War vs Peace

in a post 9/11 world

Women who sleep with the gurus

Spiritual odyssey of a Middle East hostage

PLUS: Mario Cuomo **Robert Wright** Ann Druyan **Thomas de Zengotita**
Andrew Cohen Jan Chozen Bays **Ken Wilber** Robert F Kennedy Jr

Issue 26 Aug-Oct 2004

US \$7.50 CAN \$9.50 UK £4.95

EUR €9.00 AUS \$13.75 Incl. GST



www.WhatIsEnlightenment.org

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.

Editor-in-Chief
Andrew Cohen

Managing Editor
Craig Hamilton

Senior Editors
Carter Phipps
Jessica Roemischer
Elizabeth A. Debold

Associate Editors
Ross Robertson
Maura R. O'Connor
Tom Huston

Contributing Editors
Pete Bampton
Melissa Hoffman
Jeff Carreira

Art Director
Will Rogers

Design Associates
Mary Herrmann
Nancy Hoffmeier
James B. Re

Illustration
Chris Lie

Production Manager
Wren Bernstein

Administrative Asst.
Jan Stewart

Production Associates
Jorin Hawley
Judy Fox
Dana Pasila
Debbie Wilson

Marketing Director
Sridhar Pingali

Public Relations Director
Kathy Bayer

Media Relations
Hope Cohen

Circulation
Robert Heinzman

Advertising Director
Elisa Mishory

Advertising Sales
Michael Baral

Marketing Consultant
David Parker

Development
Kim Emmert

Intern
Matt Makara

Volunteer Support
Erin Hogarth
Aniko Szocs

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

For general inquiries call 413.637.6000 or email wie@wie.org

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

Subscribe and renew online: www.wie.org

Advertising
To advertise in What Is Enlightenment? call: 413.637.6003 or email: advertising@wie.org

Printed in the USA on recycled paper
Moksha Press ©2004



What Is Enlightenment? Issue 25, May-July 2004 (ISSN 1080-3432) is published quarterly for \$24 per year by the Impersonal Enlightenment Fellowship, PO Box 2360, Lenox, MA 01240, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Lenox, MA, and additional mailing offices.

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

CREDITS: Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, p.20, courtesy of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi; Jan Chozen Bays, p.20, courtesy of Jan Chozen Bays; Sheikh Tosun Bayrak, p.21, courtesy of Shekh Tosun Bayrak; Father Basil Pennington, p.21, by Simeon Alev; Hubble image, p.26, courtesy of NASA; David Frawley, p.21, courtesy of David Frawley; Ann Druyan, p.27, by Ron Luxemburg, courtesy of Cosmos Studio; James N. Gardner, p.27, courtesy of James N. Gardner; Neil de Grasse Tyson, p.27, courtesy of Neil de Grasse Tyson; Brian Swimme, p.27, courtesy of Brian Swimme; Osho, October 14, 1984, Oregon, p.28, photo by Matthew Naythons/Liasion; Carlos Santana, p. 29, (ANSA) photo by Arnold Turner; David Chalmers, p. 29, courtesy of David Chalmers; Ken Wilber, p. 29, courtesy of Ken Wilber; Robert Wright, p. 32, c Barry Munger; Robert Kennedy, Jr., p.38, photographer Paul Eric Felder/The Commonwealth Club of California; D-day image, p.42, c National Archives; Andrew Cohen, p.42, courtesy of IEF; Ken Wilber, p.42, courtesy of Ken Wilber; Soldier Running, p.44, c National Archives; Tank at Sunset, p.48 c Peter Turnley/CORBIS; Anti-war protesters in the Vietnam Veterans Against the War March, Washington, D.C., April 1, 1971, p.57, photo by Michael Abramson, c Time Life pictures/Getty Images; Martin Luther King Jr. Speaking at Mississippi Rally June 1966, c flip/CORBIS; American Soldier from 12th Armored Division stands guard over Nazi German Soldiers, April, 1945, p.58, photo by US Army, c Office of War Information; Palestinian Boy throwing stone at Israeli Tank, Gaza City, October 2000, p. 61, c AP photo/Laurent Rebours; A Chinese Man stands alone to block a line of tanks in Tiananmen Square, June 5, 1989, p.61, c AP photo/Jeff Widener, Ramana Maharshi, p.63, courtesy of Sri Ramanasramam; Mahatma Gandhi at Boulogne Station with Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, September 12, 1931, p.63, photo by Douglas Miller/Stringer, c Getty Images; Sri Aurobindo, p.63, courtesy of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust; Arjuna and Krishna on the Battlefield of Kurukshetra, p.64, c 2001. All Rights reserved. Subala dasa; Wounded Marine being led past stricken comrade after fierce firefight, Vietnam, January 1, 1966, p. 64, photo by Larry Burrows/Stringer, c Time Life Pictures/Getty Images; The Taking of Antioch [1st Crusade in 1098] c scala/artresource, NY; Zen Monks at Eihei-ji monastery under going mandatory military training [after the National Mobilization law], Japan, March, 1938, p.66, photo courtesy of Brian Victoria; Buddhist Monk Committing Ritual Suicide, Saigon, South Vietnam, October 5, 1963, p.66, photo by Nguyen Ngoc Rao c Bettman/CORBIS; Demonstrators hold Osama Bin Laden portrait in Karachi Rally, October 7, 2001, p.69, c REUTERS/Akbar Baloch, Black Students Integrate Little Rock's Central High School, September 6, 1957, p.69, c Bettman/CORBIS; Bawa Mauhiyaddenn, p.71, courtesy of the Bawa Mauhiyaddenn Fellowship; Human Skulls from the 1994 Genocide lies in a Church in Ntarama, p.73, photo REUTERS/Anthony Njuguna c Reuters/CORBIS; Pictures of killed people are installed on a wall inside the Grisozi Memorial in Kigali, Rwanda, April, 2004, REUTERS/Radu Sighet; Mario Cuomo, p.74, courtesy of Mario Cuomo; Teilhard de Chardin p.74, David Rieff, p.80, photo by Annie Leibovitz, courtesy of Simon and Schuster; UN soldier keeps an eye on Congolese men as they approach a check point in Muzipela, Democratic Republic of Congo, May 28, 2004, p.81, REUTERS/stringer; Two photos of Linus Roache from film "Blind Flight," playing John McCarthy, p.104, 107, by Paul Chedlow; John McCarthy inside one of Beirut's shell damaged buildings along the former green line, Beirut, Lebanon, January, 2004, p.106 and Brian Keenan and John McCarthy, Dublin, March 2001, p.109, photographer c Anna McCarthy; Indiana Diddy-Dogg illustration, p. by Chris Lee; Filmmaker Amie Siegal with Eames Chair, p. courtesy of First Run/Farus Films.

Additional: Marpa and Milarepa, p. , c Brian Beresford/Nomad pictures; General Douglas MacArthur wades ashore during initial landings at Leyte, Phillipine Islands, October, 1944, p , c National Archives

EDITORIAL CREDITS: Come Together: *Centered on the Edge, Mapping a Field of Collective Intelligence & Spiritual Wisdom*, Fetzer Institute, Kalamazoo, MI, 2001; Phil Jackson and Hugh Delehanty, *Sacred Hoops: Spiritual Lessons of a Hardwood Warrior* [New York: Hyperion, 1995]; Grateful Dead/Beatles: Ken Kesey, *Garage Sale* [New York: Viking, 1973]; Dennis McNally, *A Long Strange Trip: The Inside History of the Grateful Dead* [New York: Broadway Books, 2002]; Mickey Hart, *Drumming at the Edge of Magic* [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990]; Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* [New York: Bantam, 1968]; Editors of Rolling Stone, *Garcia* [New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995]; Mark Hertsgaard, *A Day in the Life: The Music and Artistry of the Beatles* [New York: Delacorte Press, 1995]; Robert Burt, *The Beatles: The Fabulous Story of John, Paul, George, and Ringo* [London: Octopus Books, 1975]; Peter Brown and Steven Gaines, *The Love You Make: An Insider's Story of the Beatles* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983]; Paul McCartney, *Back in the U.S.* concert film [DVD], Capitol Records, 2002; Marathon Monks: John Stevens, *The Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei* [Boston: Shambhala, 1988]; Christopher J. Hayden,



features

Is God a Pacifist?

Is peace the answer to a world in chaos? Against the backdrop of 9/11 and Iraq, *WIE* asks the hard questions about just wars and religious violence, and explores the relationship between our deepest spiritual principles and the politics of an evolving global society.

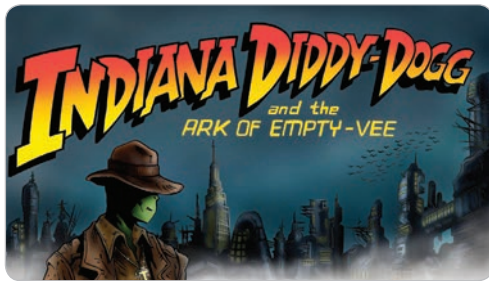
Carter Phipps

74 The God I Believe In

Mario Cuomo on pacifism, faith, and Teilhard de Chardin

76 The Moral Dilemma of Pacifism in a World of War

An interview with David Rieff



111 Indiana Diddy-Dogg and the Ark of Empty-Vee

A critical analysis of the culture of MTV, by a Martian archaeologist from the future.
Tom Huston, Illustration by Chris Lie



Women Who Sleep with the Gurus . . . and Why They Love It

There's a lot more to guru sex scandals than innocent victims fallen prey to unscrupulous teachers. Whether they're after wealth, security, social status, or enlightenment, women love men at the top, and they have for four million years.

Jessica Roemischer

departments

42 The Guru and the Pandit

Conflict, Creativity, and the Nature of God
In their latest dialogue, Ken Wilber and Andrew Cohen challenge some of our most fundamental spiritual beliefs as they come to grips with war and peace, creation and destruction, and the unconstrained force of evolution itself.

104 Beyond Limits

Finding Freedom in Captivity

Held hostage for five years in Lebanon, John McCarthy shares how a spiritual experience and a rare friendship turned a hellish ordeal into a transformative odyssey.
Pete Bampton

122 Not Just a Movie Review

SHE'LL KILL BILL while you CHILL
The Tarantinian Way
Thomas de Zengotita





9 Letters

12 Editorial

Sky to Street

16 New Age Wake-up Call

Politics makes a splash at Omega Institute's latest conference.

Ross Robertson

17 Is College Good for the Soul?

Groundbreaking surveys track the higher power in higher education.

Maura R. O'Connor

18 Customize Your Meditation

Choose your own stress-reducing adventure at 35,000 ft.

Tom Huston

19 Are There Skate Parks in Heaven?

The Bible-zine for teens is here, but who's buying it?

Maura R. O'Connor

20 Pulpit

The Most Important Election of Our Lifetime?

Five spiritual teachers tell us why.

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi • Jan Chozen Bays Roshi • Sheikh Tosun Bayrak • Father Basil Pennington • David Frawley

Jessica Roemischer

22 Will Spring and Summer No Longer Come?

The future demands a new worldview.

An interview with Ervin Laszlo.

Elizabeth A. Debold

26 Looking Back to the Beginning

The Ultra Deep Field: a picture worth ten thousand galaxies.

Ann Druyan • Neil deGrasse Tyson
James Gardner • Brian Swimme

Tom Huston

28 Pulse

News and gossip from an emerging culture



Voices from the Edge

32 The Globalization of Morality

Robert Wright explores the challenges of terrorism and the evolution of human ethics.

Carter Phipps

38 Tearing Pages From the Bible

Why environmental destruction is an offense against God.

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.



127 Natural Selection

Books, film, and other media

138 A 21st Century Love Story, Part III

When Ella sets off to India to help save the world, can Evan still bear being a Zen rebel without a cause?

152 Enlightenment for the 21st Century The Higher We

Andrew Cohen



Issue 25
May-July 2004

Send your letters to
letters@wie.org or
PO Box 2360
Lenox, MA 01240

THE FIRST DECADE

Cover to cover, I found the spring issue to be informative and stimulating. There is one point in Craig Hamilton's feature on collective intelligence that, for the sake of a more complete history, I am moved to address.

While Hamilton writes that "this fledgling field enters its second decade," from my involvement, I would say that the field is at least in its third decade. As a field of study for modern people, this phenomenon has been working its way to the surface since the 1940s. It exploded on the scene when the "human potential" and "transformational" work of the 60s and 70s met with the group experience studies of Wilfred Bion. These merged at the beginning of the 80s as "The Next Step," an experiential training on transformation at the group level, from the Hargrove's Relationships Organization. The principal architects of the training were Jamie Weiss and Josh Rosenthal. Interestingly, in that same year, 1981, the movie *My Dinner with Andre* was released, featuring tales of gatherings involving collective intelligence.

The phenomenon now called "dialogue" naturally occurred in The Next Step as an expression of the opening to the collective field. In dialogue, the collective field opens as if cued by effective dialogue. Coming in on the wave of interest in the learning organization, dialogue and collective intelligence started to find its way with practitioners and clients who consulted to or represented groups seeking to transform. Here is where Hamilton ably begins his chronicle. The first decade may have been below mainstream radar. But, especially given the field nature of all of this, I believe it deserves the decade.

Evan Root

Kindling Point
Ashland, MA

PROMOTING GROUP INTELLIGENCE

Complimenti! I've just finished reading the current issue of *WIE* and my concerns about the revised *WIE* have vanished. You've managed to engage a broad spectrum of readers and are serving an integral role, it seems to me, in promoting "group intelligence" itself.

Carol Ann Raphael

Italy

COLLECTIVE SHADOW

Craig Hamilton's article on collective intelligence was enlightening and full of useful references. I would like to mention an element of critical importance that was missing: collective or group "shadow." Jung and others after him have helped us understand that for every positive quality that the ego delights in attributing to itself, there is the potential for a corresponding shadow element emerging from the ways that we do not live up to our self-image, or blatantly contradict it.

We can see evidence of group shadows everywhere—from clergy sexual

abuse scandals, to the abuse of Iraqi prisoners, to the cutthroat infighting that occurs in the home offices of some leftist or pacifist political action organizations. Like most treatments of collective intentionality, the article focused on the thrilling potential for coherence, shared vision, morphic resonance, et cetera, and, importantly, on pragmatic approaches to creating and focusing it. But the road to radical change passes through a good deal of *collective* soul searching and cognitive dissonance—using dialogic, intersubjective, and reflective practices that can help members of a group (perhaps with the help from outsiders) come to understand and integrate the hidden beliefs and emotional drives that characterize an "us."

It is likely that the evolution of any group is severely limited (as are the collective intelligence benefits mentioned in the article) until its members can find ways to expose and integrate the shadow aspects of their common bond. How about a future issue of *WIE* dedicated to exploring the state of the art and wisdom on this topic? It is a tough question, but the stakes are high and so are the potential benefits in evolving humanity closer to the "Omega Point."

Tom Murray

Community for Integrative Learning and Action
Amherst, MA

A BETTER BALANCE

Just a note to say how much I enjoyed the essay on collective intelligence. The key word is "intelligence," which helps us distinguish between the conformity of group-think and the originality of collaborative thought. Of course, much more than thought may be involved when any community enters the depths—a tapping into dimensions of consciousness for which we still lack adequate language.

I confess to having felt some

misgivings about the previous issue, which, in striving to be hip, verged in places on silliness. I respect the need to reach out to a younger audience, including those folks for whom film, television, pop music, and night spots are far more seductive than mere reading. But I sensed that you all were in danger of losing the balance between reaching out and digging deep. The current issue seems to have struck a better balance, in large part thanks to the main essay.

Scott Russell Sanders

Bloomington, IN

TUNE IN

I found the article on group mind very thought-provoking. It fit in with some recurring thoughts I have had regarding the nature of the divine and our relation to it. It seems likely to me that we are always sending and receiving sense and thought signals and that these become the data of the group mind. Most often

we are not tuned in to the incoming data: we've got our stereo playing a CD rather than tuning in to the radio. Sometimes the radio station is so close and powerful that we hear it during the silences on the CD.

I don't think that we are creating the group mind so much as becoming aware of another part of the data that we swim in all the time. One of the dangers of religion is not being clear about what is in your head and what is outside it; I think that should be remembered as we open up a new way of sensing. What we experience is what we are ready to experience and may be only loosely based on the actual stream of noisy data. We can, as was pointed out, increase our chance of hearing and understanding that data stream by shutting off our personal CD and listening.

Max Schling

Rensselaer, NY

EGOLESS INDIVIDUALITY

In the latest Guru/Pandit talk, Andrew Cohen says that "the traditional enlightenment model . . . only seemed to describe the path from the ego to the Self Absolute," and he points to the egoless identity between ego and the Absolute. (Andrew calls it the Authentic Self.)

Osho Rajneesh talked for thirty years about the Original Man, which he called Zorba the Buddha, who embraces both heaven and earth as a free man not trapped in ego. And the full body of work by A.H. Almaas and Faisal Muqaddam likewise presents the notion that each one of us has an individual identity in our essence which is before and without ego and yet not the Absolute.

So, Andrew is quite right to point to this egoless individuality as our portal to bring heaven to earth. The ego has got no idea of heaven and the Absolute can't really take the action needed to evolve earth. It's only from that egoless

The Powers of the Universe

with Brian Swimme | an Internet Course

For more information and registration go to www.brianswimme.org or call 800-273-3720

Internet Course begins September 14, 2004
The Powers of the Universe in DVD available this September

In Brian Swimme's new series, **The Powers of the Universe**, he explores the powers, dynamics and qualities that are coursing through the Universe and in each of us.

- How are the powers of the Universe alive within you?
- How do you recognize and align yourself with these powers?
- Experience the joy of understanding that you are the Universe.
- Engage deep questions of meaning and purpose.
- Develop a deeper intimacy with the Universe and Earth and an erotic relationship with Life.

Join Brian Swimme, Eric Weiss and others for an Internet Course and a journey into the powers that have been active since the beginning of time and that are available to you.

individuality that we can reach beyond ourselves, beyond our country, and beyond our religion, and at the same time be able to act.

Bo Heimann

Copenhagen, Denmark

EVOLVING BEYOND THE SELF

After reading *Breaking the Rules*, Cohen and Wilber in Dialogue, Fall/Winter 2002 last night, I felt compelled to send some thoughts out into cyberland.

In the article, they discuss how the green meme tends to stagnate and not evolve beyond the ego. I started having spontaneous *satoris* in 1999 and that led me into Buddhism and Zen studies. It feels to me that it is natural for the ego to seek "more and more" (enlightening experiences, in the Zen instance) until the ego is finally dropped as the boring and limiting structure that it is. So we use this ego seeking until it even seeks its own dismantling. We use the mind as a tool to evolve beyond itself. These are the only

tools we have really—our "self," our life, mind, ego. The *satoris* are about our experience as this "self." What else do we have to work with? And so this dense self-stuff is used as our diving board into the unlimited. Great article, thanks!

Teresa Frederick

via email

THAT SMILE

I am an avid reader of your magazine. I enjoy it immensely. I found the article in the current issue on the Grateful Dead and the Beatles to be excellent. My problem is with the photo of Jerry Garcia on page 88. This photo was taken days before his death and he looks terrible. It would have been very easy for you to acquire a photo of Jerry that captured his essence, that sparkle in his eye that enlightened thousands, that smile that melted souls. Thanks for your efforts.

Simon A. Senzon

Asheville, NC

THE BEATLES ARE MY GOD

The article "A Kind of Innocence We'd Never Seen Before" by Ross Robertson was just so damn good. I mean it. Wow. I had a million revelations about growing up Gen X and it felt amazing to finally see in writing what I've always experienced from behind the knock, knock, knocking on Soul's door. The Beatles, Pink Floyd, the Doors, and a host of others (but especially the Beatles) have always been my "God." Never admitted that before, but I know I'm not alone. This article dares to open that truth which reaches closer than anything else we've ever encountered in this pitiful, narcissistic, postmodern nightmare we grew up in. The depths that that music reached were indescribably spiritual and utterly liberating. Coming home from school, the headphones were the most remarkable way to "tune in" while our parents saw us "tuning out." And

continued on page 146

2nd North American Conference
on Children's Spirituality

ChildSpirit

Exploring and Nurturing the Spiritual
World of Children and Youth

October 7-10, 2004
Asilomar Conference Grounds, Pacific Grove, California

How can we nurture the spirituality of young people? What is the spiritual life of children really like?

Plan to attend this groundbreaking conference on children's spiritual life — bringing together scholars, researchers, teachers, religious educators, counselors, community leaders, parents, grandparents, and others interested in exploring the remarkable richness of children's spiritual nature.



Program topics include:

- Educating the Whole Child
- Innovative Spiritual and Religious Curriculum
- Research and Theory
- Intuitive and Imaginative Development
- Spiritual Parenting, Counseling and Community

Presenters Include:

- Jerome Berryman • Carol Bowman • Tobin Hart • Ellen Hayakawa • Judith Jenya
- Jack Miller • Rachel Kessler • Joseph Chilton Pearce • Ocean Robbins
- Marilyn Schlitz • Luh Ketut Suryani • Luisah Teish

Conference fee starts at \$325 for early-bird rate up to July 31, 2004. For more information and registration, please visit us at www.childspirit.net or www.noetic.org or call 707-779-8277.



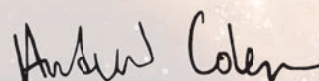


Andrew Cohen
What Is Enlightenment?
Founder and Editor-in-Chief

WHO WOULD EVER HAVE THOUGHT that working on a magazine could be so much fun! I must admit that we are really having a ball here, “redefining spirituality for an evolving world.” I’ve always heard that the experience of creating a magazine can be an emotional rollercoaster ride, fraught with fear, tension, anxiety, and near-death catastrophes. And while I’ve discovered that everything I’d heard is true, the sheer thrill of having to “live on the edge” *constantly* in order to help define the cutting edge is experienced as nothing less than an ecstatic quest for greater understanding. Beyond the fear of deadlines and unexpected detours and disasters, the pure pleasure of creating something new with each issue is gratifying in a unique way because that very pleasure is the source of the strength and inspiration to create the next!

We’ve never received a bigger or more enthusiastic response to any article we’ve written than we did to Craig Hamilton’s “Come Together: The Power of Collective Intelligence,” the theme piece of our last issue. This has been especially satisfying because the idea of coming together in a new way lay at the heart of our inspiration to produce *What Is Enlightenment?* in the first place. Also, the fact that so many are responding to this newly emerging evolutionary potential can be the source of at least some measure of confidence that we may find our way through the ultimate challenge of surviving the twenty-first century.

In the next issue, we’re going to be taking a sincere look into the question of whether popular spirituality can save us. And while the jury’s still out on that question, some of its fundamental principles seem to be coming to life in our own work. For example, as a number of the most popular teachers over the last two decades have told us, the more one is in a state of “flow,” the more one experiences synchronistic happenings, events, and connections. In that way, in the midst of the creative process that gave rise to the issue you’re holding in your hands—“Is God a Pacifist?”—we were just invited to participate in this summer’s Parliament of the World’s Religions in Barcelona, where intriguing questions like this are sure to be on everyone’s mind. So one thing is indeed leading to another and, no doubt, the next issue of *WIE* will give you the scoop on what transpired there. As we steadily evolve, along with all of you, we will continue to try to make sense out of the human adventure at the beginning of the twenty-first century from the highest state of consciousness we can muster.





sky to street

new age wake-up call

Politics makes a splash at Omega Institute's latest conference

by Ross Robertson

"Terrorism. Environmental catastrophe. Social degradation. At a time when the forces we're up against seem so insurmountable, we have to discover a kind of fearlessness that is unprecedented."

With those words—words more sober and more bracing than one might have expected—Omega Institute CEO Stephan Rechtschaffen welcomed 2,500 people to New York City for a recent New Age conference. Representing just a fraction of the more than 20,000 who attend Omega's personal growth seminars each year, the audience came from all over the country to spend a weekend with some of the biggest names in the holistic education business. As one woman from Washington, DC, told me enthusiastically, "Twenty-five hundred people is a lot of us looking for the same thing!" But for those who came looking for peace of mind or a rejuvenating retreat from the challenges of a complex and troubling world, Rechtschaffen's introductory dose of realism would be only the first in a series of surprises, signs of an uneven crosswind buffeting the world of contemporary New Age spirituality.

First, there was environmental lawyer Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., whose opening keynote address deviated abruptly from the faint synthesizer music, calling forth all the fiery dignity of the greatest statesmen of the past. "We're living now in a science fiction nightmare," Kennedy

said, and proceeded, with exceptional passion and compelling intelligence, to fold together a lesson in environmental history, a searing denunciation of the Bush White House, and an uncompromising vision for a sustainable future.* As the thunderous applause was dying down, mind/body physician Jon Kabat-Zinn came out to lead a closing meditation. But he, like the rest of us, had been stunned into speechlessness. "If we didn't know it before," he said after several minutes, wiping away tears, "we can deny it no longer. We are in a crisis, and the only way to come through it is to come to our senses."

Then there was the daringly straightforward Caroline Myss, bestselling author and former medical intuitive, who shared a recent shift in her point of view: "I used to think we create our own reality, that our illness is only the result of our negativity," she began. "But we cannot control the whims of God. Now I believe that *real* negativity is the need to think in such private, personal, ridiculous terms. As if my

pleasure and my pain are the most important things!" Although some in the audience—including the woman from DC—got up and walked out, many remained, stretching into unfamiliar territory. "New Agers are convinced that life is a therapy experience, that you have to be fully healed before you can be courageous," Myss went on. "Develop some cynicism, will you? Become spiritually shrewd! Most people don't *want* to be fully healed *or* fully courageous. We're afraid of our own lives and resentful of others' lives. Don't tell yourself you're wounded—get over it! You have to develop a backbone, not a wishbone."

Finally, there was Don Jose Luis, son of Toltec shaman and famed *Four Agreements* author Don Miguel Ruiz. Like a cross between a Christian minister, a Vedantic sage, and a soap opera heartthrob, Don Jose somehow managed to belong to many established categories while at the same time defying them altogether. "How long are

*See p. 38 for an excerpt of Kennedy's speech.





you going to play the same game?" he asked. "Faith is a simplicity the mind cannot understand. Faith in one's intention and will—and 'Thy will be done.' You can go beyond fear, beyond knowledge, into the authenticity of love, but you must get out of your own way to serve God. Heaven on earth is *free*. It's right in front of us." Transmitting a palpable depth of self-surrender into the room, he simultaneously roamed the very same personal territory Myss had criticized: "This life is a vacation. And how am I going to plan my vacation? Enjoying it, loving it! And nobody's going to spoil my vacation because it's *my* vacation, it's *my* time."

Of course, the New Age has always been defined by the primacy of the personal path, of relative truth—indeed, people walked out on Myss because she trampled on that sacred ground where no one person's view is considered higher than any other. And when it came to perspectives on the personal self, all the usual suspects were part of the Omega program. *Be yourself*,

Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* columnist Anna Quindlen encouraged: "Lockstep is the basis for all that's wrong in the world." If you don't like who you are, *invent a new self*, suggested personal transformation expert Debbie Ford: "Change yourself every year, and your life will be exciting and passionate!" Afflicted with an especially stubborn symptom? *Discover a past-life self* and it might permanently disappear, according to regression therapy pioneer Brian Weiss (your shoulder ache could be related to the fact that you were mauled by a lion in ancient Rome). Fed up with the powers that be? *Do yourself a favor* and stick it to the jerks along with obstreperous lefty rabble-rouser Michael Moore. And if all else fails, *lose yourself in dirty sex*, just like tantric agitator David Deida.

Nevertheless, the surprise of the weekend was just how much that traditionally personal ground seemed to be shifting, destabilized, cracks and fissures spreading across its surface. By the end, it had become clear that

continued on page 18

is college good for the soul?

Groundbreaking surveys track the higher power in higher education

by Maura R. O'Connor

As any frustrated college-aged seeker could tell you, spiritual sustenance is not often easy to come by in the halls of higher education. But soon, there may be new statistical evidence to prove it. This fall, the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA will be administering a survey to *90,000* first-year college students at 150 American universities. Funded by the John Templeton Foundation, the survey seeks to understand students' spiritual development by asking them questions concerning their spiritual experiences and beliefs, and it will follow up with the same questions two years later, when the students are juniors.

Pilot surveys of nearly 4,000 college students, conducted over the past four years, have already shown some interesting results. For example, fully 77% of students believe that "we are all spiritual beings." On the other hand, 21% are convinced that "in the future, science will be able to explain everything," and 31% concede that "it is futile to try to discover the purpose of existence." Most troubling is evidence showing that the atmosphere of academia appears to leave little room for serious philosophical dialogue concerning spirituality: even though 75% said that they were searching for spiritual meaning and purpose in life, 62% reported that their professors "never" encouraged discussions of religious or spiritual matters in the classroom. Indeed, when asked how they had changed since entering college, a mere 13% reported that their "spirituality" was "much stronger."

If the results of the larger survey (to be published in the spring of 2005) are anything like these preliminary findings, we can look forward to an extremely provocative study—one that might reveal not only the spiritual yearnings of America's youth but a disturbing lack of soul in our academic institutions. For the full report and upcoming results, go to www.spirituality.ucla.edu.

new age wake-up call

continued from page 17

another very different worldview was trying hard to emerge: a bigger picture, in which the importance of the personal journey pales in comparison to the pressing urgency of a planetary ecological and social crisis, demanding a higher, more absolute accountability on the part of each individual. This was the perspective into which Kennedy and Myss were leaning. When they spoke, I felt a deep, natural receptivity increase in myself and in others, a buoyant inclination to leave behind trivial concerns about “my pleasure and my pain,” as Myss had put it. I felt sharper. And I began to see the mood of defeated self-pity that I also experienced throughout the conference, both within and around me, as an equally natural emotional reaction to a familiar but stifling emphasis on the isolated self.

While the gap between these two perspectives was wide, it was filled with a sense of fertile promise. And though many attendees complained to cofounder and organizer Elizabeth Lesser about the conference’s brass-tacks political edge—so much so that she all but issued an apology Sunday afternoon and implied that Omega would back off next time around—others responded intuitively to the thrilling, if insecure, consideration of their own role in shaping an unknown future. “If you recognized how much you already know, how clearly you can already see,” Myss said, “you’d have to make different choices. It’s more of a risk to be powerful than it is to be vulnerable. The real risk is not to sabotage yourself.” Here’s hoping Omega stands their ground, because that’s a message that will never go out of date . . .



customize your meditation

Choose your own stress-reducing adventure at 35,000 ft.

by Tom Huston

Do you ever feel nervous when flying? Frustrated by an overwhelming workload? Has anyone ever told you that you just need to “chill out”? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, then you might want to check out the latest craze in spiritual technologies. Meditainment Ltd., founded in 2002 by Richard Latham in the UK, promptly made its presence known with a pioneering form of guided meditation that integrates sound effects, music, and spoken narratives into a relaxing—and *customizable*—meditative adventure. Already featured in cinemas and planetariums spanning four continents, as well as in the wards of over forty-five UK hospitals, Meditainment really took off earlier this year when the company entered into partnership with Virgin Airlines. “With people leading such busy lives, and the growing interest in yoga and meditation, we wanted to reflect that trend onboard,” observed Virgin Atlantic Programming Coordinator Katie Marks. “Now our passengers can travel to New York via the astral plane!”

So what is it like to use Meditainment? Well, you don’t have to buy a plane ticket to find out—anyone with a broadband connection can visit their website for an easily customized session of soothing English accents and idyllic guided adventures into the stress-reducing regions of the imagination. With the ability to choose your journey’s destination (lost city, desert island, etc.), mode of transportation (spaceship, canoe), music (orchestral, ambient), guide (male or female), and what topic you’d like to meditate on (slimming, feeling young), you’ll have up to 20,000 possible combinations to choose from on your path to self-discovery. Be advised, however: Meditainment could be dangerous. As they caution on their website (www.meditainment.com), “Obviously, do not use the products whilst driving or using heavy equipment or machinery.” One wonders what all the stressed-out crane operators of the world are going to do now . . .

are there skate parks in heaven?

The Bible-zine for teens is here, but who's buying it?

by Maura R. O'Connor

Everyone knows that magazines are teenagers' bibles. But who could have guessed that *the Bible* could be a teenager's magazine? That's right: believe it or not, a bizarre confluence of Christianity, pop culture, and marketing wizardry has produced the *Bible-zine*. According to the Thomas Nelson publishing house, there are a lot of young Christians out there who find the Bible to be "too big and freaky looking," and Bible-reading among the young has plummeted. So in order to put America's youth back on a more Godly track, they recently published *Refuel* and *Revolve*, for boys and girls, respectively. Clocking in at a *Vanity Fair*-ish four hundred pages, these two Bible-zines have the graphic quality of *Teen People* or *CosmoGirl*, which means the only thing setting them apart from the other rags on the newsstand is the virtuous lack of skin displayed on their covers. Other-wise, *Refuel* and *Revolve* are replete with all the slickness, cunning cover lines ("Are You Dating a Godly Guy?"), and pop culture references that make a teenager's heart sing. What's more, they've conquered the bestseller lists, occupying first and second places for the most Bible sales in 2003.

The actual text of the zine is the "New Century Version" translation of the New Testament, created in 1987 to keep even adolescents with the shortest attention spans interested in the story of Jesus. But what's the *real* key to their success? They're saving their readers the work of poring through the Bible to find answers to all of teenage life's pertinent questions. "Are there skate parks in heaven?" Did Jesus ever "sport any tattoos?" "Why did God make weed if he didn't want people to smoke it?"



You'll find answers to these questions, and hundreds of others, in the sidebars and blurbs strategically interspersed throughout the text.

Both *Refuel* and *Revolve* follow a similar format, with cleaner-than-soap stock photography and sections like "Do's and Don'ts" and "Radical Faith." But the content varies dramatically between the two, betraying some rather stereotypical ideas about gender roles and interests. Whereas *Refuel* is chock full of Christian rock music reviews, for example, *Revolve* has beauty secrets: "Make sure you keep your speech pure. Imagine putting on 'spiritual lipstick' every morning in preparation for the day's conversations." *Refuel* offers intelligent advice to guys about what to do when lust comes knocking: "No real-world woman can compete with

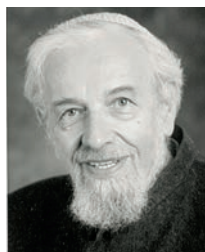
the airbrushed perfection of soft-porn beauties. But God has something better waiting for you—a unique, genuine, 3-D woman. Wait for that gift." On the other hand, *Revolve's* tips for girls on "how to have fun" with girlfriends are glaringly old-fashioned: "Get creative and make a wedding cake together." "Make flower arrangements and leave them at strangers' doors."

Refuel's and *Revolve's* attempts to create a moral context for teens are worthy ones, especially in light of the fact that the majority of twenty-first-century youth are growing up in a virtual moral desert. However, it's hard to ignore the regressive nature of their underlying message. How effective can promoting an *Ozzy and Harriet* sensibility be, when millions of teens are tuning in to *Sex and the City*? . . .

pulpit

the most important election of our lifetime? five spiritual teachers tell us why

QUESTION: *The United States is currently the single most powerful nation on earth, and yet it exists within an increasingly interconnected, conflicted, and complex global community. In that light, many are convincingly arguing that the upcoming presidential election will be the most important in our lifetime. Do you agree? And if so, why?*



Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

Never before has an election in the United States had so much global significance. Our planet is currently sick, and everywhere there are outbreaks of inflammation. So it is necessary for the people who will govern this country—and by extension, much of the rest of the world—to be in touch with the pulse of life on this earth and understand that all the cosmologies we are currently using are not benefiting the healing of the world.

Why is it that people like President Bush, who pledge allegiance to the teachings of the master from Nazareth, ignore the teachings of lovingkindness, of feeding the hungry, of taking care of the sick? If he were to follow those teachings in relationship to health, education, and welfare and follow the tenet that “blessed are the peacemakers” rather than produce the greatest number of weapons of mass destruction on earth, I would believe his religious commitment.

And to us, as citizens of the United States, I would say that anyone who meditates or prays and places him- or herself in the presence of God the Creator must be able to feel the compassion that God has for every species and for all the creatures. Someone who simply takes doctrinal clues, rather than those that arise from compassion, will not know what to do in the voting booth.

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi has been at the forefront of pioneering Jewish spiritual renewal. He is an author, a faculty emeritus at Naropa University, and the founder of the Spiritual Eldering Institute.



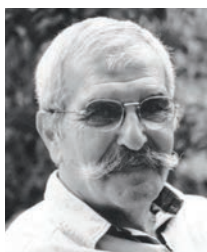
Jan Chozen Bays Roshi

First of all, I don't know if this is the most important election in our lifetime, because I don't know the long-term implications of everything that I do. If we had the awareness of the Buddha, we would have an awareness that extends into the future, and a clarity about cause and effect, that would help us make decisions about what to do or not to do. Because every action sets in motion a chain of karma that reverberates essentially forever unless something is done to counteract or change it.

When people say to me, “This is the worst time in the history of the world,” I just don't believe it. Our existence is so short, it's like a dust mote in the eye of God. So to say that the time in which my dust mote existed was the most important time in history, and that the things that I did were earth-shaking, is a self-centered view. At the same time, in Buddhism we believe that each person's enlightenment frees all the other people they interact with, and we shouldn't pass up an opportunity to do good. *What one person does really matters.* And with our limited wisdom and our limited capacity to know about the past and the future, we can still act and do what we think will produce the most wholesome outcome for the largest number of beings—and that includes voting.

Jan Chozen Bays Roshi received dharma transmission [authority to teach] from Maezumai Roshi in 1983. She is the abbess of Great Vow Zen Monastery in Clatskanie, Oregon.





Sheikh Tosun Bayrak

When I came to this country from Turkey in 1945 with the returning GIs, America was revered, loved. Its culture was admired; its people were admired. Those GIs who were returning from the war—they were angels. And while there have been some disasters in the meantime, I think Mr. Bush is the biggest disaster to have happened to the United States. And unfortunately it has fallen in the wrong moment, because there is no balance of power. President Bush's management of the country has been terrible, because a human being is made of two things. One is the body, and one is the soul. In terms of the body: people are hungry, people are jobless, the economy is in a disastrous state. And in terms of the soul: what is most unfortunate is that he claims to be a religious man, but his actions are just the opposite of a religious person. Spiritually speaking, he is obnoxious, and that affects people. Because they think, "Well, if one can be religious like Mr. Bush, then I'm religious, too."

But I'm hopeful, because Muslims believe that the first thing God created was intelligence. The ancient Greeks also believed this, and what they called "Logos" we call "Nur Muhammademan," which is the light, which is the causal intelligence. And from that, everything else was created. So this intelligence cannot be erased just because Mr. Bush doesn't have it. It cannot be totally eliminated. So I count on that.

Sheikh Tosun Bayrak is the imam of the first mosque in Rockland County, New York, and the Jerrahi Order of America, which has provided humanitarian aid in Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Yugoslavia.



Father Basil Pennington

It's a tragic thing that what is, by God's mercy, one of the greatest nations on earth isn't able to call forth great leadership. The language we've been hearing from the present leadership of our country is frightening because it is taking on a kind of crusade terminology. Jesus sent his disciples forth to teach all nations, but he never said anything about conquering. And yet, fundamentalism seems to be growing, and it is playing into the political scene in the United States perhaps more strongly than ever before.

So there's a great need for sanity at a higher level to move this nation forward, using the tremendous assets that God has given us for the well-being of the whole human race. And this needs to happen within the evolutionary thrust that began from the moment when the divine energies poured forth into creation and will continue until the consummation which, as Teilhard de Chardin said, lies God knows how far ahead. We Christians pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done." Our whole aspiration is to bring this to its fullness, so there isn't any dichotomy between living fully in the redemptive, saving power of Jesus Christ and living in the creative power that's in the whole of creation. It's a global world now, a global society, so moving that forward is my duty as a devout Catholic. There's no separation there. Political action, social action, and economic action are all part of the spiritual life. It's *all* engaged. As Saint Irenaeus said so beautifully, "The glory of God is the human person *fully* alive," and that means all dimensions of our being.

Father M. Basil Pennington, OCSO, is a Cistercian monk whose worldwide ministry focuses on bringing contemplative practices into the lives of spiritual seekers. He is the abbot of St. Joseph's Monastery in Spencer, Massachusetts.



David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri)

In the Vedic view, a country, like a person, must follow some higher dharma, or it will suffer long-term negative karmic consequences. The more power or position that a person or country has, the greater such consequences are likely to be.

The United States has gained the important role of the world's sole super-power. Yet rather than using its position to help deal with the dire human and environmental problems that threaten the planet today, it has acted instead out of a narrow, nationalist self-interest that only makes these problems worse.

The coming election is of great importance because it provides an opportunity to change this irresponsible course of action. It will be a referendum that could very well determine whether America's role as the world's leader will be a positive (dharmic) or a negative (adharmaic) force for the planet, or whether that role will even be able to continue. While there may not be an ideal choice for the voter, there is a clear distinction relative to the direction the country is likely to go in.

As the situation in America affects the entire world and the spiritual destiny of the planet, it is important that everyone take some action, inwardly or outwardly, to help counter this national crisis in consciousness and values.

David Frawley is a teacher and writer of Vedic knowledge. He is currently the director of the American Institute of Vedic Studies in Santa Fe, New Mexico (www.veanet.com).



will spring and summer no longer come?

The future demands a new worldview

An interview with Ervin Laszlo

by Elizabeth A. Debold

Ervin Laszlo is a renaissance man for the world of the future. If that's a bit of a mind-bender, then consider this: Laszlo started his career as a pianist; became the leading proponent of systems theory as a broad philosophical framework; went beyond Darwin to elaborate general evolutionary theory; theorized the "fifth physical field" to prove an absolute dimension beyond time and space; taught in universities across America, Europe, and Asia; and now advocates for global sustainability. What led him from the concert stage to the laboratory, around the world, and across the disciplines? Interest, pure interest. "I'm interested in problems, in puzzles, in what in science are called 'anomalies,'" he says matter-of-factly. "I'm really interested in things that I don't understand." And thanks to the incredible reach of his interest, we are all waking up to see the entire cosmos in a new light—as one living system of which we are an integral part.

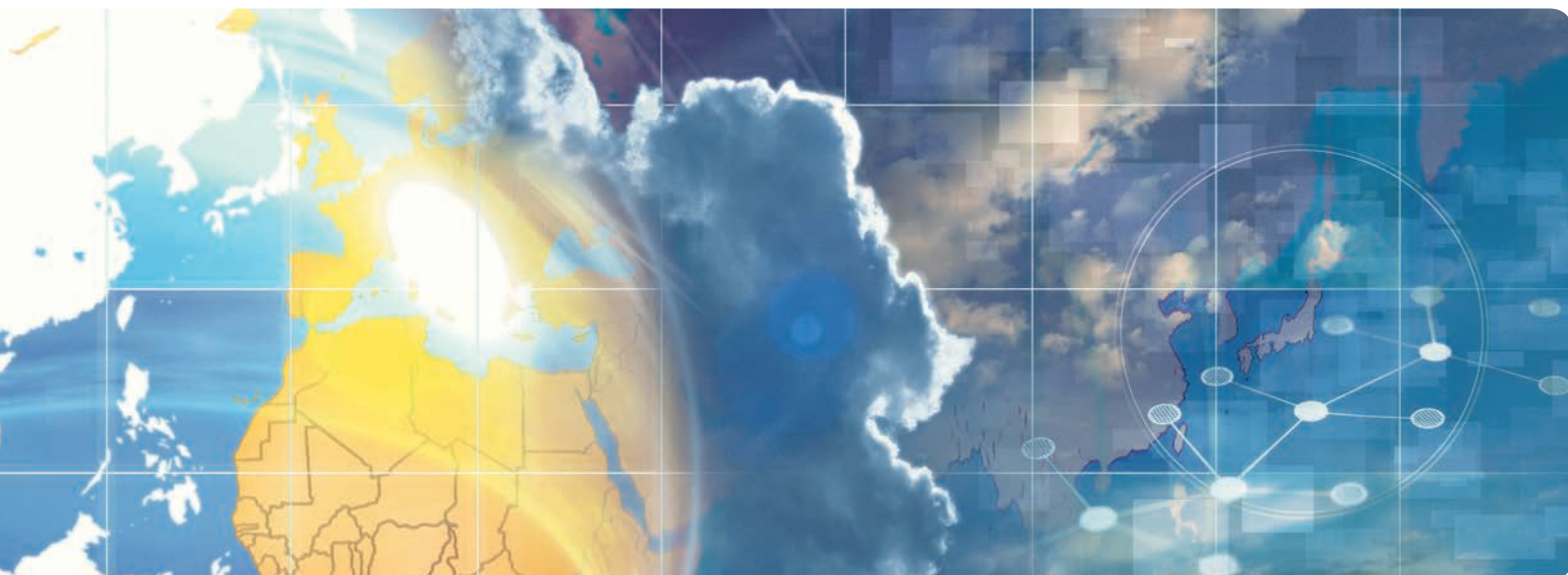
Born in Hungary between the two world wars, Laszlo was a child prodigy—a brilliant pianist who let his mind soar as his hands flew over the keys. After he would finish playing, he'd rush to his typewriter to capture the insights and questions that had come to him. Eventually realizing that "you can't be a professional concert pianist and have your mind work on philosophical scientific problems," Laszlo gave up music to pursue science. And pursue he did: he has been chasing science out of the laboratory and snug academic circles ever since, bringing the latest discoveries to bear on the fundamental questions of human life. About a decade ago, Laszlo founded the prestigious Club of Budapest, gathering together leading minds in art, science, religion, and culture in order to evolve a new ethic for a sustainable world.

After a recent lecture at Yale University, *WIE* had the privilege of speaking with Dr. Laszlo about his vision for a paradigm shift that could change the future.

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT: *You have written that we are in a "macroshift"—where the economic and ecological systems on this planet will undergo a crisis, a total transformation leading to utter breakdown or extraordinary breakthrough. What do you see happening? And how soon do you believe it will happen?*

ERVIN LASZLO: That's what we don't know. Obviously, you can't keep having more and more people use more and more resources, and have greater and greater inequality in the distribution of those resources, without a breaking point being reached. Right now, for example, with the melting of the ice cap deflecting the Gulf Stream, it's entirely possible that in three years England will have the frigid climate of Labrador, which is at the same latitude. Spring and summer just won't come. The fact of the matter is that we live on a planet where everything is circular—whatever you do to other people or to nature eventually comes back to you. While it has always been like this, we weren't even capable of thinking this way until a couple hundred years ago.

An additional factor has to do with the behavior of complex systems: they don't change smoothly. It's impossible to tell, even theoretically, when a complex system is reaching its limit—there are so many feedbacks, so many self-correcting mechanisms that are operating. But when there is more and more stress, sooner or later you reach a tipping or bifurcation point, and all of a sudden the system just can't correct for it. We have been ignoring the pressure building in the system. As a result, we are



facing an “ecol-nomic” crisis—ecological and economic simultaneously—with potentially catastrophic problems like climate change and sea level increase that may threaten our survival.

WIE: *These are problems of a magnitude and complexity that humanity has never faced before. It's intriguing that as a scientist, you're not looking toward technological solutions but, instead, toward a fundamental change in our thinking. What is this new thinking, and how can it help us?*

LASZLO: It's about a new worldview with new values adapted to living, surviving, and developing on this planet. The rise of spirituality and the rise of meditation techniques and involvement with inner growth are all part of this phenomenon. And it's already occurring, but it has to be accelerated.

Now, you can get to this new worldview by rational or intellectual means. You can get to it intuitively, through art, spirituality, or religion. And you can get there through science. If you look at developments in science, you'll find that science is increasingly recognizing that everything is connected very strongly with everything else. Everything that exists is an open system. Nothing is entirely closed or independent—everything is very sensitively connected.

The implications are enormous wherever you look. So, for example, we are not just a block of cells, like a building is a block of bricks. Most fundamentally, our living tissue is not made out of hard-core elements—atoms and molecules—it is made of waves. Thus, we are living systems that are continuously receiving and transmitting information. This information transmission is faster than any conceivable biochemical mechanism, because what happens in one part of the organism simultaneously happens to the other part. It's constantly interactive on multiple dimensions. It's a remarkable thing—going way beyond any technical, biological, mechanistic, and materialistic concept of the organism.

As so much of the spiritual literature says: we are not limited to five slits in the tower—meaning that we don't just see the world through the five sense organs. To me, it's very obvious that consciousness is not a byproduct of the brain, produced by a complex set of neurons. It's something that's pervading the whole universe. It's there in the whole body, in all living systems, probably all the way down to the quantum level. We are living in a universe that itself is conscious. And so, we can open the roof to the sky. In creativity you open up—you have a possibility to open the roof to the sky. Then you're no longer alone. I had these moments as a young musician in concert—a sensation of being part of a larger universe. You have united with something larger than yourself.

I believe that these things will give us a new paradigm of a universe that is connected. We are far more interconnected to one another and to all elements than we ever thought. A friend who I admired very much, Jonas Salk, said that a new paradigm in science and in society is like a response of the immune system, because it enables you to think in ways that are more adapted to coping with new problems. So, if this paradigm would begin to penetrate into society, we would have more solidarity, more humanity, and a better relationship to nature and to each other, because we would recognize what William James said in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*—that we are separate on the surface but connected in the deep. Or what Buddhists know—that we are connected to the cosmos. It's also what I think Jesus meant when he said, “You have to love each other, as I love you, because you are all part of the same.” All of the great prophets have said this. But we've lost this interconnectedness in our fascination with technology, the economy, and power itself. Recognizing the subtle element connecting all of nature and its effect on our mind, our consciousness, could go a long way toward making us more human—and by the way, help us to survive the crisis that we are now facing. ■



looking back to the beginning

The Ultra Deep Field: a picture worth ten thousand galaxies

by Tom Huston

Fourteen years ago, NASA's orbiting observatory, the Hubble Space Telescope, began wowing us all with its celestial snapshots of exploding stars, colliding galaxies, and nebulous clouds of solar system nurseries. The real stunner, though, came in January 1996, when a team of astronomers unveiled their space scope masterpiece: the Hubble Deep Field. During the course of a ten-day exposure, particles of light traveling at 186,000 miles per second—and streaming our way for the past thirteen billion years—were compiled into a remarkable image of some of the most distant objects ever observed. Over fifteen hundred

galaxies, many dating back to within one billion years of the Big Bang, were revealed in a patch of sky the size of a grain of sand held at arm's length.

This year Hubble managed to peer back even further—to perhaps as early as three hundred million years post Big Bang, which is when the very first galaxies began to form and nearly nine billion years before Earth itself coalesced into existence. Called the Hubble Ultra Deep Field (UDF), this dazzling photo features an estimated ten thousand galaxies of various colors and shapes, at various stages of evolutionary development. The image was acquired during the course of

four hundred Hubble orbits around Earth over a period of three months, totaling eight hundred separate exposures. Photons of light from the most distant objects seen in the image trickled in at a rate of one photon per minute, compared to millions of particles per minute from galaxies closer by. Thus, to examine the entire sky with the same resolution, astronomers say, would take about one million years.

Here at WIE we've been rather awestruck by all of this. So we decided to consult some acclaimed astrophysicists and cosmologists to get their professional insights. Judging by their responses, it seems we aren't the only ones in awe . . .

**Ann Druyan**

"Science lifts the curtain on a tiny piece of night and finds ten thousand galaxies

hidden there. Each one a community of perhaps a hundred billion suns; each sun a potential home star to, say, a dozen worlds. How many stories, how many ways of being in the universe are contained therein? All residing in what, to us, had been just a little patch of empty sky. Seeing the light from these jewels shine forth across the great ocean of space and time, I marvel at our science and ache for a political and spiritual philosophy reflective of its insights."

Ann Druyan was Carl Sagan's cowriter for twenty years. She is CEO of Cosmos Studios, which will launch into space later this year Cosmos I, the world's first solar sailing craft.

**James N. Gardner**

"In contemplating the image revealed by the Hubble Ultra Deep Field, I am reminded of the sense of wonder

felt by Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, the father of observational microbiology, when he first peered through a primitive microscope and glimpsed vast hordes of 'wee beasties' populating drops of pond water and human spittle. The hidden living firmament that so astonished the Dutch scientist (bacteria, protists, rotifers, nematodes, and much more) turned out to be the very foundation of the global ecosystem—the microscopic cells of Gaia's flesh and blood. So, too, the unsuspected celestial grandeur

"I marvel at our science and ache for a political and spiritual philosophy reflective of its insights."

Ann Druyan

revealed by this image may someday be appreciated as a poignant baby photo—the faint image of a moment, unfathomably distant in time and space, when the vast universe began an utterly mysterious process of coming to life."

James N. Gardner is a practicing lawyer, cosmologist, and former Oregon state senator. He is the author of Biocosm.

**Neil deGrasse Tyson**

"For me, what is most striking about the UDF is the richness of morphology revealed in even the tiniest of

galaxies. The photogenic spirals, kindred forms to our own Milky Way, show the characteristic central bulges and the knots of freshly made stars that dot the spiral arms. Each of these galaxies, however small it appears in the image, is its own collection of hundreds of billions of stars.

"Let there be no misunderstanding: many ground-based images exist of the seemingly countless galaxies in the outer universe, but in all cases the galaxies appear as undistinguished smudges. By these, I am captured intellectually, but not emotionally. Only with sharp images like the UDF am I viscerally reminded that there are other worlds out there. Billions and billions of them. And I wonder: on planets

around stars in the galaxies of the Ultra Deep Field, are there life-forms that are contemplating the universe the way we are? Or are they not paying attention because they are just looking for shelter, food, and sex, as does most life on Earth?"

Neil deGrasse Tyson is an astrophysicist, author, and director of New York's Hayden Planetarium, where he also teaches.

**Brian Swimme**

"What strikes me about the UDF is that we're at this incredible moment of understanding

the depths of our being—the depths of our *human* being but also the depths of our cosmic being. You just get a sense of this vast cosmic odyssey, and we're right in the middle of it. Humans have been around for over a hundred thousand years, and we simply didn't *know* about this until recently. It's amazing.

"One of the interesting differences between this and the original deep field images is that there's more *variety* of galaxies—it's more chaotic. It reminds me of the way in which you'll have an explosion of animal forms at the birth of a species—an explosion of *diversity*, this incredible chaotic explosion of possibility—and then the universe sort of winnows out the more exotic shapes and enfolds them into forms that are more enduring. Diversity is a great way in which the universe explores its future."

Brian Swimme, founder of the Epic of Evolution Society, is currently professor of cosmology at the California Institute of Integral Studies.

pulse

News & gossip from an emerging culture

What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the words "religion and politics"? An image of right-wing evangelicals cozying up to the Bush administration? Pat Robertson ushering in the apocalypse? Well, a few organizations on the more progressive side of the fence are looking to change that. Alarmed by what they see as the White House's disastrous policies toward all kinds of progressive causes, spiritual folks who have long been politically apathetic are starting to dust off their activist shoes and join the fray. From author **Robert Rabbin's** Truth for President organization to the Unquiet Revolutionary Press, from **Marianne Williamson, Ram Dass,** and **Matthew Fox's** endorsement of **Dennis Kucinich** to the new salons that are popping up around the country as forums for philosophy and politics, postmodern spirituality is getting politically savvy. And they're planning to get out the vote this November. "Sometimes we look down on politics, criticizing it as dirty," said the **Dalai Lama** recently. "However, if you look at it properly, politics in itself is not wrong. It is an instrument to serve human society." Right-wing evangelicals may see Armageddon in our future, but these newly inspired progressive activists are looking to prevent that very same thing . . .

Want to know just how far the word *guru* has fallen into disrepute in the spiritual world? The organization of one the most renowned, controversial, and successful Indian gurus of the last century has decided that their late founder is . . . not a guru. **Osho**, once known as Bhagwan Sri Rajneesh, was the popular seventies spiritual teacher most Americans know for his notorious commune in Oregon, his predilection for Rolls Royces, and his many Western students who wore the traditional Indian red or ochre "sannyasin" robes.



"Not only is Osho not a guru, his whole approach is to demolish the 'guru game,'" reads the official ashram website. That may sound somewhat bizarre considering that Osho attracted hundreds of thousands of devotees from around the world—many of whom wore a picture of him on a *mala* around their neck—and that surrender to his spiritual authority was wholeheartedly encouraged. Indeed, Osho was a force of personality unlike anything the spiritual world had seen in some time, and love him or hate him he was a guru—fully, completely, resolutely, unabashedly. But the word on the street is that even at his home ashram in **Pune, India**, they've taken all of his pictures down from the walls and have completely de-*guruized* the entire place. Not surprisingly, some old-time loyalists in the community are upset at these developments. "We can't walk around the ashram and speak about devotion and surrender anymore," one student recently complained. *Pulse* has been told that that kind of subversive talk—guru talk—is off-limits . . .

How would you like to live in an enlightened city? Okay, how would you like to live in **Providence, Rhode Island**? Providence, which has long been known as the "Renaissance City," is apparently considering changing its name to the "**Enlightened City**." No, the mayor has not converted to Buddhism, and bodhi trees will not line the downtown river walk, but there are serious discussions under way about giving the city's image an enlightened makeover—in business, culture, education, and government. Enlightenment, we are told, could become the next publicity theme for the marketing of Providence. The idea is the brainchild of Gregory DiStefano, a *WIE* reader (a recent issue was the source of his inspiration), who has close ties to local government. He envisions all sorts of new city programs built around both the noble principles of the European Enlightenment and the mystical enlightenment of the East. So do you like to read Voltaire at the library? Practice Buddhist meditation in a downtown park? Do tai chi on your lunch break? Come to Rhode Island, because Providence, once notorious for having a government run by organized crime, may be on its way to *nirvana* . . .





What do Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Carlos Santana, Danny Glover, and Gillian Anderson have in common?

They're all trying to save Africa. As AIDS in Africa skyrockets and as hopes for the successful resuscitation of so many struggling societies seem fainter by the day, a few prominent Westerners are taking notice. "Join us in spreading a spiritual virus" of compassion, Santana said at a press conference addressing the issue, announcing his intention to help eradicate the scourge of AIDS. **Artists for a New South Africa**, an organiza-

tion originally founded to help free South African society from the yoke of apartheid, is now refocused on helping the entire continent deal with the disease. "We overcame apartheid; we are going to overcome AIDS," declared Archbishop Tutu, who has also lent his support to the cause. The organization is planning a massive concert and gala event this October in LA. The star-studded evening will be held at the Greek Theater and will seek to raise awareness of, and money for, the plight of the African continent. No doubt the invite list will include a who's who of Hollywood activists, but don't be surprised to see well-known spiritual personalities like **Deepak Chopra** attending as well . . .



Wake up, Neo. Pulse has learned that **Ken Wilber** was recently out in LA recording six hours of commentary for the new DVD boxed-set of the **Matrix** trilogy—along with African-American studies icon **Cornel West**—at the request of **Matrix** co-creator **Larry Wachowski**. In a bold show of support for the philosopher of everything, Wachowski reportedly declared to the press that "Ken Wilber is our Neo." No word yet on the release date, but it's purported to contain some interesting discussions on the nature of consciousness, with philosophers like **David Chalmers**, director of the Center for Consciousness Studies at the University of Arizona. So if you are among those who were disappointed with the sequels to what was one of the most original movies of the last decade, at least you can count on hours and hours of DVD bonus materials to make it all worthwhile . . .

Now you can take your education to the next tier with Ken Wilber as your guide.

After almost half a decade of anticipation, **Integral University**, or IU as the cool kids call it, is finally set to open its cyberspatial doors. Having secured a deal to offer an accredited degree program through the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, IU's first online course, an introduction to integral theory, begins on August 30. Open to twenty-five lucky students, the course will be taught by **Integral Institute's** Randy Martin and by Wilber himself, and will be the first to pave the neural pathways of the Integral Commons—a network linking together twenty websites that will form the hub of the world's first integral learning community. So if you haven't yet mastered AQAL metatheory or the integral calculus, throw away that MIT application, forget about

Harvard, and log on to www.integraluniversity.org to see what could become the educational model of the integral age—that is, unless *WIE* beats them to it. This fall, the magazine is teaming up with **The Graduate Institute** in Connecticut, which offers an accredited Master's degree program in **Conscious Evolution**. The goal is to create a group of evolutionary activists who are committed to pushing the leading edge of consciousness further, deeper, and higher. This two-year program will allow you to *participate* in the process that you are studying—the emergence of the next stage in human evolution. Visit www.learn.edu/wie to find out more . . .



Integral University isn't the only place you can go this fall to spend quality time on the internet.

Behold, **The Powers of the Universe!** Beginning in September, cosmologists **Brian Swimme** and **Eric Weiss** will host a 24-week online course based on Swimme's new DVD series. Exploring ten of the most powerful forces in the cosmos—homeostasis, synergy, gravitation, etc.—the series centers around a single question: How do these powers express themselves through human beings? *Pulse* spoke with Swimme recently to get the stellar scoop from the man himself. "The universe came into existence 13.7 billion years ago," he said. "All these powers were at work from the very beginning, and they just continued to weave new forms into existence. The universe tried to become Galaxy; it tried to become Hummingbird. Now the universe is *trying* to become Human; these powers are trying to fashion this amazing new being. You know, the average mammalian species lasts around a million years, and we've been around a little over a hundred thousand. We're *so young*. We just got here."



voices from the edge


presenting the values & visions of a new global culture

the globalization of morality



Robert Wright explores the challenges of terrorism and the evolution of human ethics

NOBODY LIKES A KNOW-IT-ALL, the old saying goes. Well, Robert Wright better take heed. Because in this age of intellectual specialization, Wright is one member of the intelligentsia who definitely breaks the mold. After all, how many former journalists can claim to have published a defining book in a new scientific field (evolutionary psychology); been hailed as an important author by no less an authority than the New York Times; provoked the great biologist Stephen Jay Gould into a public debate in the pages of the New Yorker; been given the opportunity to write a prominent political column for Michael Kinsley and his online magazine, Slate; been called a “genius” by former President Bill Clinton; written extensively on the information age and its social ramifications; spent the last couple of years interviewing some of the top scientists in the world for an internet documentary project; and published a highly acclaimed book detailing an original theory of cultural evolution? And as if politics, science, biology, psychology, and technology weren’t enough, Wright is now working on a book tentatively titled *The Future of Religion*. He may not know it all, but I certainly wouldn’t want to play high-stakes Jeopardy with him.



Despite his prolific pen and wide-ranging intellectual interests, there are, in fact, some key threads that connect and integrate all the dots in Wright's eclectic world. First, all of his work is concerned with the deeper questions of human motivation—universal questions that get at the core of the human condition, questions that by their very nature are scientific, political, psychological, and religious. And one of those interdisciplinary threads is the highly charged issue of morality, an issue so fundamental to human behavior that it cuts across intellectual boundaries and implicates almost all fields of endeavor. Wright's breakthrough 1997 book on evolutionary psychology was actually called *The Moral Animal*.

Second, all of Wright's work is motivated by an interest in both biological and cultural evolution. His follow-up to *The Moral Animal*, called *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny*, approached the issue of morality by examining the unique ways in which it is interwoven into the very pattern of our evolutionary history. Indeed, it is Wright's unique ability to convey a big-picture, bird's-eye view of human culture that has earned him a place among a small but influential group of new visionaries who are taking a close look at the evolutionary challenge faced by our species at this moment in history, a challenge that could just as well be described as a moral crisis.

So while morality might not be the hippest word right now in the postmodern sensibilities of our cultural intelligentsia, it's heartening to know that there are those who are approaching this ever-thorny subject in innovative ways. Though Wright himself is much more an optimist than a prophet of doom, he does feel strongly that a worldwide moral transformation is an absolute necessity if we are to ensure a vibrant and viable future for human life in the twenty-first century.

Carter Phipps

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT: *Both of your recent books have addressed moral questions from new perspectives. The Moral Animal addressed morality within the context of evolutionary theory, and Nonzero did so within the context of globalization. Could you explain why you feel the issues of ethics and morality are so relevant now, and why it is important that we address them?*

ROBERT WRIGHT: I think the basic issue is that accelerating technological change is driving our species to a momentous moral challenge. And if we don't pass the test, we could all be in trouble. In other words, technological evolution needs to be paralleled by moral evolution. Technological evolution is starting to push society through a "phase change," a kind of transformation of social structure, and that needs to be accompanied by a moral transformation.

Now maybe "moral transformation" is a misnomer, because the logic I'm talking about is ultimately grounded in self-interest. As the world gets more interdependent, it makes more sense—even from the point of view of crass selfishness—to worry about the welfare of people far away from you. For example, to contain the AIDS epidemic in America, you need to worry about the health of people on another continent. To keep the SARS epidemic from killing Americans, you need to worry about the containment of SARS in another part of the world. To keep Islamic terrorism at bay, you need to worry about whether Muslims around the world are contented or resentful and angry.

In that sense, some people would quibble with the word "moral." But even though the logic is ultimately self-interest, I think that pursuing that logic requires an act of true moral imagination. In other words, if you're going to figure out how to make some groups of people happier or less resentful, you actually need to put yourself in their shoes, to look at the world from their perspective. And that's very hard to do when people seem culturally different from you, or when members of that group are doing things you find abhorrent. There's a natural reaction *against* responding to an act of terrorism, for example, by trying to put yourself in the shoes of the group of people from which the terrorist came. So even though I'm arguing for this on grounds of self-interest, I still think you have to exercise your moral imagination to get the job done.

WIE: *How do you see these moral dynamics in our society now? How are we doing?*

WRIGHT: I think there's still a lot of progress to be made. As I was saying, there are large numbers of Americans who instinctively resist the idea of trying to look at the world from the perspective of people on the other side of the planet—especially when those people are associated



with terrorism. And I'm not asking people to look at the world through Osama bin Laden's eyes, because he's hopeless anyway. He's beyond conversion at this point. But I do want them to look at the world through the eyes of the people he would like to turn into tomorrow's recruits. They're the next generation of terrorists. I want people to look at the world from the perspective of his milieu. But even that is hard. The idea that when somebody assaults you, you retaliate, is built into us for evolutionary reasons that we now understand. And it was a pretty good rule of thumb in the hunter/gatherer environment in which we evolved. But now, relying only on retribution is just counterproductive. Yet I think that's probably the strongest single sentiment governing U.S. policy. So there's a lot of work to be done.

On the other hand, I do think that to the extent that you can show Americans other people, up close and personal, we can become empathetic pretty quickly. To the extent that we actually see what's going on in Africa with AIDS or with civil war or see what's going on in Iraq, the switch can flip. During the war, if the average American heard of an Iraqi soldier dying, that wouldn't even register on the down side of the moral scale. If anything, it would have been on the up side—they're the enemy, so it's good. But now, if you show us footage of some Iraqi woman who is a victim of the Iraqi insurgency or a woman who loses a relative in a car bombing, we'll feel sorry for her—even if she's the same woman whose brother we killed a month ago. The pain we were causing her then did not bother us, but the pain she's suffering now does. And there's obviously a paradox there.

So all I'm trying to say is that, on the one hand, I don't think we're bringing nearly the moral sensitivity that is needed to bear on the world. On the other hand, little things can make a difference. You can flip the switch and shift people into a completely different moral frame of mind with little cues. One of those is

just seeing the people we're talking about. In that sense, TV and video technologies of all kinds can play a big role.

WIE: *So do you see technological globalization, if I can use that term, as helping to drive this moral transformation?*

WRIGHT: Absolutely. Since the Stone Age, technological evolution has had the effect of making people over larger and larger areas interdependent with one another, correlating their fortunes, for better or worse. For example, when the Black Death came to Europe in the Middle Ages, if the contagion spread in one city, it was bad news for people a hundred miles away. Transportation technology connected cities that were far apart, and so even then, the welfare of people was correlated over long distances. But with globalization, I think we're seeing the culmination of a historical process in which people over larger and larger distances are becoming involved in what is technically called a "nonzero-sum game"—that is to say, it can be either win-win or lose-lose.

A MORAL SINGULARITY

WIE: *You have also spoken about humanity approaching what you have called a "moral singularity." Some futurists have used the term "singularity" to describe a point in the future at which we will reach some critical threshold of accelerating technological change. Singularity, as most people speak of it, points to quite a dramatic transformation. In what sense are you using the term?*

WRIGHT: One way to define singularity is as a phase change. An example of a phase change in physics is when water turns into ice. It's a critical point; there's a transformation of structure. So I'm saying that technology is pushing us through a very



rapid transformation of structure. It is pushing us toward a global level of social organization that, in historical terms, is happening fast enough and is dramatic enough to constitute a phase change.

There are challenges. I think that if economic globalization is going to work, and is going to be stable, we're going to need progress in a couple of dimensions. One is global governance. And if that succeeded, it would qualify as a type of phase change. But that won't be enough. There needs to be a parallel transformation of moral sensibility and it needs to be fast and dramatic. It's not going to happen tomorrow, but a decade is not long if you look back over the whole sweep of history. So I'm saying that the economic, social, and political phase change needs to be accompanied by what you could call a moral phase change—one that is sufficiently rapid and dramatic to qualify for the term "singularity."

I also want to say that this isn't just a challenge for Americans. Ultimately, it has to be a moral transformation that is itself global. People around the world who are intolerant of religions other than their own have to change in the long run if this whole thing is going to work out.

WIE: *Given all the trajectories, what do you think is the kind of time frame that this needs to happen within?*

WRIGHT: I certainly would think that if in fifteen to twenty years there hasn't been really dramatic, discernible progress on this front, and on other fronts like global governance, we'll be in serious trouble. For one thing, just look at the realm of terrorism. At that point, you will probably have some serious weapons in the hands of people who want to cause a lot of harm—especially if you haven't made any progress on global governance, which would help prevent that. So if we haven't made progress on

either the political or the moral track in fifteen or twenty years, then I can imagine things getting to a point of no return.

In the long run, will we recover and figure things out? Yes, probably—a hundred, two hundred years from now. But I'd just rather not be part of the painful learning of the lesson, which is to say, collapse and chaos.

WIE: *Assuming for a moment that we are successful, what will this moral phase change look like on the other side?*

WRIGHT: I see it looking like large numbers of people all around the world truly, deeply understanding that if they were in the shoes of people who are geographically distant and seem culturally alien to them, they would probably see the world the way those people see the world. It sounds like a completely elementary point. But very few people are good at practicing it, and I don't claim that I am. It's hard to do. I mean, on an everyday basis, we all go through life with moments where we deem other people as really bad, just on the basis of trivial evidence. For example, take road rage. We've all felt at least incipient road rage. And I would submit that usually we're mad at somebody who's doing something that we ourselves have done at least once.

So when you put it in terms of precepts, it almost sounds trivial. And yet, in a geopolitical context, the failure of large numbers to practice it leads to large-scale trouble. The Middle East is an example. You may realize that if you were on the Israeli side, yes, you'd probably be as outraged as most Israelis are. And if you were on the Palestinian side, yes, you would probably be as outraged as most Palestinians are. Now, if you could get the Israelis and Palestinians to appreciate that about each other, you would be very close to a solution to the problem. Yet we haven't been able to do that.

perspectief

moralité globale

מוסריות גלובלית

WIE: *In your last book, Nonzero, you made the point that at this moment we have a chance, maybe for the first time in history, to tip the balance between good and bad in human culture to the good side of the scales—to put it in very simplistic terms.*

WRIGHT: Yes, I was saying that historically, the amity, or goodwill, within the group has often depended on enmity, or hatred, between groups. But when you get to the global level, that won't work—assuming we don't get invaded by Martians or something. That cannot be the dynamic that holds the planet together. So we're facing a new kind of challenge. The good news is that if we meet that challenge, we will have done something unprecedented, which is to change this historic symmetry between enmity and amity and raise the ratio of the amity to the enmity. And that's another sense in which I think a term like “phase change” or “singularity” or something that dramatic is warranted.

In some sense, this is not unprecedented. In the past, we moved from the hunter/gatherer village to the agrarian chiefs to the ancient state, so there are precedents for the expansion of solidarity between people. But what would be unprecedented is to have this kind of solidarity and moral cohesion at a global level that did not depend on the hatred of other groups of people. That would be a singular accomplishment in the history of the species.

Now, I'm not imagining completely pervasive brotherly love. I'm realistic, and I have a fairly cynical view of human nature. But if we could first have a truly global ethos of tolerance, and second, have people everywhere being reminded often of the need to at least *try* to see things from the perspective of people who seem most different from them, that would itself be a momentous accomplishment and would do a world of good.

A LARGER PURPOSE

WIE: *What do you see as the spiritual implications of this kind of trajectory of moral development in the species? Is there some deeper purpose this transformation is pointing to?*

WRIGHT: It's tricky to speak about spirituality, because part of the whole problem we're trying to solve is what seems to be a clash of spiritual traditions. But if I were not to think about specific spiritual traditions, I would say that for those people who like to think that there is some larger purpose at work in the world—and I'm one of them—the whole trajectory of human techno-

logical and social evolution does have a moral direction that is at least suggestive of a larger purpose. It has been driving us all along toward an expanded realm of tolerance and compassion. And now, it's driving us toward an expansion of those things to a planetary scale. To me, that is suggestive that there is intrinsically a moral dimension to human history.

Leaving that aside, I would also say that very often, associated with spiritual practice or mystical enlightenment, is both a sense of distance from your own personal perspective and a sense of union with other beings from whom you might normally think of yourself as separate. Either of those two things—a more global perspective and a detachment from your own selfish perspective or a sense of active union with other beings from whom you might normally think of yourself as separate—is a spirituality that's conducive to what I'm arguing for. And from a standpoint of evolutionary psychology, I would argue that those perspectives are actually truer perspectives.

WIE: *What do you mean by truer perspectives?*

WRIGHT: When you think about the evolution of the human mind, you just realize that our everyday perceptions are systematically warped by a kind of Darwinian imperative. I mean, our brains were designed to get genes into the next generation, and doing that successfully can involve a selective blindness to the perspectives of other people. It happens at an unconscious level. You don't realize that the reason you think this person is immoral is because you're vying for the same job or the same woman. Natural selection has not designed us to appreciate the ways in which our selfish agendas shape our moral perceptions.

It takes a certain amount of introspection and disciplined practice to come to that realization. I mean, we're all designed to go around thinking we're the most important people in the world, and obviously we can't all be right. So in that sense, a more detached perspective *is* truer, because the perspective we carry around every day is just manifestly absurd.

Intellectually, it's almost easy to do. It's not difficult to accept the logic that “I'm not really that special. Other people are as important as me. Their perspectives are just what my perspective would be if I were in their shoes.” But what's hard to do is really live it, because evolution has ingrained moral biases into us so deeply. And that's why there are whole spiritual practices devoted to it—whether it's going to church every Sunday and hearing the sermon or sitting and meditating every morning. Actually *living* the philosophy is very, very hard. ■

tearing pages from the bible

Why environmental destruction is an offense against God

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

I REMEMBER WHAT IT WAS LIKE before Earth Day 1970. I remember the Cuyahoga River burning for a week, with flames that were eight stories high, and nobody being able to put it out. I remember when they declared Lake Erie dead. I remember that I couldn't swim in the Hudson, or the Charles, or the Potomac growing up, and what the air smelled like in Washington, DC, which wasn't even an industrial city. Some days you couldn't see down the block for the smog. We had thousands of Americans dying every year in the sixties during smog events. And in 1970, this accumulation of insults drove twenty million Americans out onto the streets—ten percent of our population, the largest public demonstration in U.S. history—and the political system responded. Republicans and Democrats got together. Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency, and we passed twenty-eight major environmental laws over the next ten years to protect our air, water, wetlands, endangered species, and food safety.

We can generate an instantaneous cash flow and the illusion of a prosperous economy. But our children are going to pay for our joyride.

What's more, those laws became the model for over 120 nations around the world that had their own versions of Earth Day and made their own investments in environmental infrastructure. But there are a lot of countries that didn't do it. And invariably, those were the countries that didn't have strong democracies, because democracy and the environment are intertwined. You cannot get sustained environmental protection under any system except for a locally based democracy, because the fishes and birds and future generations don't participate in the political process. Their voices and interests are not heard in that process, except in a locally based democracy, where individuals who harbor those values have the opportunity to stand up and inject them into the political dialogue. That doesn't happen in a tyranny, and that's why there's a direct correlation around the planet between the level of tyranny in various governments and the level of environmental deg-

radation—whether it's in right-wing tyrannies like Brazil during the seventies and Saddam Hussein's Iraq during the eighties and nineties, or in left-wing tyrannies like Eastern Europe, China, and the Soviet Union, where they're now facing economic catastrophe because of their failure to invest in their environmental infrastructure.

Russia is a great example. Russia didn't have a democracy, so it had no Earth Day, and therefore, it had no environmental law. It didn't, for example, have NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act], which is the most important of our environmental laws, the first one we passed at the time of Earth Day. That's the law that requires government agencies to perform environmental impact reviews before they destroy or disperse an important public trust asset. Because they didn't have NEPA in Russia, the Aral Sea, which is the fourth largest freshwater body on earth, is now a desert. It's as if all the Great Lakes dried up at once. Because they didn't have a Clean Water Act, the Sea of Azov, which was the richest fish nursery on earth after Chesapeake Bay, is now a biological wasteland. Because they didn't have nuclear regulatory review requirements, one-fifth of Belorussia is now permanently uninhabitable due to radiation contamination. In Turkey, they don't have a Clean Water Act either. Three hundred species have disappeared from the Marmara Sea over the past fifteen years. The Black Sea will be dead within ten.

In those nations, and in many, many others, environmental injury has matured into economic catastrophe. That's what would have happened here if we hadn't made that investment back in the seventies, and that's what *will* happen if we allow this foolhardy Congress and this reckless White House to dismantle thirty years of environmental law. The biggest environmental problem today is not global warming, or population, or sprawl—it's George W. Bush. Some of the worst damage has already been done, and we're going to be paying for it for generations. But if even a fraction of the over two hundred rollbacks currently being proposed by the Bush Administration are passed or enacted, by this time next year we will have effectively *no significant federal environmental law left in our country*.^{*} That's not exaggeration. That's not hyperbole. It is a fact. They didn't have NEPA in Russia, and we're about to not have it here, too, because the Bush Administration is destroying it. Many of our laws will remain on the books,



in one form or another, but they'll be unenforceable. And we'll be like Mexico, which has these wonderful, poetic environmental laws, but nobody knows about them and nobody complies with them because they can't be enforced.

If you ask people in the White House and on Capitol Hill why they're doing this, what they invariably say is, "The time has come in our nation's history when we have to choose between economic prosperity and environmental protection." But that is a false choice. One hundred percent of the time, good environmental policy is *identical* to good economic policy—that is, if we want to measure our economy (and this is how we ought to be measuring it) based upon how it produces jobs, and the dignity of jobs, over the generations, and how it preserves the value of the assets of our communities. If, on the other hand, we want to do what they've been urging us to do from this White House—which is to treat the planet as if it were a business in liquidation, convert our natural resources to cash as quickly as possible, and have a few years of pollution-based prosperity—then we can generate an instantaneous cash flow and the illusion of a prosperous economy. But our children are going to pay for our joyride. Environmental injury is deficit spending. It's a way of loading the cost of our generation's prosperity onto the backs of our children. And they're going to pay for it with denuded landscapes, poor health, and huge cleanup costs that are going to amplify over time.

So actually, environmental protection *enriches* us economically, and we ignore that at our peril. But it also enriches us aesthetically,

and recreationally, and culturally, and historically, and spiritually. The reason we protect the environment is not for the sake of the fishes and the birds—it's for our sake, because nature enriches *us*. Human beings have other appetites besides money, and if we don't feed them, we're not going to become the kind of beings our Creator intended us to become. When we destroy nature, we diminish ourselves, and we impoverish our children. And this is really important for Americans to understand, because we have a closer connectedness to nature than any other industrialized nation in the world. From the beginning, our cultural and political leaders told the American people, "You don't have to be ashamed that you don't have fifteen hundred years of culture like they have in Europe, because you have this relationship to nature, to the land, and particularly to the wilderness, which is the undiluted work of the Creator. And that will be the source of your values, your virtues, and your character as a people."

That same connectedness was recognized by great spiritual leaders and moral theologians throughout every religious tradition in the history of mankind, who used parables, allegories, and fables taken from nature as morality plays to teach us the difference between right and wrong—to teach us what the face of God looks like. I don't believe that nature *is* God, or that we ought to be worshipping it as God. But I do believe that it's the way God communicates to us most forcefully. God talks to human beings through many vectors—through each other, through organized religion, through the great books of those religions, through art, literature, music, poetry, and dance—but nowhere with such force and clarity and texture and grace and joy as through creation. And therefore, destroying the environment is the moral equivalent of tearing the last pages out of the last Bible, Torah, Talmud, Qur'an, or Upanishad on earth. It's a cost that I don't believe is prudent for us to impose upon ourselves, and I doubt if we have the right to impose it upon our children. And that's all that environmental advocacy is about—recognizing that we have an obligation to the next generation. ■

Excerpted from a speech given in New York at the Omega Institute's "Living a Fearless Life" conference on April 2, 2004.

**See www.nrdc.org/bushrecord for details on the Bush administration's environmental policies.*



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 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*.



CONFLICT, CREATIVITY and the NATURE OF GOD

dialogue VI

What *is* the ultimate nature of reality? In their latest dialogue, Wilber and Cohen challenge some of our most fundamental spiritual beliefs as they come to grips with the Absolute, war and peace, creation and destruction, and the unconstrained force of evolution itself.

ANDREW COHEN: Ken, let's look into some of the most fundamental beliefs that lie at the heart of our spiritual worldview today. Because I think that many of the ideas we have about Ultimacy—about God, about the absolute nature of things—have a profound influence on the way we see the world. And these deeply held convictions greatly influence the way we relate to life, often much more than we are aware of. And usually these beliefs are unquestioned. So if we want to awaken, if we want to be able to see clearly, I think it's essential that we begin to

question what our fundamental beliefs actually are and what they're based on.

So in this issue we're asking a very big question. We're asking, What *is* the ultimate nature of the Absolute? Is peace the nature of the Absolute? Or to put it in more theistic terms, Is God a pacifist? Or is creation and destruction the nature of the Absolute? Does God make war? Or is God the silent witness? Is he or she completely absent from the stage? Because, once again, our deepest convictions about the nature of God or Ultimate Truth have a tremendous impact on the way we respond to life.

MANY SPIRITUAL TEACHERS ARE SAYING THAT IN FACT QUIETUDE IS ULTIMATE TRUTH; THAT THE EXPERIENCE OF DEEP PEACE IS GOD. AND THIS CREATES A GREAT DEAL OF MISUNDERSTANDING.

ANDREW COHEN

KEN WILBER: Yes. And if I believe that God is a pacifist, then I should be a pacifist, if I want to know God.

COHEN: Exactly! So to begin, I'll try to describe some fundamental concepts that form the ground upon which our deepest spiritual convictions are based. In our previous discussions, we've talked about the nature of reality as a whole and have agreed that it is made up of the manifest and the unmanifest—the manifest domain being the realm of time and space, this whole evolving universe, and the unmanifest domain being the ground of being, the empty void out of which this entire universe emerged fourteen billion years ago. Now, I think our notion of what God or the Absolute is depends very much on whether our view of reality is biased toward the unmanifest domain or the manifest domain, or whether it transcends and includes both.

For example, if we say that the unmanifest ground of being is what Ultimate Reality is, then we would most likely say that God is emptiness, peace, or cessation. But if we say that the manifest realm is what Ultimate Reality is, then we're looking at a different picture altogether. Now we're looking at reality from the perspective of deep time, of evolution. Then we could call God the impulse to become, the creative impulse, the First Cause. From this perspective, God is simultaneously creation *and* destruction, from the Big Bang up until the present moment.

Then if we want to expand on that, in order to embrace more of a nondual perspective, we would see both the

manifest and the unmanifest domains as being absolutely nonseparate and non-different from each other. The manifest and the unmanifest are ONE. God is both form and emptiness, and that which transcends both.

So these are some different definitions of God or Ultimate Truth. And once again, the reason that we're interested in this is because we want to know what our relationship to life would be if we were embodying the true nature of God—we want to know what the most right, wholesome, appropriate relationship to life in all spheres, in terms of all of our important choices, might be.

WILBER: Yes. Well, this is obviously a very, very important topic. It has to do with one's spiritual practice as well as, for example, one's political orientation. And obviously in the real world, those two things should overlap in a certain sense. In other words, one's view of what's the correct thing to do in a political process should have something to do with one's orientation to a spiritual reality as well. That doesn't mean injecting religion into politics. It just means not disassociating the political and the spiritual in the first place.

COHEN: Yes, because the truth is they're *not* separate. If one had a deep conviction that the nature of God and the Ultimate Truth is peace, then one would probably be led to believe that one's relationship to life has to be, at all times, radically nonconfrontational, radically nonaggressive—that right action always has to be nonviolent.

WILBER: Well, I think the fundamental answer to this is found in the Bhagavad Gita. Krishna gives very interesting counsel there. Arjuna has to fight in a war that's going to happen in any event, and of course, being a spiritual person he's concerned that he might have to kill somebody and that this is bad, and therefore, he shouldn't fight. And at the end of a very long and very profound discourse, Krishna says, "You must do your duty. You must remember the Lord and fight." Now, he doesn't say, "Remember the Lord and don't fight." Nor does he say, "Fight in the name of the Lord." He says, "Remember the Lord and do your duty." In other words, established in nondual reality, you must do the appropriate thing in this moment, which is fight.

COHEN: Right, I agree. When a just society or culture is being threatened, we *have* to be ready and willing to aggressively defend ourselves or others if necessary.

WILBER: Yes. And Krishna's counsel would be good for somebody who is in WWII, for example, and is fighting Hitler. Hitler's regime was gassing 20,000 Jews a day at that time. Now you can sit there and say, "Let's be passive, let's not be aggressive, God is peaceful, therefore, I'm going to be peaceful and I'm going to help the Lord." No, you're actually murdering people with that stance, and you're contributing to homicide with that attitude. And that's clearly not a very spiritual attitude. So under those circumstances, what are you to do? You remember God, you do everything in

**THE *BODHISATTVA*
HAS TO BE A WARRIOR.
HE OR SHE HAS TO
FIGHT THE RELUCTANCE
OF THE WORLD. AND
STONE BUDDHAS ARE
A DIME A DOZEN!**

KEN WILBER



**AS WE BEGIN TO
UNDERSTAND THAT
GOD IS MANIFEST,
UNMANIFEST, AND
ALSO TRANSCENDS
BOTH, THEN THE
QUESTION ARISES:
WHAT DOES THE
NATURE OF GOD LOOK
LIKE AS IT BECOMES
CONSCIOUS OF ITSELF?**

ANDREW COHEN

your pure heart to remain established in spiritual love and openness, and then you do your duty and you fight and you kill the people who are murdering people. They simply will not stop under any other circumstance. And if that's true, then it is your spiritual duty to kill them. And I think that's what a lot of people get really confused about. They think that there's simply no way that their behavior can include a duty of aggressive action but that their heart can still be open for a higher cause and a higher purpose.

COHEN: This is a very, very important point. Many people who are awakening spiritually, who are beginning to be drawn to the deeper dimensions of life, are entering into a spiritual marketplace where there is a lot of confusion about this issue. Many spiritual teachers, some of whom are even teaching enlightenment itself, are implicitly and explicitly saying (and believing) that in fact quietude *is* Ultimate Truth; that the experience of deep peace is God. And this creates a great deal of misunderstanding. Indeed, if one is convinced that the experience of peace or quietude is Truth or God, then inevitably that's going to be one's fundamental reference point.

But in fact, the truth is more subtle, more complex, and more demanding than that.

WILBER: That's right. That's a very dualistic view. It takes one partial state that is set apart from an opposite, and it absolutizes that relative, partial state. And the great sages, from Shankara to Padmasambhava to Nagarjuna, really explain this very carefully. Their whole notion, as we're saying, is that the ground of being is present in *nirvikalpa* [absorption in all-encompassing consciousness] but it's also present in *savikalpa* [consciousness with subject-object awareness]. It is the suchness of whatever is arising or not arising. It's radically nondual. It can't be categorized as active or passive. And it can be and is present in any active state and in any passive state.

And so you have to have that realization of nondual, ever-present ground. But out of that ground come yin and yang, active and passive. And in the unmanifest domain, you experience the ground as that ever-present isness, that immovable suchness, moment to moment. But your manifest domain is an evolutionary thrusting and unfolding and creative Eros and thrashing, ecstatic pushing into the world of form. And the nondual realization is that you experience both of those simultaneously.

COHEN: So, once again, the important point here is that exclusively saying that peace or stillness is God or Truth is a profound misrepresentation of the nondual totality of reality. And if that is

one's conviction, then in terms of one's relationship to life—not just to the war in Iraq, but to one's relationships, to one's work, to one's body, to life as a whole—it's going to have a very profound influence. You know, it's so fascinating how awakening to the evolutionary dimension of the manifest domain changes one's worldview in such a profound way. To awaken spiritually in that context really means to awaken to the big picture, or to a much bigger and radically inclusive view of reality as a *whole*. It's a view that finally liberates one from what is ultimately a one-dimensional spiritual interpretation of reality that ends up imprisoning so much of one's latent creative potential within a limited notion of peace.

WILBER: Yes, and I think that's certainly not the attitude of a *bodhisattva*. The *bodhisattva* has to be a warrior. He or she has to fight the reluctance of the world, get down in the ditch and move stuff around. And stone Buddhas are a dime a dozen!

CREATIVE CONFLICT

COHEN: There's another dimension to all this that I wanted to talk about. It's something you're very familiar with in your own work, and something I struggle with all the time, which has to do with the nature of the creative process itself. If one is truly moved or inspired by the evolutionary impulse, ultimately one is going to be endeavoring to create that which is new—in our case, *new structures in consciousness*. New structures demanding higher and

GOD IS ALL OF NATURE. AND NATURE IS ONE BIG RESTAURANT—EVERYBODY'S EATING EVERYBODY; IT'S A DAILY MENU. IT'S CREATION, DESTRUCTION, LIFE AND DEATH HAPPENING A GAZILLION TIMES A SECOND.

KEN WILBER

higher levels of integration. And it seems that an inherent part of the creative/developmental process involves transcending the old in order to embrace the new. This kind of transition inevitably will create conflict—conflict between the old structures and those new ones that are trying to emerge. Of course, at the deepest level it's being fueled by an ecstatic compulsion to create, but the structures that one is endeavoring to transcend and go beyond will perceive that creative impulse as threatening or even aggressive.

WILBER: Right.

COHEN: So the interesting point which I think needs to be brought out is that *part and parcel of the creative process is conflict*. This fact tends to challenge many of us who have spiritual inclinations. It challenges our deepest beliefs about Ultimacy, about the nature of God. It calls for greater depth, higher evolution, and a much bigger embrace of this miraculous process we are all participating in. The fact that the nature of the creative process includes conflict, and that conflict is ultimately part of our larger development, can be both a bitter pill and a glorious awakening. But it's a fact.

WILBER: Oh, I agree. I think even the traditions have generally tended to agree with that view. As you know, in the Hindu tradition, for example, generally Ultimate Reality itself, or *Brahman*, is seen as unqualifiable. It's a cloud of unknowing; it's divine ignorance.

You can't say it is or it isn't, or it's up or it's down—it transcends all opposites including that one. So it's neither aggressive nor peaceful. But the manifest world always arises as a play of opposites. There's Brahma the creator and Shiva the destroyer—creation and destruction go together. In the manifest domain, God is all of nature and everything that's out there. And nature is one big restaurant—everybody's eating everybody; it's a daily menu. It's creation, destruction, life and death happening a gazillion times a second, and all of that is God, the manifest God, playing both light and shadow.

COHEN: Yes. And that's not difficult to see at the gross physical level. But when we go to the highest or most subtle level, the level of consciousness, the same process of creation and destruction is also still occurring.

WILBER: Absolutely. I think Hegel gave a wonderful summary of what we're talking about. It's a fancy kind of Hegelian tongue twister, of course, but this was his notion of transformation or transcendence: "To transform is at once both to negate and to preserve." I often say to "transcend and include." Each moment transcends and includes its predecessor. So to transcend something means that you go beyond it, and therefore you negate it in that sense. It's even a death in a sense; it's the destruction of the narrowness of the thing that came before. But then you also include it in the new and bigger reality. So I always liked that expres-

sion, "negate and preserve." It's creative death and destruction leading to a new birth or rebirth at a new and more encompassing reality.

A FOCUSED INTENSITY

COHEN: So as we begin to understand that God is manifest, unmanifest, and also transcends both, then the question arises: What does the nature of God *look* like as it becomes conscious of itself, or aware of itself?

WILBER: In the manifest domain?

COHEN: In the manifest domain.

WILBER: I call it spirit-in-action. And it looks like evolution!

COHEN: And *how* does evolution look?

WILBER: [Laughing] Evolution is like riding a psychotic horse toward a burning barn!

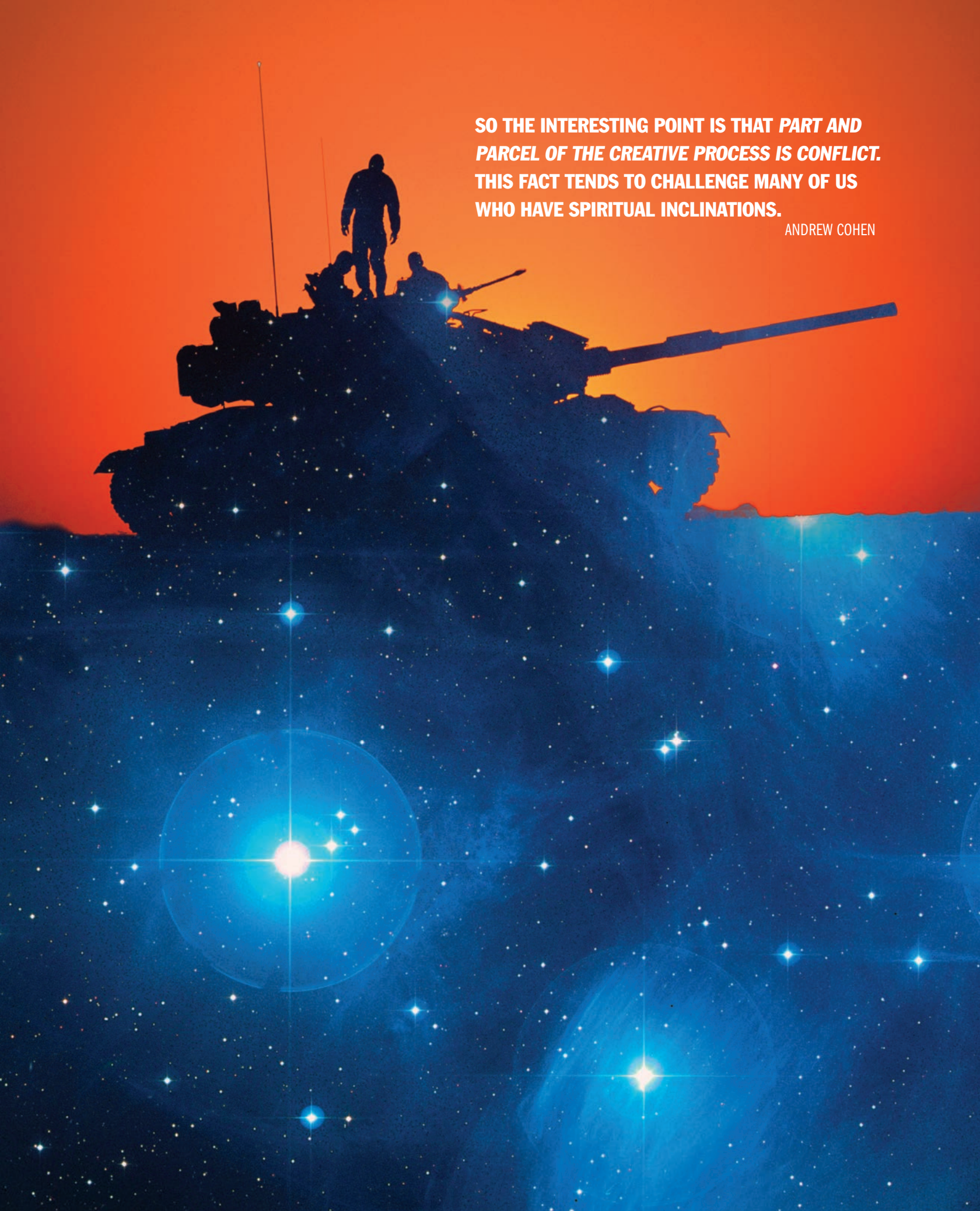
COHEN: You mean because it meanders so wildly?

WILBER: Mike Murphy is fond of saying that evolution meanders more than it progresses. And that's true, but it does progress.

COHEN: Sure. But let's try to move closer to the very center of the evolutionary impulse itself. As regards the ultimate nature of this whole process, in my own experience I have found that there is a profound ecstasy at the innermost heart of it all. When it is purely witnessed, free from any distinctions, it seems to reveal to us that the ultimate nature of this whole process

**SO THE INTERESTING POINT IS THAT *PART AND
PARCEL OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS IS CONFLICT.*
THIS FACT TENDS TO CHALLENGE MANY OF US
WHO HAVE SPIRITUAL INCLINATIONS.**

ANDREW COHEN



THE EVOLUTIONARY IMPULSE ITSELF IS DEFINITELY SPIRIT-IN-ACTION; IT'S AN EROS. AND HALF OF IT IS A BLISSFUL PUSHING INTO NEWNESS, AND THE OTHER HALF IS SORT OF A CARPET BURN AND THE DEATH OF THE OLD.

KEN WILBER

is *inconceivably positive*. And it's not *felt* as meandering—it feels more like a powerfully focused intensity.

WILBER: I think it varies at different moments, but I think what you're saying is very important because even though evolution at large meanders and progresses, the very impulse itself is definitely spirit-in-action; it's an Eros. It's a very erotic and very intense impulse. And half of it is a blissful pushing into newness, and the other half is sort of a carpet burn and the death of the old.

COHEN: Exactly! So this definition and understanding of God as evolution in action, as this kind of focused intensity, points to something very important, I think.

WILBER: Yes, I think so too.

COHEN: Especially as we endeavor to redefine and update what enlightenment is all about, to recontextualize the realization of nondual awareness in an evolutionary, developmental framework.

WILBER: Right. And I do think that's sometimes where people get confused about what you're saying or what I'm saying or what Mike Murphy is saying, or what any of us are saying who are trying to have a nondual view of evolution. What I mean by that is that we acknowledge ground, we acknowledge this pure emptiness that is neither evolving nor not evolving, this fundamental ground that you describe in your teachings; that's a fundamental component of meditation as well. And

we're not denying that you have to be established in that ever-present nondual isness or suchness. But some people, if they just stick to that alone, end up getting caught in a quietude or passivity or quiescence, which is really a misunderstanding of ground. So what we're saying is that there needs to be a bigger mind, if you like, a Big Mind that embraces both emptiness and form. And emptiness is absolute stillness, but form is absolute shouting! It's evolutionary manifestation, and if you can't get both of those in Big Mind, then frankly, you ain't got a very big mind!

THE STRUCTURES OF THE FUTURE

COHEN: So then to take this one step further, we agree, more or less, that the expression of God in the manifest realm, at its best, is this evolutionary push, this thrust forward. And in that, there is always the exciting possibility of new structures emerging, which is something we're both very interested in. But if one has awakened in this way and is *compelled* ecstatically to create new and higher structures, that's inevitably going to demand the use of some kind of force, for want of a better word, or insistence, that we move to a higher level.

WILBER: Yes, in the manifest domain, of course. But a lot of people are going to object to the word "force."

COHEN: I wish there was a better word, because "force" sounds so negative.

WILBER: Well, it's like whatever a chicken does when it hatches out of an

egg. You can use whatever words you want, but what that chick is doing looks pretty damn forceful to me.

COHEN: I call it "evolutionary tension." Often we relate to tension as being bad or negative, but I always remind people that *evolutionary* tension is inherently positive. That's what makes you sit up straight. That's when you're focused, you're paying attention. It's when your higher conscience has been awakened and you are conscious of a mysterious sense of care for something higher than the concerns of your own ego.

WILBER: This is another thing that people commonly misunderstand. People think that when you say force, it means "I have the right to force you." But what we're talking about is that my higher self has a right to force my lower self. That's all we're talking about.

COHEN: Exactly. As I've mentioned to you before, one of the most important things that I'm trying to do with my students is to create a *structure* that is based on the radical truth of that higher self, which we described in our last dialogue as the Authentic Self, and that will not admit the limited truth of the lower self, the ego, and all of its relative fears and desires. For many years I've sensed that if a collective could meet in this Authentic Self, a higher structure would be created that could become, one could say, a portal or even an engine for the evolution of consciousness itself. One that would support a kind of development that was

THE FACT THAT THE CREATIVE PROCESS INCLUDES CONFLICT CAN BE BOTH A BITTER PILL AND A GLORIOUS AWAKENING. BUT IT'S A FACT.

ANDREW COHEN

beyond any individual, a new or higher form of creative potential. Does this make any sense to you?

WILBER: Well, it does. This is the thing that's so interesting, frustrating, exciting, freaky, disappointing all at once—that to the extent that spirit is in action, any age is evolving. Whether it's in the Paleolithic caves or the Middle Ages or any other time, moment to moment that spirit is in action. Moment to moment God unfolds in the manifest domain. And so if you're on a spiritual path, in any age, and you're actually attuned to the authentic moment itself whenever it occurs, you're going to be riding the edge of evolution. You're going to be sitting on the edge of that chaotic, frothy emergence and both helping it to unfold and also intuiting the higher, deeper dimensions of spirit itself. So you're actually watching structure-building occurring. And to some extent you're helping it, and to some extent you're having it done to you. But we're all sort of groping our way into it. New structures have to be built, and we don't know what those are. And so there's this trial-and-error process, where you try to build these structures and hope they get laid down in some way that fits with the other

grains and dimensions of the universe. And certainly somebody who's in a *sangha* like you are, and pushing this thing forward, is going to see these kinds of things starting to happen.

COHEN: It's so exciting. Because one gets glimpses of an enormous potential that's just right on the edge of awareness. And at times it really feels like we're trying to create a structure that's going to be a vehicle for something so much bigger than anything I understand.

WILBER: I think down the line, there's going to be an increasing sort of subtlety and sophistication in being able to discern exactly what's going on. For example, if you're building inter-subjective structures, to the extent that they do get built, they'll stick because structures are permanent. They're actual stage accomplishments. You'll notice that once they're laid down, everybody can kind of breathe easier and rest there. But then there will be these ecstatic states, which I would call "trans-subjective," that kind of swoop down. And every time a trans-subjective state is experienced, it helps to break the previous inter-subjective structure.

COHEN: To take it to a higher level, you mean.

WILBER: Exactly.

COHEN: Or at least to reveal a higher potential.

WILBER: Yes. So all of this is part of that creation/destruction process. Any moment of laying down a new structure has at least those three parts. One, it

has a trans-subjective state that sort of descends on people. Then there's a destruction of the previous inter-subjective structure. And then the third component is a laying down of the new, higher inter-subjective structure, and that is driven by this trans-subjective state that's pushing fullness and evolutionary unfolding and trans-individuality. And that's an impersonal force, not an inter-subjective force, if that makes sense.

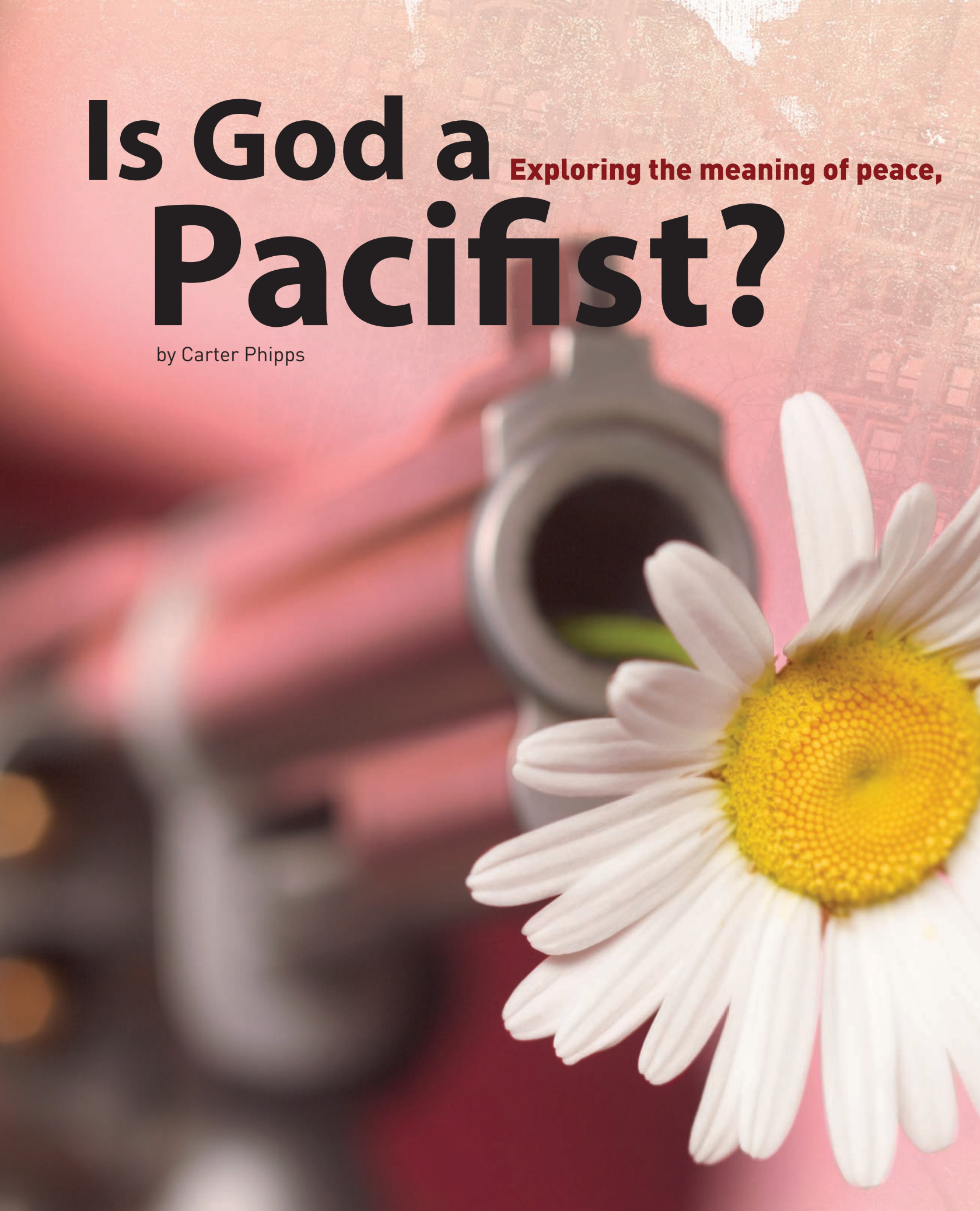
COHEN: Yes, it definitely does. And it's so thrilling when one begins to see and understand *how* these new structures are formed and to recognize what their incredible evolutionary potential is. I mean, that's what you must find in your own work—you're not only helping people to see what structures already exist that they weren't aware of before, but through that same insight, also making it possible for *new* structures to be created.

WILBER: I certainly hope so. The hope is that by looking at the formation of structures in the past, using empirical and historical research, we can not only honor and acknowledge the structures that are there, but we can also focus our attention on that leading, frothy, chaotic, creative/destructive edge of evolution and help to move it forward. We have no choice. Evolution is conscious of itself now. There's no going back. Therefore we have to take it into our own hands. It's spirit in action today. So if you're spiritually active today, you're helping to understand evolution. That's my strongest belief. ■

Is God a **Pacifist?**

Exploring the meaning of peace,

by Carter Phipps





feature

nonviolence, and pacifism in a post 9/11 world

"ONCE YOU START USING VIOLENCE, THERE IS NO WAY BACK," the young peace protestor said to me, his eyes shining with conviction. "Bush is determined to drag us into war in Iraq, and we have to stop it."

"I'm not anxious to go to war either," I replied, but even as I said the words, I could hear the uncertainty in my voice. "I'm just not sure that peace is the answer."

Maybe this was a mistake, I thought to myself. Driving through the Green Mountains of Vermont on a beautiful October day, I had come across this small antiwar demonstration in a local town square. Stopping for lunch, I had gotten embroiled in a discussion with the protestors on the hot political topic of the day: Iraq. It was thirteen months after 9/11, and with all indicators pointing to an imminent invasion, peace protests were popping up all over.

"Peace is the *only* answer," the man responded, looking at me in slight disbelief. I had the feeling he could sense that I was genuinely uncertain about the issue, and perhaps he thought he could pull me back to the light. "If we use violence, how are we better than anyone else? Violence just feeds on itself. We have to find another way. *Peace is the only answer,*" he repeated.

I found it disconcerting to be on the other side of the demonstration. After all, a few years earlier, it might have been me saying those words. I had spent many years passionately supporting the peace movement. In fact, one of my early heroes had been the great twentieth-century spiritual teacher J. Krishnamurti—a committed pacifist, who remained so even in the midst of WWII, a morally unambiguous war if ever there was one. But that was then and this was now.

For the first time, I noticed the sign that the protestor was carrying. Scrawled with magic marker on white cardboard was the phrase: *God is on the side of peace.* "Do you really think God is on the side of peace?" I asked. "Well, let me put it this way," he said with a smile. "I'm quite sure that he's not on the side of war."

As I headed back to the car, I reflected on the growing wave of protests. The demonstrators were certainly right that our president seemed quite intent upon war. As the administration's attention was slowly but inexorably shifting from the mountains of Afghanistan to the deserts of Iraq, Saddam Hussein was looking like a man in the crosshairs. And the Western world was having to come to terms with the fact that for the first time in



a generation, the future was looking more dangerous than the past. The wreck of the World Trade Center was in the process of being made into a memorial, the anthrax killer was still at large, and on the radio, Bruce Springsteen's "The Rising" was paying musical tribute to the 9/11 firemen who had the faith and strength to walk "up the stairs, into the fire." Fear and uncertainty still lingered in the air as the American populace adjusted to the new color-coded "threat levels" signifying the likelihood of imminent terrorist attacks. For a period of time, the barrage of warnings—some frightening, some bizarre—was fast and furious. Jogging by the local country lake in the morning, I remember having strange images of Al Qaeda scuba divers coming up out of the water, as per Ashcroft's recent suggestions, ready to launch massive chemical weapons assaults on local farmhouses.

As the initial unifying shock of 9/11 was beginning to wear off on the American polity, two very different visions of our role in the world were emerging in the fractures. One was held by the more conservative, or neoconservative, faction—a majority if you believe the polls—who were gradually coming to accept a more interventionist role for America in the world. They

section of the country, including parts of the Democratic Party, which staunchly opposed the idea of war and roundly denounced the administration. This faction included the more liberal, ecumenical members of the mainstream religious community, and they were joined by a number of other spiritual or pseudo-spiritual movements, including American Buddhism, the self-help movement, the New Age, New Thought Christianity, et cetera. They took a resolutely pacifist stance, criticizing all talk of war. And the strong implication was unavoidable: that God, the spirit, or at least the moral and spiritual high ground, was in fact on their side—the side of pluralism and tolerance, the side of peace and reconciliation, the side that would not so easily kill in the name of a dubious American agenda to unilaterally order the world as we saw fit. "God is on the side of peace," read the man's sign in Vermont.

God is on the side of peace. As I drove through the golden hills on that warm autumn day, the phrase tumbled around in my mind. Is God really on the side of peace? It did seem almost a truism. God and peace, in many people's minds, go together like America and apple pie. And it *was* hard to imagine God taking the side of war. Moreover, wasn't peace an essential message in the teachings of just about every religious tradition in history?

For me, peace had always been a word with powerful associations. More than a good idea, it was an orienting vision for life, a sort of mythic ideal that called out from the future with the promise of a better world to come, a new and more tolerant way to live on this small earth. Peace was a spiritual, philosophical, moral, and political statement all wrapped up into one, and I had spent much of my own life trying to make that statement in the best way I knew how. And I wasn't alone. Peace and nonviolence were ideals that captured the moral imagination of an entire generation as they sought to find a deeper humanity in a world where, for the first time, weapons of war could spell the end of life as we know it. But as I listened to the chanting of the antiwar protestors on that autumn afternoon, and as I

Sometimes it seems that the only place peace has broken out consistently is on the bumper stickers, key chains, and T-shirts of countercultural chic. Peace, it seems, has become a commodity of cool.

believed in the use of military force and were ready and willing to head into the minefield of Middle East politics to rid the world of a dangerous dictator. In the name of democratic values, the argument went, we must be willing to break the back of tyranny in a part of the world that has often been the seedbed for terrorism. On this end of the spectrum were much of the traditional religious community—mainstream Christians, Evangelicals, American Baptists, conservative Jews, and so forth. And the implication of the position, whether stated directly by the Pat Robertsons of the world or simply suggested by Bush's "axis of evil" doctrine, was that God was on the side of America in this particular confrontation—that God was a supporter of freedom and of democracy and would like nothing more than to see the American eagle triumphant in the unfortunate but fundamentally good war on the globally destabilizing reality of rogue states and international terrorism.

On the other side of the fence was the more liberal cross-



Antiwar protesters in the Vietnam Veterans Against the War March, Washington, DC, April 1, 1971



Demonstrators protest against war in Vancouver, BC, November, 2001

watched the various peace movements rise up around the world in concern over American hubris, I couldn't help but notice that, for me at least, that special magic was gone. The moral power of the peace movement to move my soul and fire up my idealistic passion seemed distant. A parade of former activists from the Vietnam era came forward in the media to tell the world that, this time, the movement was going to grow and grow and overwhelm the country. Activist Ron Kovic, whose life was portrayed by Tom Cruise in Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July*, came on CNN and said that this peace movement was going to be an "extraordinary crossroads" and a "turning point in American history," the beginning of a nonviolent revolution. And I wondered: Could it really be true?

I was certainly sympathetic to the concerns of the peace movement. Indeed, it wasn't so much that peace seemed like a bad idea—just an *inadequate* one. Like it or not, we were living in a world full of conflict—not only conflicts of arms but of ideologies and worldviews. And like many Americans, I was concerned about how we were going to respond to the numerous pressure points that were threatening the fragile cohesion of our global society. We were living in a world where, despite the relative





Martin Luther King, Jr., speaking at a Mississippi rally; June 1966

American soldier of the 12th Armored Division stands guard over Nazi soldiers, April 1945



peace and comfort of the West, chaos and barbarity were just down the neighborhood block. The horror of ethnic cleansing was practically becoming a seasonal item on the news; kids were hanging body parts on their guns in Burundi; Pakistan was operating the Middle East department store for weapons of mass destruction; oil and water were growing more and more scarce; ecological catastrophes were looming; new diseases were threatening; and Al Qaeda sympathizers were plotting to overthrow or at least destabilize a nuclear-enabled Pakistani government. Against that backdrop, it seemed like a real leap of faith to imagine that all of our problems could be dealt with peacefully and nonviolently. But for many spiritually minded people who care about the state of the world, the ideals of peace and nonviolence are simply unimpeachable. They have a sort of sacred Teflon coating that repels all critical analysis of their pragmatic value. Why, I wondered. Is God a pacifist? Are higher human endeavors always oriented toward peace?

It's been almost two years since the autumn day when I stood in that Vermont town square, and in the intervening time, these issues have grown increasingly, even desperately, urgent. Indeed, as we stand at this crucial point in human history—thirty-five hundred years after Moses came down from the mountain with the simple commandment “Thou shalt not kill,” three thousand years after Krishna instructed Arjuna to fight and “conquer his evil-doing enemies,” twenty-five hundred years after Socrates drank the hemlock of the Athenian state refusing to fight or flee, two thousand years after the Romans crucified a Jewish rabbi who told his followers to “turn the other cheek,” nine hundred years after the Christians pilaged their way across the Middle East to take back the land for God, sixty years after an Indian lawyer brought the British Empire to its knees with no weapon but his own conscience, and just a few years after three thousand civilians were murdered in a carefully executed act of war on American soil conducted in the name of Islam—the question of if, when, why, and how to use violence is more confusing, more complex, and more important than ever.

THE CULTURE OF PEACE

“I know war as few other men now living know it, and nothing to me is more revolting. I have long advocated its complete abolition, as its very destructiveness on both friend and foe has rendered it useless as a method of settling international disputes.”

General Douglas MacArthur

It is one of the ironies of history that war has often been the greatest benefactor of peace. And never was that more true than during the twentieth century. With the destruction wreaked by the two world wars, the Holocaust, and the unleashing of nuclear weaponry on the Japanese mainland, the cry for peace grew louder than ever before as the sheer physical, moral, and spiritual exhaustion with the human capacity for violence reached unprecedented levels. “The more ruthless the world, the more it needs idealistic compensation,” peace historian Carl Becker was once quoted as saying. And more than a few people over the last decades seem to have taken this message to heart. Indeed, our post-world war culture has seen a veritable explosion of scholarship, research, activism, university programs, and international institutes all dedicated to understanding the nature of peace, nonviolence, pacifism, and religious violence. Spiritual and philosophical contemplations of war and peace have ancient roots—scholars claim that some form of peace activism can be traced all the way back to the ancient civilization of Sumer—but for both scholarship and activism, the twentieth century is unequaled.

So if we want to understand how to approach the all-important issue of peace and nonviolence in the twenty-first century, it might be best to start by looking at how these concepts are understood in contemporary religious and secular life. After all, we live in a time when the ideal of peace has become embedded in the very fabric of our culture. Once an edgy and dangerous countercultural rallying call, peace is now the sober subject of doctorates and dissertations. Once a rare and religious form of idealism, peace has, in its modern incarnation, transformed itself into an almost secular principle. In the boardrooms of NGOs and the strategy sessions of policymakers, we are applying modernity's ample talents to the subject. We are dissecting its component parts, analyzing its constituent processes, testing new methods of implementation, and publishing position papers on how to achieve results better and faster. Presidential candidate



and congressman Dennis Kucinich has even proposed a peace department that would be a cabinet-level part of the executive branch. Calling Washington, DC, a “font of official violence,” Kucinich is determined to “challenge the idea that war is inevitable.” Imagine another Pentagon, one filled with thousands of government workers poring over the history of conflicts around the globe, studying new ways to resolve tribal wars, exploring better methods of on-the-ground peacekeeping, flying in lightning-quick special forces to mediate in trouble spots around the world. In Kucinich’s vision, these sorts of things would be commonplace.

Some manifestations of peace in contemporary culture are more lighthearted. Judging by the back bumpers of our nation’s

many forms of opposition to war and violence. John Yoder, one of last century’s great scholars of pacifistic thought, actually managed to identify twenty-nine unique types of religious pacifism alone.

For example, there is the pacifism of utopian purism (for those seeking to create a utopia), the pacifism of absolute conscience (for those whose personal conscience will not let them kill), the pacifism of the categorical imperative (something to do with Kant), and the pacifism of nonviolent change (for those who are seeking social justice). How many ways can you protest

war and violence? Well, believe it or not, someone’s been counting. But without spilling the subtle secrets of graduate peace courses, the big picture of peace advocacy goes like this: Pacifism is generally understood to be a rejection of violence—usually, as Michael Nagler points out, a rejection

of war. It is often called “nonresistance,” a term derived from the biblical phrase, “Resist not him that is evil” (Matthew 5:39), presumed to mean that Christians should uphold Jesus’s example of not fighting back against injustice. Think of the Mennonites or the Quakers. Both denominations have strong pacifistic sensibilities, and during times of war their adherents often take what the government calls “conscientious objector” status, which allows them not to participate in war-related activities. That is pacifism. Now, if they start demonstrating against the war—staging sit-ins, burning draft cards, and getting arrested—that’s different. A true-blue pacifist would tell you that they are now engaged in *active* resistance, a euphemism, the pacifist might say, for a kind of fighting. They have crossed over into active social protest, and assuming that they don’t start overturning cars or firing RPGs, you could say that they are now practicing “nonviolent resistance,” or just “nonviolence.”

The term “nonviolence” entered the English vocabulary in 1923 as a translation of *ahimsa*, a Sanskrit word adopted from Hindu scripture by Mohandas Gandhi. *Ahimsa* means “the force that comes into play when every vestige of the

No spiritual tradition has ever promulgated a teaching of pure pacifism, or pure nonviolence. They have all concluded that a perfected state of nonviolence is, for all practical purposes, unattainable.

cars, we seem to be busy either building peace, creating peace, thinking peace, teaching peace, giving peace a chance, waging peace, or visualizing world peace. We have books that promise “forty more ways to be a peaceful person” and “108 steps to create a more peaceful world.” And in a society where *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Understanding Iraq* was recently published, I imagine that *Peace for Dummies* can’t be that far behind. What do Miss America contestants want to work for? World peace. In a time when war and conflict are still so prevalent around the globe, sometimes it seems that the only place peace has broken out consistently is on the bumper stickers, key chains, and T-shirts of countercultural chic. Peace, it seems, has become a commodity of cool.

Now there is nothing inherently wrong with this postmodern plethora of peace, but it does raise the larger question of what we really mean by the term. Is peace a spiritual concept or a political one? Do we mean peace with other countries? Peace in the Middle East? Peace with Al Qaeda? Do we mean peace between races or peace with racists? Do we mean that politically popular concept of “peacekeeping”? Or do we mean that well-worn and slightly vague notion, “inner peace”?

Perhaps the most common thing people mean by peace is simply pacifism. “Pacifism means the rejection of war fighting,” explains Dr. Michael Nagler, who founded the Peace Studies Program at the University of California, Berkeley, in the early seventies. It may sound simple, but be warned—like the proverbial Eskimos and their many different kinds of snow, peace studies professors have drawn some fine distinctions on the



A Palestinian boy throws stones at an Israeli tank in Gaza City, October 2000

A Chinese student stands alone to block a line of tanks in Tiananmen Square, June 5, 1989



desire to harm is eliminated,” says Michael Nagler. And force is probably a good word to use because nonviolent resistance is hardly passive. Indeed, in the capable hands of the “half-naked Indian fakir,” as Churchill described Gandhi, the ideal of non-violence began to define a revolutionary new way of interacting within the political sphere. A whole new method of applying force was born, a middle way that existed somewhere between outright violence and turning the other cheek. Gandhi brought together Jainism’s teachings on nonviolence, Henry David Thoreau’s idea of civil disobedience, and the Bhagavad Gita’s call to “do your duty and fight for this just cause,” and the resulting fusion changed the face of the twentieth century.

THE FORCE OF NONVIOLENCE

“Some people draw a comforting distinction between ‘force’ and ‘violence.’ . . . I refuse to cloud the issue by such word play. . . . The power which establishes a state is violence; the power which maintains it is violence; the power which eventually overthrows it is violence. . . . Call an elephant a rabbit only if it gives you comfort to feel that you are about to be trampled to death by a rabbit.”

Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, founding president of Zambia

Someone once remarked to Gandhi that he seemed to be a saint masquerading as a politician. Gandhi considered this description of himself and his work for a moment, and then he corrected the individual. “No,” he said, “I’m a politician masquerading as a saint.” Whatever the case, Gandhi brought together spirituality and politics like no one before him. He plucked the idea of non-violence from the world’s religious traditions and proceeded to use it as a force for massive social protest. He showed the twentieth century that radical social change was possible without resorting to violence, and he inspired individuals across the world to take up the cause. Without employing the weapons of war, they overthrew repressive social systems, from Soviet tyranny in Poland to Marcos’ regime in the Philippines to segregation here at home. They fought a war without arms, a war of conscience. But make no mistake—it was still a war. Gandhi’s God may not have known how to wield a bayonet or a bazooka, but he or she knew how to wield force to maximum advantage and did so with great effect.

“Nonviolence is not necessarily pacifism,” explains Dr. Arun Gandhi, director of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence. Dr. Gandhi is the grandson of the great leader of Indian independence. “Pacifism suggests that we do not retaliate in any way

at all, but nonviolence is a very active philosophy. It means that we nonviolently stand up against injustice, and it means that we sacrifice our lives if necessary.”

“If you want to make omelets,” Vladimir Lenin is famous for saying, “then you have to break some eggs.” Well, Gandhi broke a lot of eggs in his day, but he resolutely refused to use violent means to achieve his ends. He proved that there are many forces in this world more powerful than the barrel of a gun. Yet he was quite militant in his intention to eject the British from India, and he did not hesitate to provoke conflict. For some pacifists, that was going too far. “Gandhi’s program is not one of . . . peace,” one of the great Mennonite pacifists, Guy Hersherberger, was quoted as saying. “It is a form of warfare.”

Peace has always had a strained relationship with nonviolence. The focus of nonviolent resistance, from Gandhi to King to Walesa to Mandela, has really been on *change*, on the evolution and transformation of an unjust society. And all of those individuals have been concerned with that transformation *over and above* the maintenance of any state of peace or quiet social harmony. “Look at Martin Luther King. He was going throughout the South during the civil rights movement getting arrested,” says Jim Garrison, cofounder and president of the State of the

questions for political theorists to consider. Questions like: What are the limits of the principle of nonviolence? Would it work in all situations or just in particular circumstances? Is it possible to govern according to nonviolent principles? In South Africa, where nonviolence was used so effectively to win the moral high ground, anti-apartheid activists underwent some profound soul-searching around these questions during the course of their struggle. “There are some remarkable people who believe that no one is ever justified in using violence, even against the most horrendous evil,” explained Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1986. “Such absolute pacifists believe that the Gospel of the Cross effectively rules out anyone taking up the sword, however just the cause. I admire such persons deeply, but sadly confess that I am made of less stern stuff. . . . Nonviolence as a means toward ending an unjust system presupposes that oppressors show a minimum level of morality.” Many contemporary scholars of politics and nonviolence continue to debate the issues raised by Gandhi, Tutu, and others, perhaps the most well-known being Gene Sharp. Sharp is the founder and senior scholar at the Albert Einstein Institution in Cambridge, Massachusetts, an organization dedicated to studying and promoting the strategic use of nonviolence worldwide. His magnum opus, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, has been consulted by activist groups around the world looking for help in their struggles against tyranny. If Gandhi and King were the Christ-figures in the nonviolence movement, Sharp is its Augustine, analyzing the strategic use of nonviolence with more depth and thought than perhaps anyone else in history. In his work, he has reflected at length on how power is exercised in society.

“It is widely recognized,” Sharp writes, “that conflicts are common in society [and] that important issues of

Gandhi used tremendous force—what he called soul force—but he did so nonviolently, and it raised a host of new questions for political theorists to consider.

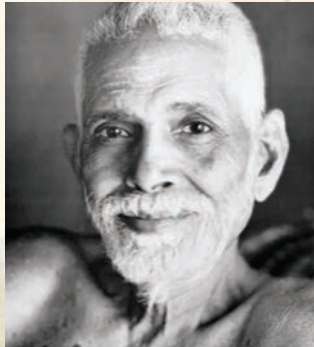
World Forum. “Look at Jesus. Jesus said to love one another, but he was so confrontational with the Orthodox leaders that they killed him. They wouldn’t have killed him if he was just sitting there in the temple saying, ‘Let’s sit here and pray.’”

Evolutionary biologists like to tell us that, in nature, external stress is what forces an organism to change and adapt to new conditions of life. “Stress is the *only* thing that creates evolution in living systems,” biologist and author Elisabet Sahtouris emphasizes. And much the same could be said of human culture. Gandhi may not have been a biologist, but he applied this principle well, and the power of his movement increased the stress on the British colonialists to the point that it became intolerable for them to continue their unjust occupation.

Gandhi’s revolution was not just a social revolution. It was a revolution in the way that we understand the nature of power and force. Gandhi used tremendous force—what he called soul force—but he did so nonviolently, and it raised a host of new

The Lesson of India

Ramana Maharshi, Mahatma Gandhi, and Sri Aurobindo—most civilizations would count themselves lucky to produce three men of such stature over the course of a few centuries, or even a few millennia. India was blessed with all three at the same time. One could argue that they make up a grand trinity—India's greatest mystic sage, her greatest political mind, and her greatest spiritual visionary. All three lived during the fight for Indian independence; in fact, two of them (Aurobindo and Gandhi) were leaders in the movement. But despite their proximity and their shared affection for the great culture of their homeland, in the end they each came to their own individual conclusions about the nature of spiritual life, offering the world very different teachings on the subjects of peace, pacifism, and nonviolence. As always, the lesson of India is subtle and profound, but on this subject she speaks with three distinctive voices.



RAMANA MAHARSHI (1879–1950)

Q: *What is the best way to work for world peace?*

What is the world? What is peace and who is the worker? The world is not in your sleep and forms a projection of your mind in your *jagrat* [waking state]. It is therefore an idea and nothing else. Peace is the absence of disturbance. The disturbance is due to the arising thoughts in the individual, who is only the ego rising up from Pure Consciousness. To bring about peace means to be free from thoughts and to abide as Pure Consciousness. If one remains at peace oneself, there is only peace everywhere.



MAHATMA GANDHI (1869–1948)

Literally speaking, *ahimsa* means nonviolence. But to me it has much higher, infinitely higher meaning. It means that you may not offend anybody; you may not harbor uncharitable thought, even in connection with those who you consider your enemies. To one who follows this doctrine, there are no enemies. A man who believes in the efficacy of this doctrine finds in the ultimate stage, when he is about to reach the goal, the whole world at his feet. If you express your love—*ahimsa*—in such a manner that it impresses itself indelibly upon your so-called enemy, he must return that love.



SRI AUROBINDO (1872–1950)

A day may come, must surely come, we will say, when humanity will be ready spiritually, morally, socially for the reign of universal peace; meanwhile the aspect of battle and the nature and function of man as a fighter have to be accepted and accounted for by any practical philosophy and religion.

both principle and human welfare are often at stake in these conflicts.” In World War II, for example, most would agree that there were quite important issues of both “principle and human welfare” at stake. We were fighting, in other words, for a good cause. Sharp goes on to say that “the exercise of power of some kind is unavoidable in such situations unless one is to abdicate responsibility for influencing the outcome of those conflicts.” Indeed, if we had not exercised power in World War II, we might all be speaking German today, or maybe Japanese. If we do not exercise power in the world, then we surrender influence over the world to those who do. Sharp points out that “ultimately such power involves and at times depends upon the application of some kind of sanction or means of struggle.” Now here is the important question: Does that “sanction or means of struggle” inevitably imply some form of violence? It is a question not just for politicians. It is a question our religious traditions have been struggling with for millennia.

IT DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU MEAN BY “KILL”

“Oh Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire . . . help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander unfriended the wastes of their desolated land. . . . We ask it, in the spirit of love, of Him Who is the Source of Love.”

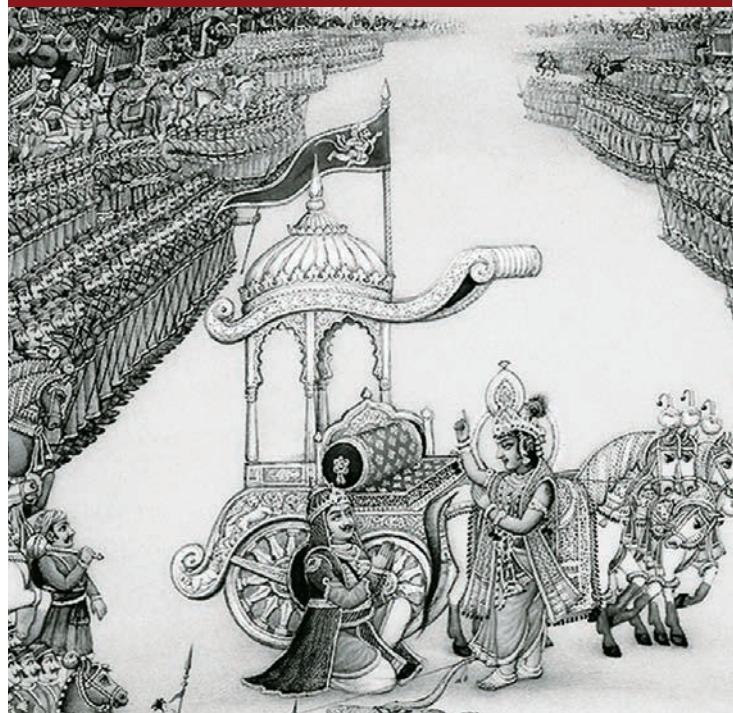
Mark Twain

“I think that to someone who has spiritually awakened, it’s self-evident that God is a pacifist, no matter what tradition they awaken in,” declares Christian monk Brother Wayne Teasdale. “If they have awakened to that deep experiential level that puts them in touch with transformation, they realize that non-harming

is an essential element of mature spiritual life and is an element of enlightenment itself.”

Scholars tell us that Teasdale is accurate about the cross-cultural nature of pacifism in our religious traditions. Every tradition has teachings that discourage war and violence. And every tradition encourages peace. The only problem is that most traditions also have exception clauses that render both injunctions null and void.

Arjuna and Krishna on the Battlefield of Kurukshetra – The Bhagavad Gita



A wounded marine is led past a stricken comrade after a fierce firefight, Vietnam 1966



For example, at the foundation of the Western traditions is the classic statement of spiritual pacifism, “Thou shalt not kill,” enshrined in one of the most ancient and revered scriptures—the Ten Commandments. It is a crystal-clear imperative delivered high on the slopes of Mt. Sinai to one of the most influential figures in Judeo-Christianity. And it is a fundamental tenet of not one but *three* of the world’s major religions. Nevertheless, if we took it upon ourselves to ask some Jewish rabbis, Christian ministers, or Islamic clerics about the discrepancy between this religious principle and actual political practice, we would likely get a very philosophical response about exceptions to this absolute rule. “Thou shalt not kill, *except* . . . when x, y, and z.” And God’s pure pacifistic intentions for human behavior, so black and white in the stone tablets of Moses, soon would begin to take on a few subtler shades of gray.

Eventually we would hear about scriptures that contradict or balance the sixth commandment, scriptures that tell us when war and violence are appropriate. In order “for a war to be just, three things are necessary. First, the authority of the sovereign. . . . Secondly, a just cause. . . . Thirdly . . . a rightful intention,”

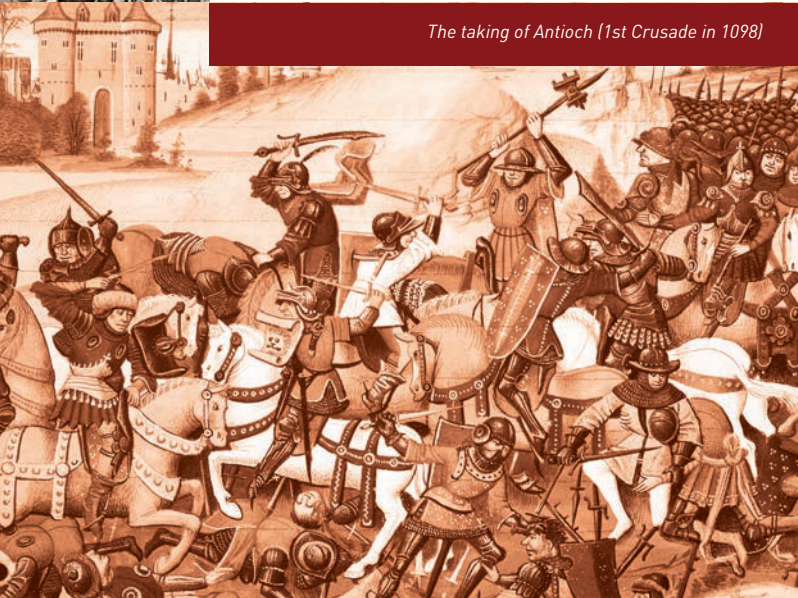
wrote St. Thomas Aquinas in his thirteenth-century masterpiece *Summa Theologica*, establishing the basis on which Christians could rightfully go to war.

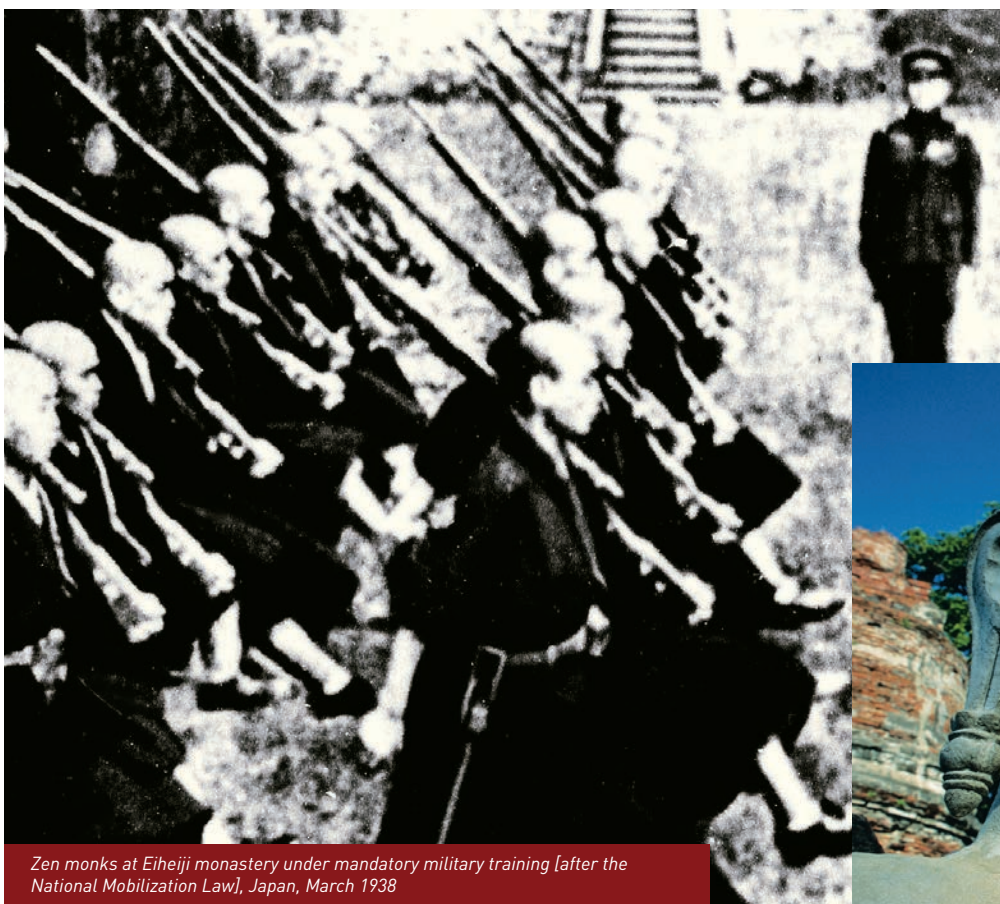
Self-defense, we might learn, is often considered justification for the use of violence, even deadly violence. “To those against whom war is made, permission is given [to fight], because they are wronged . . . Allah is most powerful for their aid,” the Qur’an instructs Muslims. Additionally, the Jewish Talmud has very simple and practical advice regarding self-defense: “If a man comes to kill you,” it tells us, “forestall it by killing him.”

Look hard enough, and sooner or later we would find a number of other exclusions that void the sixth commandment: protecting one’s family, defending one’s tribe or religious faith, saving innocent lives, preventing a more deadly conflict in the future. After a while, “Thou shalt not kill” will start to look less like a commandment and more like a thirty-five-hundred-year-old legal contract, constantly renegotiated and filled with all kinds of loopholes, side clauses, and legalistic phrasing. Granted, we would probably have to speak to a lot of people before “protecting oil fields in the Middle East” would show up as one of those side clauses. But the Reverend Edmund Browning, the former head of the Episcopal Church, was confronted with just this issue on the eve of the first Gulf War. Browning received a phone call that night from President George Bush, Sr., who requested his prayers and support as the war was about to begin. Bush was calling on Browning as the top religious leader in Bush’s Episcopal tradition, and Browning had to ask himself the question: Does removing Saddam Hussein from Kuwait fall within the boundaries of the long-established Christian notion of a “just war”? His answer was “no.” And he offered the president of the United States his prayers but withheld his support, saying that a war to continue America’s dependence on cheap oil was not justifiable within the context of their mutual Christian faith. Billy Graham spent that evening at the White House instead of Browning, as Operation Desert Storm was launched.

“Blessed are the peacemakers,” proclaimed Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. In Judaism, “shalom” is the common greeting, which simply means “peace.” And in Islam, Allah is often referred to as “the source of peace.” There are endless such examples. Yet, taken as a whole, the practical and theological legacy of Western religion is not really one of peace or of violence. If anything, it is a legacy of profound ambiguity. Marc Gopin, director of the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University in Virginia, concurs. “I think it’s hard to say ‘yes’ to the question, ‘Is God a pacifist?’ All the Western religious traditions suggest some serious contradictions in that regard. There are competing voices. A variety of texts suggest that God is very committed to violence—

The taking of Antioch (1st Crusade in 1098)

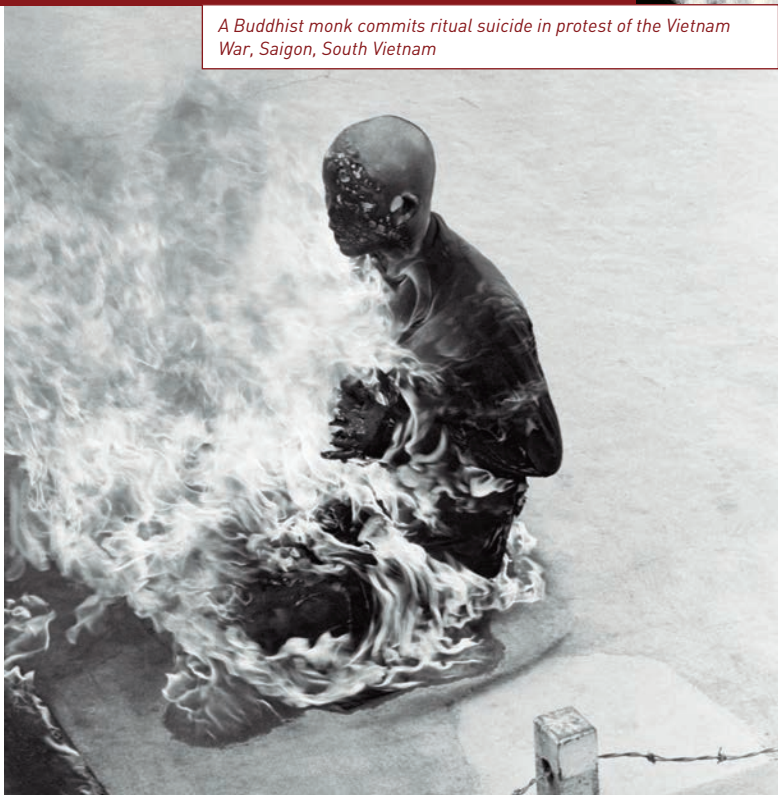




Zen monks at Eiheiiji monastery under mandatory military training [after the National Mobilization Law], Japan, March 1938



A Buddhist monk commits ritual suicide in protest of the Vietnam War, Saigon, South Vietnam



commandments to engage in revenge against enemies, capital punishment for all sorts of crimes. These would all indicate that God is not a pacifist. And yet there are also strictures and rebukes for those who commit acts of violence.” Many theologians will draw a distinction between God’s nature (Is God a pacifist?) and what he or she intends of human beings (Does God want us to be pacifists?), but in both cases, ambiguity prevails. “Does God want us to be pacifists? Well, I see a lot of evidence for that,” says Gopin. “But I see counter evidence too.”

Nowhere is this ambiguity more perfectly encapsulated than in what Sufi scripture calls the ninety-nine names of God. These represent the many attributes of divinity, the numerous ways in which God can manifest. Pacifism may be on that list somewhere—for example, As-Salam, the sixth name, means God as the bestower of peace, and Al-Latif, number thirty-

one, is God as the most gentle and kind. But two or three out of ninety-nine don't exactly carry the day, especially when the list also includes names like the eighty-first—God as the avenger, the lord of retribution.

EAST IS EAST AND WEST IS WEST

***“All tremble at violence; Life is dear to all.
Putting oneself in the place of another, one
should neither kill nor cause another to kill.”***

The Buddha, *Dhammapada*

If we turn our attention to the wisdom traditions of the East, we find what first appears to be a different story. Indeed, some of the most profound examples of nonviolence have arisen out of the mystical depth of the Asian mind. The Buddha and Mahavira, the founder of the Jains, were actually contemporaries in sixth-century BCE India. Over the course of their lives, they delivered some of the most renowned teachings ever given on nonviolence, teachings that have deeply influenced not only India but the rest of the world for countless generations.

“Avoid killing or harming any living thing” is a principle that lies at the foundation of Buddhist morality, and *ahimsa* or nonviolence is a fundamental tenet for anyone who practices Jainism. Legend has it that Mahavira would even allow insects to crawl upon his body and bite him, so resolute was his intention to kill no sentient being. Simply put, Buddhism and Jainism are unmatched by any other tradition in the emphasis they have placed over the centuries—in their teachings, scripture, and practices—on upholding a nonviolent relationship to life. And it is perhaps not surprising that today's most famous advocate of nonviolence, the Dalai Lama, is a Buddhist—though it must be said that he also has not taken a purely nonviolent position, recently acknowledging that it might indeed be necessary to fight terrorists with violence and withholding his judgment regarding the war in Iraq.

Hinduism has also long been a strong promoter of nonviolent principles. “To be free from violence is the duty of every man. No thought of revenge, hatred, or ill will should arise in our minds. Injuring others gives rise to hatred,” said the great twentieth-century Hindu sage Swami Sivananda. And he is but one of hundreds, if not thousands, of great mystics and religious leaders in Hinduism's rich history who have nurtured its tradition of nonviolence down through the centuries. One of those leaders was Guru Nanak, the sixteenth-century founder of the Sikh religion. Born a Hindu, he enshrined pacifist sentiments in the very heart of his new faith, exhorting his followers to “take up arms that will harm no one; let your coat of mail be understanding; convert your enemies into friends; fight with valor, but with no weapon but the word of God.”

However, violence—including religiously justified violence—is hardly absent in the spiritual legacy of the East. Hindu scripture is replete with references to war, from the Vedas to the Mahabharata. One of the greatest philosophical inquiries into the morality of war and peace is contained in the legendary battlefield conversation between Krishna and Arjuna. At the end of the long dialogue between spiritual master and student, Krishna tells Arjuna that sometimes it is necessary to resort to physical force. “If you do not fight in this just war, you will neglect your duty, harm your reputation and commit the sin of omission,” he says. “Having regard to your duty, you should not hesitate, because for a warrior there is nothing greater than a just war.”

“When all other means have failed, it is but lawful to take to the sword,” wrote Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth guru in the Sikh tradition, who was also a great general. Sikhism, despite its founder's strong pacifism, has over the years developed a more militant culture: Strict practitioners carry a ceremonial dagger as part of their attire; the symbol of the religion is made up of five weapons; and there are clear teachings on when and how to fight “righteous wars.” And it has also engaged in more than a few. Moreover, it has earned the dubious distinction of fostering within its ranks one of the most violent extremist movements in recent decades, the Sikh militants in the Punjab region of India.

Buddhism and Jainism, with their extraordinary emphasis on nonviolence, are in a fundamentally different category than most of their brother and sister religions. Neither has developed teachings on “just” or “righteous” wars, and neither has ever engaged in anything remotely resembling a holy war or crusade. It is hard to imagine a Buddhist jihad or a crusading army of fierce and righteous Jain monks. At the same time, part of the reason these traditions have managed to keep their

reputations unstained is that they have generally steered clear of politics and have been relatively unburdened by the difficult issues of war and violence that inevitably arise in the wielding of state power. It is something that Buddhism, at least, has come under increasing criticism for. Sulak Sivaraksa, a celebrated Thai Buddhist activist, points out that pacifism has long provided an important moral touchstone in Buddhist life but has also effectively kept the tradition from playing any greater role in affairs of state. This lack of political consciousness, he explains, has resulted in what often amounts to an uncritical acceptance of the governing status quo. And in pre-war Japan, that uncritical acceptance devolved into the most reprehensible kind of warmongering. According to Buddhist scholar Brian Victoria, author of *Zen at War*, Japanese Buddhist leaders in World War II, far from being antiwar, in fact happily supported some of the worst elements of war-fevered jingoism. The recent violence on the part of the Buddhist government in Sri Lanka has been another problematic marriage of Buddhism and politics. Jainists, for the most part, have steered clear of such entanglements, but they have also stayed even further away from the machinery of government, especially in recent years.

Now just because the overall message of our religious traditions regarding peace and pacifism has been inconsistent down through the ages does not necessarily mean that God does not prefer nonviolence. Perhaps God has been desperately pulling his or her hair out for millennia, watching our violent history unfold. As Brother Wayne Teasdale puts it, “Violence is not part of the divine reality. It’s part of the human reality in the state of ignorance.” Yet it is also clear that no spiritual tradition has ever promulgated a teaching of pure pacifism, or pure nonviolence. They have all concluded that a perfected state of nonviolence is, for all practical purposes, unattainable. So does that mean that we are destined to live lives aspiring for a state of existence that we will never reach, looking for salvation in an ideal of peace and harmony that will lie forever beyond our grasp, at least on the physical plane? Even Gandhi believed that complete nonviolence was impossible in this world, convinced that there was some inherent violence in even the “will to live.” The best we can do, he felt, is to minimize the violence we commit during our sojourn in the flesh.

But some see a different lesson to be gleaned from the history books. “We have this notion that God is pacific and we are violent; that God is eternal and we are temporal; that God is the great exception to everything that we witness in nature and in the universe,” says Jim Garrison. “But I think Jung’s great insight was that we are part of a universe and part of a divine drama that is in deep struggle with itself. And the struggle

inside the inner heart of the individual is a microcosm of the struggle that one sees in nature, in the universe, and by projection, in the Godhead itself.”

THE WILL OF GOD

“What puzzles me is not why bad things are done by bad people, but rather why bad things are done by people who otherwise appear to be good—in cases of religious terrorism, by pious people dedicated to a moral vision of the world.”

Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*

“Not my will, but Thy will be done” is the timeless declaration of surrender—spoken by Jesus, the Bible tells us, in the Garden of Gethsemane, before the drama of his arrest and crucifixion. For Jesus, “Thy will” meant pacifism, at least on that particular morning. He did not resist the Roman guards, and he stopped his disciples from drawing their weapons. Now, if scripture is correct, he seemed to have a clear sense of what God intended for him to do. But ascertaining the “will of God” has long been one of the most delicate and dangerous challenges of the religious life.

“At a given moment, any two religious actors, each possessed of unimpeachable devotion and integrity, might reach diametrically opposed conclusions about the will of God and the path to follow,” writes religious scholar Scott Appleby. “Violent as well as nonviolent acts fall readily within that range.” Appleby is pointing out that even suicide bombers—however much we decry what they do—could very well be acting on the inspiration of genuine moral and religious conviction. That does not mean that Osama bin Laden is doing the will of God. But it does challenge some of our usual conclusions about what constitutes religious action and what does not. Indeed, as we witness the horror of car bombs, smart bombs, and human bombs exploding like firecrackers across the Middle East, it is tempting to automatically declare all religious violence immoral and





Demonstrators hold an Osama bin Laden portrait at a rally in Karachi, Pakistan, October 7, 2001

inherently bereft of any spiritual authenticity. But that would be a mistake, says Appleby. “To define all acts of ‘sacred violence’ as *ipso facto* irreligious is to misunderstand religion and to underestimate its ability to underwrite deadly conflict *on its own terms*,” he explains.

Consider this statement by Marc Gopin soon after 9/11:

Politically incorrect or not, this war is about religion. In case anyone thinks that it is not about religion then they should take a good hard look at the document written by the terrorist mastermind of the World Trade Center bombing, Mohammed Atta, in order to help his soldiers prepare for their sanctified deaths. It is one of the most profound religious documents I have ever seen, and its preparation for a beautiful death and afterlife is so compelling that I almost forgot, as I read it transfixed, that it was really about mass murder. I felt tempted to join the journey myself. If I felt tempted as

Black students integrate Little Rock's Central High School, September 6, 1957



a non-Muslim, how much more tempting to tens of millions of alienated young Muslim men in search of significant lives and meaningful deaths.

Martyrdom has long been a hallowed act of religious sacrifice, sacred in almost all traditions, and even in some secular movements—“Give me liberty or give me death” was the great declaration of the martyr’s instinct during the American Revolution. But few would grant Mohammed Atta anything but the distinction of being one of the more brutal and misguided killers in modern history.

Some acts of religious violence, however, express not only authentic religious conviction but a deeper and higher morality. When the German pacifist and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer abandoned his nonviolent principles and attempted to assassinate Adolf Hitler in 1943, it was an act of great courage that, if successful, would have been praised around the world. As we commemorate the sixty-year anniversary of the Normandy invasion and honor those who gave their lives to liberate the world from the Nazi threat, we can only imagine how many might have been saved had Bonhoeffer’s act of principled violence succeeded. It is the regret of history that he failed and was martyred for the cause.

So if we cannot condemn religious terrorism merely on the grounds that it is violent, where does that leave us? Are we destined to live in this fragile global society with religious actors running around the world stage committing spiritually “justified” acts of violence based on some very dubious interpretations of the sacred? At the very least, it is important to understand, as Appleby points out, that one can have authentic religious devotion and still manage to draw some extremely dangerous conclusions about the “will of God.” As he puts it, “The numinous power of the sacred—conveyed through the imperfect channels of intellect, will, and emotion—does not come accompanied by a moral compass.”

The well-known Zen scholar D.T. Suzuki echoed this sentiment in 1946 when he lamented the profound lack of critical thinking employed by Zen priests before and during World War II. They had happily joined the emperor’s jingoistic parade and were waking up after the fact, realizing that the power of their own enlightenment had done little to stem the moral disaster of their complicity in Japanese warmongering. “With *satori* alone it is impossible for [Zen priests] to shoulder their responsibilities as leaders of society,” Suzuki declared. “By itself, *satori* is unable to judge the right and wrong of war. With regard to disputes in the ordinary world, it is necessary to employ intellectual discrimination.”

In our postmodern world, we have begun to deconstruct the idea that spiritual experience and moral development always go

hand in hand. Some contemporary philosophers such as Ken Wilber have even explicitly separated the *states* of spiritual experience from the *stages* of moral development. But whatever model we use, it is becoming more and more clear that how we *interpret* spiritual experience may in fact be much more important than the experience itself, more significant even than direct contact with “the numinous power of the sacred.” As Suzuki wrote over a half-century ago, “I wish to foster in Zen priests the power to increasingly think about things independently. A *satori* which lacks this element should be taken to the middle of the Pacific Ocean and sent straight to the bottom!”

NONVIOLENCE: THE LUXURY OF THE OPPOSITION PARTY

“Ultimately there are two sources of power: force and legitimacy. People obey out of fear of violence or out of respect for authority. Civilization and order come from putting force at the service of legitimate authority. . . . But both force and legitimacy remain essential to order. Force without legitimacy brings chaos: legitimacy without force will be overthrown.”

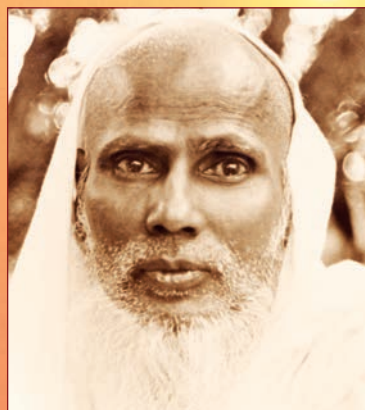
Robert Cooper, former advisor to Tony Blair

“Who would Jesus bomb?” is a telling phrase being bandied about by some in the peace movement. It is a play on the slogan, “What would Jesus do?” (or “WWJD”), which has spread through Christian communities like wildfire and can be seen on everything from mugs to mousepads to baseball caps. The phrase is supposed to remind one of the moral standard that Jesus set in his life and actions, hopefully inspiring similar aspirations. And given his clear predilection for peace and nonviolence, similar aspirations could well be taken to mean pacifism. In fact, since the early history of the church, scholars tell us, those who have sought to emulate Christ have adopted a strong antiwar stance. The early Christians would not join the Roman army, and many

The Value of a Human Being

I was in Sri Lanka in 1974, and it was a very hot day. I was sitting at Bawa Muhaiyaddeen's bedside. He was very old, and his center was made up of a cement floor, a corrugated steel roof, and in the courtyard about ten yards from where his bed was, there were a variety of animals—goats, turkeys, dogs, cats, and even a deer that followed him out of the forest. The deer used to be so attentive when he would sing and pray. His day consisted mostly of sitting on his bed and giving advice on understanding the wonder and beauty of God. Now, because he was a respected saint, people often attributed many things to him, maybe things that should not have been attributed to him, both good and bad in their lives. So one day while I was there a fellow came in absolutely shaking with rage, filled with the spirit of violence and hatred. And I was sitting right by the bed, and this guy pulled out a knife, the kind of knife that you use to cut bamboo. He pulled it out and he was screaming. I understood that some tragedy had befallen his family and he was blaming this saint for the tragedy. Now I was close to him, close enough that I believed that I could have sucker punched him. He wouldn't have expected it. He would never have seen me coming. But my conscience said, "No, it's not for me to step in front of the sage. I'm here purely as a student, and it's not for me to intervene." You must understand the kind of love that Bawa Muhaiyaddeen generated in me, so this was a very profound position that I was in. But I knew deeply that I wasn't supposed to do anything; I had to watch this and not engage.

Now Bawa attributed all beauty, goodness, wonder and the many miraculous events that happened in creation only to God, and never centralized any wondrous events on him. He did not do any miracles as a way of promoting the value of wisdom. He promoted the supremacy of love and the knowledge of the nature of consciousness as the pathway to human realization. However, in this instance, he opened his arms fully wide. He had no shirt on. And he leaned his neck backwards exposing himself fully to this flood of violence and looked with the most melting eyes of gentleness at his assailant and said, "My brother, will taking my life give your soul the peace it is seeking?"



Bawa Muhaiyaddeen

It was as if the molecules in the room began to scintillate and vibrate with this power of love. That love just filled the space we were in like a tangible presence, and the man with the knife became like a puppet whose strings had been cut. He collapsed on the ground, dropped his knife, and gazed at the sage's eyes. Bawa then embraced him with such kindness and motherly absorption, and said, "Go home and clean yourself, and come back my child."

I bore witness to seeing somebody respond to ultimate violence with no concern for his own life but only concern for the wellbeing of the attacker. I saw the power of divine love in this world in action. That was how I learned the value of a true human being.

*Jonathan Granoff
President, Global Security Institute*

chose martyrdom rather than kill in the name of Caesar. Many of the original Christian writers were resolute pacifists, and it was a stance that lasted for several hundred years after the crucifixion. Then, suddenly, everything changed. Christians started fighting in the Roman army. St. Augustine set the tenor of Christian thought on the subject with his doctrine of a “just war.” War could be permitted, the reasoning went, if it was waged for just reasons, a standard that still informs Christianity to this day.

But what really changed? The answer is more political than theological. The Christians came to power. Emperor Constantine converted, and the Roman Empire became the Holy Roman Empire. And the philosophy of pacifism looks a little different when you are the one holding the reins of authority, responsible for administering affairs of state. Indeed, more often than not, nonviolence and pacifism are the luxury of the opposition party, of those who don’t have to deal with the challenging realities of practical governance. It’s one thing to call for peace; it’s another thing altogether to have to come up with workable solutions for a world that unfortunately doesn’t yet conform very well with the vision set out in the Geneva Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Today’s peace movement might do well to take this message to heart, as they have tended toward “rants against the Bush administration” combined with “pacifist rhetoric,” as political analyst Mark Satin puts it. Religion commentator Alan Wolfe could just have easily been speaking about much of the antiwar movement when he wrote recently that “liberals, in a word, are uncomfortable around power, and, because they are, they criticize politics more than they engage in it.” But if we blindly cling to the ideals of peace and nonviolence even when they fall short of real-world application, then we run the danger of leaving the day-to-day realities of governing to those who may not bring the same degree of conscience and concern to the use of deadly force. This point was illuminated during the process of researching this article. In a conversation with Professor Abdul Aziz Said of American University, an inside-the-beltway peacemaking expert and a deeply spiritual man, I asked if he ever saw the need for the use of violence in politics. “No, I couldn’t use violence,” he said. “I try to only use nonviolence.” Moved by his conviction, I nevertheless had to ask: “Do you think that in government, there are times when we must use violence?” He paused for a moment and then chuckled, “I think that that is why I’ve never been in government.”

Whatever our attitude toward the machinery of state, we are

all still beneficiaries of government power. We enjoy the relative peace and security provided, for example, by a police force. After all, what is the purpose of the police if not to enforce the rule of law under the carefully applied threat of state-sanctioned force? “There comes a time when one cannot preach nonviolence without recognizing the hypocrisy of enjoying a security provided by violent means,” said the South African activist Frank Chikane, at the height of the anti-apartheid movement in the eighties. What would happen, for example, if you removed all law enforcement from North America? The implicit force of law is always there in the background, exerting a subtle tension to behave within certain boundaries, and to uphold common standards in the way we

“Pacifists may be individuals who have gone beyond a certain level of violence in themselves, but it does not mean that we live in a global society of individuals who have done the same.”

David Rieff

conduct our lives. “Pacifists may be individuals who have gone beyond a level of violence in themselves,” says author David Rieff, “but it does not mean that we live in a global society of individuals who have done the same.” However much we have evolved over the decades and centuries, we have not evolved beyond the rule of law. And it is that implicit power, and the threat of force that lies behind it, that allows for a freedom we might otherwise never know. “Law is the persuasive application of conscience,” says Jonathan Granoff, president of the nuclear watchdog organization the Global Security Institute. And that “application of conscience,” sometimes forceful, provides a tension that is evolutionary, exerting a constant upward pull on the general society to conform to a higher level of social organization at a local, national, or even global level. It can be a foundation not only for peace but for a freedom that makes higher human endeavors possible. And

Negotiating with the Devil

The moral dilemma of if and when to use violence took on almost mythic proportions during the Rwandan genocide. At one point during the crisis, Canadian General Romeo Dallaire, the UN commander overseeing peacekeeping operations in the small African country, decided to meet with the leaders of the Hutu extremists, masterminds of the brutal ethnic killings that were consuming the country and taking the lives of ten thousand people every day. Dallaire was trying to determine if there was any way to work with them to bring about a ceasefire in the ongoing civil war, and maybe to mitigate or slow down the genocide. But the general found himself confronted with an ethical crisis as he stood face to face with the killers of Rwanda.

"The first [meeting] was in the Diplomat Hotel that had been partially bombed out. It was being used as the extremist headquarters in Kigali. . . . There were three Rwandans . . . who stood up when I entered. . . . As I was looking at them and shaking their hands, I noticed some blood spots still on them. And all of a sudden they disappeared from being human. All of a sudden something happened that turned them into non-human things. I was not talking with humans; I didn't see humans anymore. I was totally overcome by the evil.

"These three guys brought evil into reality and [with] my religious background, the only way I could understand that was as the devil. That son of a bitch had come on earth, in that paradise, and literally taken over. And these three guys were the right-hand people of Lucifer himself. . . . My instinctive reaction had me starting to pull my pistol, because I was facing evil. I wasn't facing humans; I was facing something that had to be destroyed. . . . It even became a very difficult ethical problem. Do I actually negotiate with the devil to save people? Or do I wipe it out, shoot the bastards right there? I haven't answered that question yet."

General Romeo Dallaire
From a Frontline broadcast, April 1, 2004



Human skulls from the 1994 genocide lie in a church in Ntarama, Rwanda

Pictures of victims of the Rwandan genocide are displayed on a wall inside the Gisozi Memorial in Kigali, Rwanda



The God I Believe In

Mario Cuomo on pacifism, faith, and Teilhard de Chardin

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT: *Governor Cuomo, is God a pacifist?*

MARIO CUOMO: It's so difficult to attempt to define God in any way. As a matter of fact, most of the formal religions that I'm aware of, including my own Roman Catholicism, start by saying that God is ineffable. You can't define Him. And the Hebrews suggest as much when they refuse to write His name (or its name, or a name). So it's impossible to define God, especially if you assume that God means something infinite. We're not capable of understanding infinity. How could we, as hidebound as we are by the strictures of our humanity?

The whole thing gets to be a terrible riddle for most of us. My working idea of God is that there's something very significant, beyond my capacity to measure, that existed before me and will exist after me and all the things like me. It was there at the beginning, and it will be there at the end of this reality. Perhaps it will create new realities. And I'll call it God, but it is a kind of "first force," and it does exist.

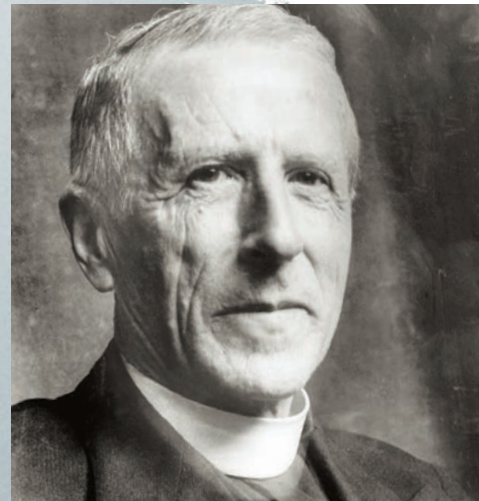
Does it determine all of our actions? No. The God I believe in allows us free will to make the contest of humanity an interesting one. If it weren't for free will, we wouldn't be able to tell when we were doing it right and when we were doing it wrong. So this force, this God, built that into our current stage of existence. There's a right and wrong in everything. But for it to *be* right and wrong, we have to have a will, and we have to be able to choose between the two.

So is God a pacifist? Well, first of all, I confess that you get nowhere, in the end, unless you're allowed a heavy dose of faith. "Faith" is a word that is carefully chosen, because you have to reject knowledge. If you had knowledge, you wouldn't need faith. You use as much knowledge as you have, but to make it all the way across the chasm between you and a belief in God, you have to use faith for the last part of the trip. So acknowledging that, what God wants is the perfect society, and He wants you to get there. Now, I'm a Teilhardian, so I would say that in all the struggles of Phipps and Cuomo and all the rest of us, what we're trying to do, in our stupid, trivial way, is contribute to that effort, move toward what Teilhard de Chardin called the *pleroma*, the ultimate consummation, which is perfection. We're trying to get there. How? By making it as good as we can make it for now. Would pacifism serve that end? Well, if pacifism means not butchering one another in a war, then yes, of course, that would be ideal. Would God allow for a time when He would permit you to undertake a war? Well, if you meant a war against evil, probably. Probably the God I believe in would not want you to surrender to evil to the point of allowing yourself to be obliterated.

On the other hand, it's also conceivable that He could say, No, I'm going to allow you to take Jesus literally. Jesus said, "Turn the other cheek," so yes, turn the other cheek! And if it wipes you out, so what? Maybe your permanence is not part of the arrangement. Maybe that's not part of what God has planned. Nothing is more obvious than the fact that when God created you, there were no guarantees. It's theoretically possible that it would be irrelevant to God whether you were pacifistic or bellicose or just a loyal fighter for truth and justice and all things that are at that moment considered good and holy. So I think it's too limiting to say that the God I can't fully understand would be, or wouldn't be, a pacifist.



Mario Cuomo



Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,

as we take tentative steps toward global governance, the creative ways in which we are able to apply legitimate and beneficent force, either through skillful means, subtle persuasion, or strength of arms when absolutely necessary, will go a long way toward determining the success of any attempts at greater international solidarity in the years and decades to come.

"You need force for any social organization to endure," explains Jim Garrison. "Those utopian communities that think, 'Well, we're all liberated, so we can do without force,' quite quickly, as we see in example after example, fall apart. The proper appreciation of force comes out of the recognition that the shadow side of the human being is not quite integrated yet and needs to be kept in check, sometimes at gunpoint. It is actually a full appreciation of the role of force that is the genesis of real freedom. Without force, anarchy ensues and freedom is destroyed. But with order, with an appreciation of hierarchy and the force that's needed to enforce hierarchy, people can really experience a civility and freedom that are not possible without it. Force and violence to me are not bad things that we overcome when we're enlightened. Rather, they're constitutive parts of the natural process itself."

THE POLITICS OF EVOLUTION

"Evolution is a light illuminating all facts, a curve that all lines must follow."

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin
The Phenomenon of Man

"We are star stuff, contemplating the stars" is one of the many mind-expanding statements credited to Carl Sagan. And he was correct—science has discovered that many of the elements in the human body were manufactured in the cauldron of distant exploding stars. The natural creative process that has brought us to life and created the abundant world we live on is inextricably linked to the violent processes of massive stars that long ago vanished into the cosmic void. So in the same way that violence,

or at least some kind of force, may be important to the functioning of a healthy social organization, it can also, we are coming to learn, play a vital role in the evolutionary process of life itself.

"I would say quite categorically that God is not a pacifist," declares Jim Garrison. "The natural order is full of violence and cataclysms, star systems bursting into supernova status, whole galaxies exploding and transmuting into something else. And if you look at nature on earth, and the food chain, everything eats everything else. The further up the food chain you go, the more ferocious are your eating habits. Whoever God is, God is manifested through his handiwork. And I don't see a pacific universe." Garrison's observations about the nature of nature are hardly novel—"red in tooth and claw," the old saying goes—but his observations about the universe are a product of more recent revolutions in science. Indeed, in the last half-century, scientists have begun to incorporate into their theories the awe-inspiring recognition that we live in an evolving universe, one that is billions of years old. Over those vast tracts of cosmological time, we now know, our universe has changed, developed, and evolved through what physicist Paul Davies calls "a long and complicated series of self-organizing and self-complexifying processes." And those processes haven't exactly been calm and peaceful, as Hubble has shown us, revealing cannibalizing galaxies, exploding stars, colliding nebulae, and all kinds of cosmological train wrecks displayed across the heavens for high-powered telescopes to see. "Phenomenal existence itself seems to be a violent mode of being," writes eco-theologian Thomas Berry. Simply put, we don't live in a Leave-It-to-Beaver universe. It's violent, it's wild, it's out of control, but it does have one extraordinary thing going for it. It's evolving, it's changing and developing, and no one could question the unbelievable success of the evolutionary process—from the Big Bang to the Big Dipper to the Big Apple—that ultimately has created all of us.

So what about peace and pacifism? Where is the God of Peace in the heavens above, or for that matter, in nature all around? Peace, order, and equilibrium are simply not as central in this new conception of our cosmological heritage. Gone is the once-dominant paradigm of a steady-state universe in equilibrium. Gone is the notion of a natural world that exists in some relatively pristine, peaceful, unchanging state. We live, as complexity scientist Stuart Kauffman points out, in a universe that is expanding, self-organizing, and always creating "novelty and diversity." And we live in the midst of a biosphere, scientists tell us, that is dynamically poised on a dangerous edge of disequilibrium, a creative sort of chaos that contains just enough order to keep it from spinning out of control.

"The universe isn't just a happy, friendly, creative, harmonious, have-a-nice-day kind of place. It's also chaos, violence,

continued on page 78



"I don't have a spiritual bone in my body," said the voice on the other end of the phone. "At least, not that I'm aware of as such." Author and journalist David Rieff may not be religious, but he is making an interesting career out of being deeply moral. Traveling and living for the last decade in some of the most godforsaken war zones in the world—including the Balkans, Rwanda, Iraq, and Afghanistan—Rieff's sharp eyes and brilliant pen are experts at sorting through the immense complexities and moral ambiguities of war and genocide, ethnic cleansing and ethnic fighting, international intervention and international apathy. And he is not afraid to take on sacred cows. His 2002 book, *A Bed for the Night*, offered a carefully articulated and quite devastating analysis of the moral and political failings of humanitarian agencies like Oxfam and Doctors Without Borders, even while recognizing their heroic efforts to help people in desperate situations around the world.

"I don't like to write about a place unless I've put my boots on the ground," says Rieff. And he continues to put his boots on the ground around the world, having spent much of the last year writing for the *New York Times* from Iraq and Israel. In fact, it was in Jerusalem that I reached him, curious to find out what a veteran observer of the horrors of war had come to understand about the morality of pacifism.

The Moral Dilemma of Pacifism in a World of War

An interview with David Rieff
by Carter Phipps

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT: *Are you a pacifist?*

DAVID RIEFF: No. I'm not a person who thinks that political ideals can be realized. There's a fundamental gap between what we can imagine and what we can do.

Now, war is a terrible thing. And pacifists are probably the only group of people in our world who really know that all the time. A lot of people know it, but they only know it part of the time, or they are seduced by war. People get off on war; that's also part of the picture. In some ways, the pacifists are the only people who see war from the perspective of the graveyard and the burn unit. So one doesn't want to be condescending, because on a very profound level, that is the place to see war from.

But I think pacifism is an impractical doctrine in a world of war. It's possible to struggle for a world that gives up war, but I think it has to come first in regions and communities. In other words, it's a hell of a lot easier to be a pacifist in Western Europe than in Africa.

WIE: *Why is that?*

RIEFF: Prosperity—the fact that war doesn't seem to serve anybody's interest in Europe. Also, maybe Europeans have actually learned something from history. That would seem unlikely, but it's always possible. I do think the burden of German history may have made a lot of Germans pacifists. But I don't see how being a pacifist in the siege of Sarajevo would have done the world much good, and that's coming from someone who lived in Sarajevo for a lot

of the war. You would have been on your moral high horse, but what would it have done?

Also, it depends on whether all wars seem pointless to you. All wars don't seem pointless to me. They all seem tragic and horrible, but they don't all seem pointless. Pacifists finally say that they all are, I think. The classic case for pacifists is World War II.

WIE: *That's the great dilemma for a pacifist.*

RIEFF: Right. Of course, being critical of pacifism is not the same thing as saying war should be a first recourse. A lot of us have been critical of the Bush Administration in Iraq because we thought they went to war too easily. But again, would an Iraqi have been best served by a pacifist position toward Saddam Hussein?

I think we admire the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto who didn't just go to their deaths passively but instead fought the Nazis. I think that we believe they were noble people. The trouble with the pacifist view is that there is no room for that feeling. Those Jews who rose up in the Warsaw ghetto knew that they were going to die, but they thought the right thing to do was to fight. And I don't understand a way of viewing the world that doesn't see the elementary correctness of that decision. It seems to me that there is a moral blindness in pacifism, which that story illustrates.

WIE: *So would you agree, then, with the idea that some types of violence are only stopped by greater violence applied in the right way by the right people?*



UN soldier keeps an eye out at a check point in Muzipela, Democratic Republic of Congo, May 2004

RIEFF: I don't think there's any rule, but I think the only answer to the Osama bin Ladens in this world is state power. In cases like his, you *do* fight fire with fire. Sometimes you have to fight. That doesn't necessarily mean you should fight as often as people do—maybe wars should become much rarer. But I don't think they're avoidable all the time.

I don't see how being a pacifist in the siege of Sarajevo would have done the world much good, and that's coming from someone who lived in Sarajevo for a lot of the war.

You see, Osama bin Laden is not going to quit. That's the great problem for a pacifist. What pacifists point out, quite correctly, is that war is a horrible and wicked thing, even when it's a just war. On the other hand, the dilemma that pacifists face is: What if moral suasion and good intentions don't

actually work? A guy like bin Laden would like to put all the women in the world in veils. Should one really just hope that one day he'll see the error of his ways?

I also think it is very important to make a distinction between nonviolence and pacifism. Nonviolence can be a very effective strategy. The worst mistake the Palestinian resistance ever made was to oppose the Israelis by force. As a tactic, it's completely self-defeating; they're never going to defeat the Israelis by force. The only hope they have of changing the political dynamic in this part of the world is through nonviolent protest—through adopting the tactics of a Martin Luther King, Jr., or a Gandhi. And there are some Palestinians who know that. I think it was the genius of the African National Congress to use largely nonviolent means. It can be very effective.

WIE: *In international engagement, when should violence be used?*

RIEFF: It should always be the thing you have to do because no other

choice makes sense. If you had known that the guys who hijacked those planes planned to blow up the World Trade Center, you would have attacked the planes. You would not have waited for them to attack the World Trade Center. In Iraq, it seemed like we went to war before it was absolutely necessary. It seemed like a war we didn't have to fight then. Maybe we would have had to fight it a year later. On the other hand, the war did overthrow Saddam Hussein, which objectively is a good thing. But I think any use of war should be a last resort.

WIE: *I know that you were in Rwanda, and you have said that you would have called for the use of force there.*

RIEFF: Rwanda seems to be such a perfect refutation of the pacifist plan. Maybe I'm wrong, but I almost can't believe that even a pacifist could have opposed that intervention. Pacifism is a principle, and I imagine a lot of pacifists would tell you that the world is not at the point where they can be one hundred percent pacifists. I know that nonviolence would not have saved a single life in Rwanda. ■

continued from page 75

destruction, and breakdown,” says Christian minister and former environmental activist Michael Dowd. Dowd has spent the last couple of years studying and teaching the spiritual implications of our new understanding of cosmological evolution, and he points out that nature’s acts of violence are often creative and serve larger evolutionary ends. “Evolution, by and large, does not proceed by peace and tranquility,” he says. “Evolution proceeds by the greatest amount of conflict or tension that the organism or living system can creatively bear.” God, at least as expressed through nature, may have a violent temper, but, as Dowd explains, he or she also has a specific motive—a motive that, in the end, is not peace or violence, but creative development toward higher levels of complexity, harmony, and integration.

This evolutionary vision has already begun to impact the work of a number of pioneering philosophers, mystics, and

“Everything depends on a creative resolution of our present antagonisms. I refer to a creative resolution of our present antagonisms, rather than to peace, in deference to the violent aspects of the cosmological process.”

Thomas Berry

theologians, who see in this conception of nature not a pacifist God, but a creative, self-transcending divine impulse seeking ever higher expressions of itself in this world. And as this vision begins to work its way through our culture, many believe we will see paradigm-changing effects on the way we think about a host of issues, not the least of which are war, peace, and conflict resolution. As Thomas Berry points out, “Everything depends on a creative resolution of our present antagonisms. I refer to a creative resolution of our present antagonisms, rather than to peace, in deference to the violent aspects of the cosmological process. . . . Neither violence nor peace in this sense is in accord with the creative transformations through which the more splendid achievements of the universe have taken place.”

Dr. Don Beck, who worked in South Africa to help that society transition out of apartheid, uses a new model of cultural development based on similar evolutionary principles. He explains that human nature and human culture are also governed by the same deep principles that we find at the heart of living systems across the universe. If we want to genuinely resolve conflicts, he

suggests, then we would do well to pay attention to how they work. “What we have to be able to do is learn how to manage *emergence*—not peace, but emergence. Trying to create peace means we’re operating in a closed system, and then once we bring tranquility, harmony, and unity, everything will be fine. But that’s homeostatic, equilibrium thinking. It’s not human nature. Human nature is evolutionary, dynamic, always shifting. So, if our attempts at peacemaking are based on homeostasis—getting this group and this group to stop fighting—it won’t work out.”

Understanding the big-picture vistas of evolution and human development does not necessarily answer the nitty-gritty questions about

if, where, when, why, and how to use violence. Nor, for that matter, does it tell us the right thing to do in the sands of Mesopotamia. But it can begin to expand the context in which we are asking these crucial questions, and make us deeply consider what our goals are, as we look to transform the tremendous conflicts that beset our world. Peace, pacifism, and nonviolence will no doubt continue to play a role as important moral sensi-

bilities that inform our personal and political lives, but they may have to share the limelight with other emerging spiritual values. Our rich cosmological and biological heritage is giving birth to a new vision of the spiritual impulse, one that incorporates the evolutionary principles at the heart of living systems. The more we understand about the developmental processes of life, including our own lives, the more we can develop solutions appropriate to the complex, multidimensional human world that we live in. We can hope that those solutions may be more effective at leading us toward a lasting and comprehensive peace, but that does not mean that peace itself will be the ultimate goal of our efforts. “If people try to put peace ahead of evolution, they won’t get either,” says Michael Nagler. “If they put evolution ahead of peace, they’ll get both.” ■



The King of the East

In 323 BCE, Alexander the Great died an early death at the age of thirty-three, leaving his recently acquired empire, which stretched from Egypt to Persia, at the mercy of his generals. But the strength of the empire had been the strength of Alexander's own will, and without him, unity failed. The empire cracked and divided, falling back into the hands of regional powers. Out of the strife of those times arose a new empire in the East, one of India's greatest. The Mauryan kingdom eventually covered most of South Asia, extending from southern India to the borders of Persia. The third ruler of this kingdom was a young man who ascended to the throne at the age of thirty-one. After many years of great success on the battlefield, he became sickened by the horror of war, and following one particularly gruesome victory in which, legend tells us, over a hundred thousand were slain, the king made a dramatic pronouncement. He converted wholeheartedly to Buddhism and proceeded to declare the absolute abolishment of war in the kingdom and his intention to adhere forthwith to the Buddhist principles of nonviolence.

The name of this unusual ruler was King Ashoka, and he went on to conduct what is perhaps the first great experiment in widespread pacifism in history. Sometimes called the "Constantine of the East," he was responsible for taking the relatively new teachings of the Buddha and making them the preferred religion of the state, spreading the dharma far and wide. We know little about the details of Ashoka's unique reign. Much of the information we do have comes from the Rock Edicts, sermons that he carved into cliffs and pillars throughout India that survive to this day. The story they tell is enough to inspire peace-loving souls the world over. They trumpet the extraordinary accomplishments of this remarkable emperor, his passion for the way of the Buddha, and his unprecedented determination to make the Buddhist teachings on nonviolence the moral standard of the realm. If somewhere there exists a moral tally of the world's leaders, you can be sure that even 2,300 years later, the name Ashoka is near the top of the list.

My intention is that the noble deeds of Dhamma and the practice of Dhamma, which consist of compassion, liberality, truthfulness, purity, gentleness and goodness will thus be promoted among all men.

Edict No. VII

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi [Ashoka], conquered the Kalingas eight years after his coronation. One hundred and fifty thousand were deported, one hundred thousand were killed and many more died (from other causes). After the Kalingas had been conquered, Beloved-of-the-Gods came to feel a strong inclination towards the Dhamma, a love for the Dhamma and for instruction in Dhamma. Now Beloved-of-the-Gods feels deep remorse for having conquered the Kalingas.

Edict No. XIII



The Nuclear Weapons of the Mind

IN THE YEAR 2000, THE CITY OF

New York was host to the UN Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders—the first gathering of its kind in history. Bringing together influential figures from every tradition in the world, the summit's mission was to look for common ground and search for ways to foster peace. Among the diverse assembly of priests, clerics, ministers, monks, sheikhs, shamans, and other holy men and women was the revered Indian spiritual master Ammachi, who took her turn on the stage and declared that the ultimate source of peace is in the self. "Peace is not just the absence of war and conflict," she explained. "It goes well beyond that. . . . Simply transferring the world's nuclear

weapons to a museum will not in itself bring about world peace. The nuclear weapons of the mind must first be eliminated."

Eliminating the "nuclear weapons of the mind" has indeed long been the main goal of authentic spiritual practice, and it is impossible to speak seriously about the end of conflict in the world without sooner or later addressing the need to come to the end of conflict within the heart and soul of the individual. That inner struggle to bring one's own selfishness and egotistical tendencies to heel has prompted spiritual practitioners through the ages to undergo dramatic trials and undertake extraordinary acts of personal sacrifice. Depicted so powerfully in many of the scriptures, artifacts, and stories of our religious legacy, it is a battle that may require the marshaling of tremendous force within oneself. As Brother Wayne Teasdale points out, in order to decrease the violence in our outer lives, we may have to increase the violence in our inner lives: "Sometimes a kind of emotional violence is necessary to discipline an unruly ego."

To successfully accomplish the task of "disciplining an unruly ego," many seek the guidance of a spiritual mentor. And there is a rich and colorful history in our religious traditions of the powerful, liberating, and demanding lessons that have passed from teacher to student over the centuries. Whether

or not God is a pacifist, we can safely say that many of his or her earthly representatives have been nothing of the sort, at least not when it came to applying force to curtail a student's egotism. "Nothing kills the ego but the shadow of the *shaykh* [teacher]," declared the great Sufi poet Rumi, and it seems that many teachers have gone to great lengths to live up to that statement. Ironically, it is the Buddhist tradition—one of the most nonviolent of all—that contains far and away the most stories of spiritual masters using quite forceful tactics to assist them in their work. For example, there is the famous Zen story of Gutei's finger:

Whenever anyone asked him about Zen, the great master Gutei would quietly raise one finger into the air. A boy in the village began to imitate this behavior. Whenever he heard people talking about Gutei's teachings, he would interrupt the discussion and raise his finger. Gutei heard about the boy's mischief. When he saw him in the street, he seized him and cut off his finger. The boy cried and began to run off, but Gutei called out to him. When the boy turned to look, Gutei raised his finger into the air. At that moment the boy became enlightened.

Gutei's story is not an exception. In his groundbreaking book *Holy Madness*, Georg Feuerstein points out that Zen masters were quite well known for their innovative shock methods, which

often included verbal assaults, physical beatings, and acts of sudden violence designed to break through the defense mechanisms of the student's psyche. Like unexpected acts of nature, these methods, Feuerstein explains, help create a dynamic state of psychic tension in the student, rousing them from their usual equilibrium. And the role of conflict in that endeavor, he says, is underappreciated: "Conflict is not necessarily bad or evil. It is as much a part of social existence as is the desire for harmony and integration. We tend, however, to deny conflict in ourselves and in our environment. Therefore, we fail to appreciate that some conflict is positive and desirable."

We can only assume that this must have been the philosophical position of the eleventh-century Tibetan Buddhist master Marpa, who, in stories that have become legend, subjected his student Milarepa to a grueling physical and emotional ordeal in order to test his character and humble his pride. Milarepa, a scoundrel with a shady past, seeks out Marpa, a guru of great renown, in order to purify himself of the karma of his evil deeds. Marpa begins Milarepa's discipleship by instructing him to undertake a series of Herculean construction tasks—what scholar Molly MacGregor has dubbed "trial by tower-building." Milarepa starts by building a large circular tower on the top of a nearby mountain, but halfway through the project, Marpa asks him to tear it

The Nuclear Weapons of the Mind continued

down and start again with a new design. Milarepa works diligently to finish this new semicircular tower, and just when it is almost completed, Marpa shows up again, reconsiders his plans, and orders this one to also be destroyed and a third tower created, this time of triangular shape. Day after day, Milarepa's back-breaking labor continues, as does the fluctuation of Marpa's desires, and a number of different-shaped towers are built, only to be demolished one after the other at the request of the demanding guru. Despairing that he will ever please his fickle teacher, and exhausted, aching, and bruised, with sores covering his entire body, Milarepa finally completes his tasks and approaches Marpa, begging to receive his longed-for initiation into yogic life. Marpa listens carefully to his supplicant student and then explodes in anger, physically battering Milarepa, dragging him by the hair, and throwing him out of his house, ordering more hard labor for his shattered disciple. At this point, Marpa's wife takes pity on Milarepa, secretly helping him to leave and seek spiritual guidance elsewhere. But Marpa discovers the plot, orders Milarepa to return, and then explains to his student the difference between worldly anger and divine wrath. "Although my anger rose like flood water, it was not like worldly anger. However they may appear, my actions always come from religious considerations which, in essence, conform to the Path of Enlightenment." Milarepa goes on to complete his training and

becomes one of the greatest yogis in Tibetan history—thanks, we are told, to the uncompromising methods of his legendary teacher.

Marpa and Milarepa's story is but the best-known example of a theme that repeats itself over and over again in both Zen and Tibetan lore. The tale of Tilopa and Naropa, another famous Tibetan legend, is filled with even more outrageous trials and tribulations. Making Milarepa's discipleship look downright easy, Tilopa puts his student through ordeals that constantly threaten to take his life—Naropa almost drowns, gets nearly beaten to death, is burned in a fire, and reaches the point of near suicide before Tilopa finally intervenes to save his student from a self-inflicted death.

Given the mythical nature of many of these accounts, it is difficult to determine which aspects are factual and which are not, but we do know that similar stories are prevalent in other traditions as well. The twentieth-century Indian sage Meher Baba was said to have been awakened to his divine destiny through the wise actions of a holy man who hurled a rock at him, striking his forehead at the point of the mystical third eye and releasing his consciousness. Paramahansa Yogananda, in his classic book *Autobiography of a Yogi*, refers to his teacher's "verbal vivisections" and describes how the delicate egos of most of his fellow students could not bear the teacher's harsh criticisms. Another popular mystic of the last century, George Gurdjieff, is reported to have

used all sorts of shock tactics, including heavy doses of alcohol, constant criticism, teasing, and ridicule, to keep his students in a state of psychological tension. The late Sufi teacher Irina Tweedie, in her autobiography *Daughter of Fire*, recalls how her guru would treat her with disdain, refuse to speak with her, castigate her for being a hopeless case, eventually leading to the point of her near suicide.

There are examples of the phenomenon even today. Ammachi, whose address at the United Nations was just one more in a growing list of accomplishments, is revered by millions as a peerless example of unconditional love, but her compassion also has a fiery side. Long-time students tell stories of the many trials they have undergone to discipline their egos and disarm the "nuclear weapons of the mind." They tell of long days, hard work, and little sleep, of being pushed to the edge of complete physical exhaustion, sickness and breakdown. Ammachi has been known to rouse her devotees for hard labor at all hours of the night to see if they have, as she puts it, "the spirit of selflessness or whether they are just living for bodily comforts." Caustic verbal reprimands and even an occasional slap in the face are not unheard-of for those who have taken up the spiritual path under her guidance. "To check the growth of ego, the guru may act in a very cruel manner," this modern saint explains. "People who see the blacksmith forging a hot piece of iron with his hammer may think that he is a



The story of Marpa and Milarepa as depicted in a series of ancient Tibetan tangkas

cruel person. The iron piece may also think that nowhere can there be such a brute. But while dealing each blow, the blacksmith is only thinking of the end product. The real guru is also like this."

In all of these examples we see again and again that the spiritual path can be a tumultuous affair. A soul that is finally at peace with its maker is a spiritual prize not necessarily won through peaceful means alone. In Feuerstein's *Holy Madness*, Buddhist scholar Christmas Humphries elaborates on why he feels force is sometimes an indispensable part of the spiritual life:

The violence may do what years of gentle encouragement had failed to do. Again and again, we read of passionate seekers flung out of the monastery itself by a 'furious Roshi' and told to seek Truth elsewhere. The seeker seeks, elsewhere, and years may elapse before he returns, bearing his triumph with him. To complain of the Master's treatment? No, to thank him for the violence which sent him back into the depths of his own mind. Where encouragement may only sap the will, the fierceness of a Bodhidharma may rouse it to final victory. ■





feature



Women Who Sleep With the Gurus

... and why they love it

by Jessica Roemischer

"KISS ME . . . HERE," HE SAID WITH A THICK KOREAN ACCENT, pointing to his lightly pursed lips. He turned to make sure no one could see us as we stood just inside the front door of my house, out of sight of the neighbor who, only a few dozen feet from us, was making her way to the car. And in the private and highly charged space he created between us, although I had been far more physically attracted to other men in my life, I felt an intrigue and affirmation I had never before experienced.

I had met him just ten days earlier. When my turn came, I entered the serene atmosphere of the large open room in the meditation center that was sponsoring his visit. It was my first private audience with a spiritual teacher. Sitting on a raised dais bathed in the warm light of late afternoon, he exuded a quiet equanimity, a mysterious and powerful depth, and a penetrating clarity and insight that seemed to transcend the temporal confines of the present, reaching far back in time and far forward into the future. And there I was, kneeling before him, as he brought that power and wisdom to bear . . . *on me.*

What he proceeded to say so directly penetrated me, so thoroughly resonated with my own deepest knowing, that it seemed to meld with the very cells of my being. He read my deep past; he anticipated far ahead into my future. "You have done no harm in past lives and have no heavy karma to make up for," he reassured me. "But now you must overcome all your fears. You have high spiritual ability and the chance to be a spiritual teacher in this life and to help many others through

**"May I lie next to you here?"
he asked as he motioned
near my prone body.**

the spiritual practice I can give you.” Dams and locks in my psyche that I had not even been aware of suddenly opened, and I was flooded with the mysterious sense of my own karma—an overarching destiny and purpose that had shaped a long succession of lifetimes. A vast universe arose in my awareness, and with it a feeling of infinite potential. In that moment, the vacant and gnawing space I had grown used to living with since my youth was filled with inner knowing and certainty. And what had been a long-evasive spiritual possibility suddenly became real. In the presence of this one man, I found myself overwhelmed by unconditional love and the deepest peace I had ever known.

“Enlightenment, security, spiritual power, and affirmation; I mean, sex is a small price to pay.”

A week later, he asked if he could stay with me for a few days in the small house I occupied in the mountains of upstate New York. I had only one bedroom, I explained. But he insisted that he would sleep on the futon couch in the living room. On the second night, I was suddenly stricken with a bout of food poisoning, and from the bathroom I heard him ascending to the second floor. He told me to lie back on my bed. Through a mysterious combination of deep guttural chanting and hand movements in the air above me, he miraculously and almost instantaneously alleviated my discomfort. Then he took my hand in his. “You don’t have to worry anymore, Jessie,” he assured me. “I will help you if you ever get sick. I’m the best health insurance you can have. May I lie next to you . . . here?” He motioned near my prone body. In a strange mixture of relief, flattery, and confusion, I said, “Okay.” And that was the beginning of my special connection with this powerful and charismatic shaman, yogi, and Zen master.



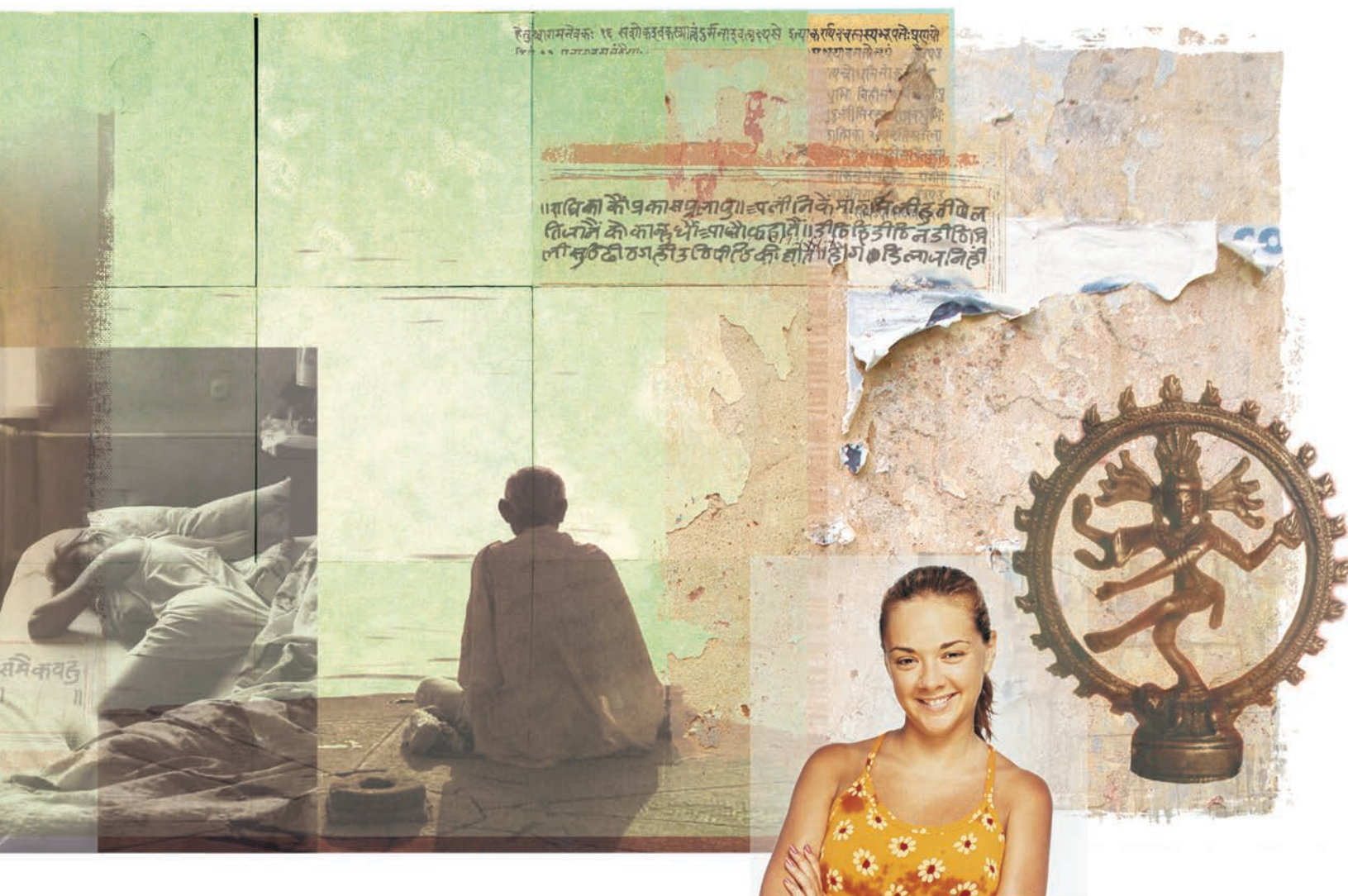
“How can women be victims when we *want* something?” said Mary, my former women’s studies professor from college, who had since become a trusted friend and confidante. Infamous for defying prevailing feminist viewpoints, she was the first person I turned to when I decided to write this article on the subject of women who have been sexually involved with their spiritual teachers. And true to form, in her one short rhetorical question, Mary upended entirely the pervasive and unchallenged image of the innocent woman fallen victim to the abuse of spiritual

authority. “Enlightenment, security, spiritual power, and affirmation,” she continued. “I mean, sex is a small price to pay. And whatever the extent of the flirtation or sexual involvement, you enter this relationship of intrigue, and you’re the special daughter or the special wife. You experience ‘number one life,’ as they say in the Asian tradition.” It was hard to argue with her logic. Indeed, as I reflected more deeply on my own past with my Korean teacher, I knew she had captured the very essence of my experience.

Now, given the many sordid and scandalous details revealed about well-known gurus during the last two decades—details of sexual excess, psychological manipulation, betrayal, and deceit—Mary’s was clearly a novel and controversial perspective, one that refocused attention on the woman’s active role in these relationships. “We women do have a strong and unspoken investment in seeing ourselves as victims,” I observed, “as unsuspecting agents or innocent players in an unfolding event beyond our control.” Mary agreed with me: “And that perspective has, in one form or another, become such a basic tenet of our time and culture, of our postmodern worldview, that we are often unaware of how much it has colored our perceptions at the most fundamental level. But it’s time for women to go beyond that. Because if we are really honest with ourselves, in most cases, there’s a lot more to the picture!”

That’s exactly what I began to find as my research unfolded. As one contact led to another and I interviewed ten women who had been sexually involved with prominent and revered teachers, I discovered that this phenomenon has been more pervasive than I *ever* imagined. And not only that, it has been the product of age-old motivations and choices that have been surprisingly consistent as women became involved with their Hindu sages, Tibetan lamas, Indian yogis, Asian Zen masters, South American shamans, and the new generation of Western teachers who followed in these traditions. And that’s not even to mention the untold numbers of rabbis, priests, ministers, and therapists.





Considering the subject in light of my past experience and what these women shared with me, and illuminated by the insights and views of a noted anthropologist, a psychologist, a well-known author, and a feminist who I also consulted, I found myself compelled by a new and liberating perspective on this sensitive and confusing issue. “Plenty of exposés of corrupt gurus have already been done,” I said to Mary in conclusion, “but what I’m really interested in is why we women almost always say yes.”

SLEEPING WITH THE KING

“If your husband’s a doctor, then you’re special. If you’re with Mick Jagger, you’re special. If you’re sleeping with your Tibetan lama, you’re special. It’s seen as a status symbol,” explained Catherine* over the phone one afternoon. “It gives you status, and it plays into women’s sexual identity. *Women identify themselves based on who they sleep with!*” Having been the consort of a prominent Tibetan lama, Catherine was speaking from firsthand experience. And with this conversation, I entered headlong into

a series of disarmingly candid and illuminating dialogues with women who have slept with their spiritual teachers.

“You want to align yourself with a man who has the kind of power that you want. And in this case it’s *dharma* power!” said Annie, a student and former lover of one of the most influential Japanese Zen masters to bring the Buddha’s teachings, or dharma, to the West. Another woman, Linda, told me: “It was powerful to think that I was intimately involved with the principal disciple of one of the world’s great Indian yogis. He was very charismatic and he had exceptional powers that not every human being was manifesting, which confirmed my belief that there was something more in the unseen world that was possible. What attracted me to him was that so many *other* people were attracted to him, because when others recognize a greatness in the person you’re involved with, that affirms you even more. You think, ‘Well, this says a lot about *me*,’ whether it does or it doesn’t.”

Indeed, that was exactly how I had felt. My Korean teacher had been the most highly realized man I had ever encountered. He

*The names of all women interviewed have been changed.



was different; *he stood out*. And in his presence, events unfolded with uncanny synchronicity, transmitting the sense of another dimension, an alternate and mysterious reality that intersected with the ordinary in ways that evoked the numinous world he inhabited and the spiritual powers he could manifest. Wherever we went, his penetrating and powerful presence was noticed and often drew attention. In his company, by association and physical proximity, I felt simultaneously special, protected, and *spiritual*.

“Women love men who are at the top and have for at least four million years, and they continue to everywhere in the world,” explained anthropologist and author Dr. Helen Fisher, her evolutionary view on sexual attraction providing a refreshing and vast perspective on the most intimate realm of human experience. “In a study of thirty-seven societies, it’s been established that women are attracted to men who have status, power,

“Women love men who are at the top and have for at least four million years, and they continue to everywhere in the world.”

Dr. Helen Fisher

education, and resources. I think it’s a brain mechanism, a brain appetite or tendency that has developed because a man who has status, class, education, and influence is more likely to be able to provide for children. So women have inherited a biological taste for what in anthropology we call ‘big men.’ And if a woman is looking for spiritual guidance, the spiritual teacher is the one with all the resources.”

In the case of my own teacher, I had never met a man who was so well equipped to fulfill both my spiritual longing and my longing for security. For some mysterious and inscrutable reason, which only he seemed to fully comprehend, this great shaman and Zen master had felt obligated to take care of *me*, to shepherd me to the distant lands of my own spiritual potential and safeguard me throughout the journey, conveying to me a divine possibility and a deep security beyond anything I had ever experienced. “I am protecting you with my aura,” he told me a few months after we met. “And because you are physically

protected, you can relax and trust, and this will accelerate your spiritual progress.”

Annie, now a Buddhist teacher herself, spoke about how women’s spiritual search has been intermixed with our age-old craving for security, position, and influence. Echoing Dr. Fisher’s view, she said, “A woman who wanted to be safe and secure, let’s say in caveman times, would match up with a man who could provide her with that security. Even though this is the modern era, these are very atavistic, very, very ancient forces at work here. And though I hate to admit it,” she continued, reflecting on her relationship with her Japanese Zen master, “I’m sure I was getting off on being powerful. *I was the one sleeping with the teacher*. That was the ego part—it was a feather in my cap. On some level, I’m sure I thought I was hot stuff.”

For women on the spiritual path, a relationship with our teacher adds an additional and ultimately compelling element to the long-standing benefits of becoming sexually involved with a powerful and influential man: spiritual enlightenment. “He deeply acknowledged the spiritual capacity that I knew existed,” said Leslie, who was in a relationship with a prominent American spiritual teacher. “So I thought, ‘Wow, I can have this all together in one package: mentor, lover, father.’ I knew he favored women who were attractive, and that boosted whatever image I had about myself. All the attention made me feel special, like *Radha*—a spiritual goddess. I mean, this teacher had power; he had money. He was charismatic, and if you were the woman at his side, that had to mean something about you as well.”

In one of the first and most notable studies of sexual transgression between women and their teachers, doctors, or therapists—*Sex in the Forbidden Zone*—author and psychiatrist Peter Rutter writes, “When a woman meets a man—as mentor, healer, protector—who has the connection to the world at large that she yearns for, all that she might become is for a moment in his hands.” He describes how all the women he spoke with for the book “felt they acceded to sex as a way of maintaining a relationship that had come to have extraordinary importance in their lives and seemed to them to open up new and boundless possibilities for the future.” When I spoke with him one afternoon, he elaborated: “What this means is to have your future

potential recognized, as well as your specialness as a human being. You know, it's really, really powerful stuff. And so the male mentor holds this, and he's using personal, social, and transpersonal power."

The experience of that transpersonal, transcendent power in the presence of a spiritual mentor was evocatively described by Diane, who had sexual relationships with a number of her teachers: "When you are in the presence of someone with a very, very deep connection to Source, God, whatever you want to call it, and you have something inside yourself that you're trying to get to, and you see it there in front of you, you're like a kid with candy. You want to taste it at a depth that you don't believe you have yourself. And God, you want more and more of it!"

Bestselling author, columnist, and former executive director of *McCall's* magazine Dalma Heyn told me: "While women have historically chosen 'alpha males' for pleasure because they were most likely to deliver it in all its myriad forms—sex, power, money, children, and esteem in the community—in the spiritual context, you're talking about a man who has been elevated in her consciousness to the highest realm. My analogy is of a king, but a king who has a god in him, the *spiritual* king. He's not only a great guy, he's not only wonderful and smart, but he'll take care of her spiritual life. Good Lord. I mean, that's the sexiest possible alpha male there is!"

HOLDING THE CARDS

Security, specialness, *and* enlightenment—we've been more than willing to use our attractiveness and sexuality to procure these. And the more women I spoke with, the more I realized that while our teachers may have been the ones to initiate the relationships, we women harbor a deeply ingrained, age-old understanding that our attractiveness, in whatever form it takes, gives us the power to control and manifest outcomes—something we bring to the spiritual path a priori, and often unconsciously. Simply put, we know that there is an inherent power in being the ones who can say "Yes."

Dr. Fisher illuminated the biological and anthropological reasons why women are able to exert such extraordinary influence and control through sexuality. "There's no question that women have an enormous amount of sexual power," she said, "because they are the custodians of the egg, and take nine months to bear a baby. And they are the primary caretakers of the very young in every culture in the world. So women are exceedingly valuable, because they are the ones who will rear a man's DNA. As a result, around the world people tend to regard women as the giver of sex. The woman bestows the gift, and the man gets the

gift if he plays his hand right. *But she holds the cards.*"

In her book, *Who Stole Feminism?: How Women Have Betrayed Women*, Christina Hoff Sommers critiques some of the overarching feminist viewpoints that have emerged during the last twenty or thirty years—particularly the view that women are, by and large, victims of male abuse and exploitation. From

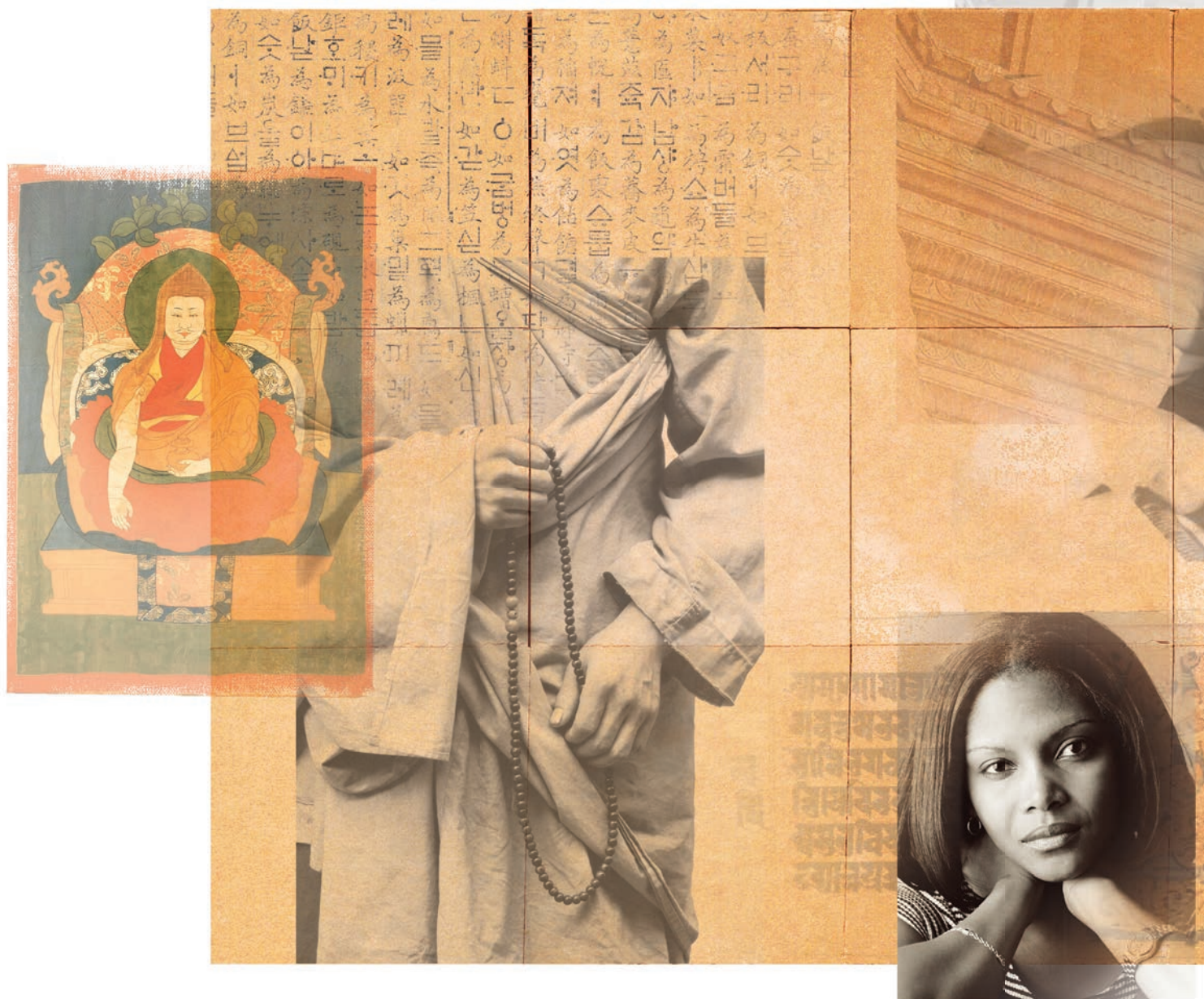
"He's not only a great guy, he's not only wonderful and smart, but he will take care of her spiritual life. Good Lord. I mean, that's the sexiest possible alpha male there is!"

Dalma Heyn

that perspective, she concurred with Dr. Fisher: "Human psychology is just too complicated to be reduced to a simple power differential: woman equals victim equals oppressed. While it's true that the mentors have power," she said, "women have their *own* power to attract the mentor. So as much as there's the mentor-student dynamic, there's the male-female dynamic, where there's known to be attraction. And for a woman, being young and beautiful is charismatic, as being older and powerful and wise is for a man. So both parties bring their attractions to the relationship, and it's uncertain who has more power."

In fact, many of the women I spoke with clearly articulated an awareness of their own sexual power and the ability they knew they had to attract men. "I think we all grow up with strategies that we've learned for feeling safe and secure in the world, and special," said Annie. "If you're born attractive, then you learn to use your femininity as a way of getting what you want. I was reasonably attractive and bright, and I knew from fairly early on that if there was someone who I really wanted to fall in love with me, I could bring it about. I'm very adaptable, and I knew how to match energies with people and adapt to a situation, so it wasn't hard to make my dharma instructor fall in love with me."

"In my case," said Diane, "I have to tell you, there were *several* teachers, and all of them were different. I think the Buddhist was somewhat innocent, and to some degree, he knew his power. But he was also curious, because somewhere I pushed buttons in him. He wasn't a sexual being, and I helped him out with that. At the same time, he helped me spiritually. So, who do you blame? Of course, what it comes down to *can* be an abuse of power, absolutely, and it is up to the teacher to draw that line. And while I really do believe it is the teacher's responsibility to



act appropriately, I think that as adults we all have a responsibility for our actions. I mean, *he's* human, too, right? And here's this young, little twenty-four-year-old babe-ette . . . What are you supposed to do? *Really!*"

If we're honest with ourselves, seductiveness is second nature to women, and we begin cultivating our ability to attract surprisingly early in life. Some of my earliest, most vivid memories of attraction and seduction, at age fourteen, resulted in my first kiss—with the twenty-six-year-old handyman who took care of our home, shared my love of music, was physically desirable, and was older and *experienced*. And while it is true that *he* approached *me*, in a timeless moment I can remember like it was yesterday, what I now realize is that for months prior to that, I had been deeply intent upon *him*. I expressed

that intent in a myriad of ways—from making sure I bumped into him in whatever corner of the house he was working to sitting at the piano and playing melodies into the stillness of the afternoon, knowing he would hear them. At that young age, and even earlier, I instinctively knew how to pull him toward me, the way a young kitten instinctively knows how to hunt its prey—that deep impulse having been preprogrammed into the very structure of its cells and psyche. The fact that it didn't lead much further than that kiss, I now see in retrospect, was ultimately due to his discretion rather than mine.

"There's power in female sexuality, and women have been aware of this and used it to their advantage, although we hard-line feminists always want to say to our *disadvantage*," said Sommers. "But that is disrespectful of women, and it under-



states reality. Because in love affairs, first and foremost there is a man and a woman. And then there's the status and the background of the people, which also come into play. But fundamentally, you have two people. Of course, we're talking about a woman who is an adult. I'm not talking about a girl who is underage—that's a totally different situation—but a woman who is eighteen or twenty-one. I think she has to be viewed as a responsible moral agent making choices, because to view her as passive, easily manipulated, and exploited is to assume that she is somehow helpless and weak and ineffective as a human being. I do find that patronizing. We should not tell young women that that's always the scenario when they may know deep down inside that it's something quite different. So I'm really arguing against a one-size-fits-all approach to

evaluating love affairs between spiritual mentors and students. I think that there's a lot more going on that has to be sorted out, and it could very easily turn out that the woman held most of the cards."

Women's strong attraction to influential men can sometimes lead them to circumvent what would ordinarily be considered taboos to intimate relationship, including great disparities in age. Recounting the sexual relationship with her eighty-four-year-old teacher, Linda told me, "I was eighteen at the time, and although he was pretty vital as far as physical relationships go, it was not nearly as wonderful as those I'd had before or have had since. But it served the purpose of making me feel special and affirmed. In fact, over

"I'm very adaptable, and I knew how to match energies with people . . . so it wasn't hard to make my dharma instructor fall in love with me."

time the relationship actually became a kind of obsession. I felt that I got a spiritual power from being with him. And actually, he asked me to legally become a vice president of the organization."

Indeed, a woman elevated to the highest status in a spiritual community through a sexual relationship with the teacher can reap the benefits of being most favored, most powerful, *and* most spiritual. As Heyn acknowledged, "That's the prize in that community, and I think that it's the most compelling possible situation a woman could be placed in." June Campbell, author of *Traveller in Space*, has spoken openly about her experience as the sexual consort of one of the most renowned Tibetan teachers to come to the West, a yogi-lama who was purportedly celibate and whose holiness was widely recognized and revered. When asked in an interview in 1999 what motivated her to perpetuate the relationship for a number of years, she replied, "Personal prestige. The women believe they too are special and holy. They are entering sacred space. It produces good karma for future lives and is a test of faith." As Dr. Fisher concluded, "[Sex] has always been an extremely powerful tool that women have, not just in the spiritual world, but in the business world, the academic world. I mean, think of the wife of the President of the United States—she didn't get there by election!"



BREAKING THE RULES

Women are inherently drawn to powerful men, and they instinctively sense the power of their own sexuality and attractiveness. But like many of the women I spoke with, Vickie described how her initial reaction was shock, confusion, and repulsion when her supposedly celibate Zen master first approached her. “I

“Everybody flirts. . . . But keep it to the flirting—because once you start sleeping with them, you’re off to the races.”

Dr. Helen Fisher

didn’t have a boyfriend at the time, and he was pretty persistent, so I just decided to go ahead and do it, even though I really wasn’t very sexually attracted to him at all. He seemed awfully old, and he was short and kind of overweight. But I just did it anyway. I asked him, ‘Do you do this with everybody?’ And he said, ‘No.’ He never had been with anybody before, except in the army. And he justified it by saying that he was going to *help me*. And I thought, well, he’s the teacher, and I’m here to learn from him, so there must be something in what he’s proposing. Now I think that was bullshit.”

Like every other woman with whom I spoke, Vickie decided to become involved—and like many, she *stayed* involved—despite her initial reaction to her teacher’s advances and despite the fact that everyone believed the teacher held vows of celibacy. In order to maintain that illusion, the relationship was concealed, and when it was exposed many years later, it caused considerable upheaval in the teacher’s community.

As I reflected on the whole phenomenon, I recognized the universal—and familiar—nature of the response that many women described when I asked them how they became sexually involved with their gurus. Like Vickie, the majority told me they experi-

enced repulsion at their teacher’s initial advances, as well as confusion and shock. But in the end they said yes, for surprisingly similar reasons. Now, I’m not a smoker, but smoking seems an apt analogy: When you inhale your first puff of cigarette smoke, your body convulses inwardly in an instinctive response to something it knows is not good for you. Yet at a certain point, you cross some invisible barrier, and smoking becomes habitual and addictive. When I think of the step from being confused and shocked and knowing instinctively that something is not right, to actually being in bed with a man who I shouldn’t be involved with—well, the step from that initial and instinctive recoil to sexual intimacy *should* be a big one. And yet, I had discovered from my own experience that it’s possible, within hours or days, to make that transition surprisingly easily. Before you know it, you can become fully involved in a relationship that may go on for years.

“That’s why I tell my students not to sleep with people you don’t want to get involved with,” Dr. Fisher explained in an interview with *Elle* magazine. “Because you just may get involved. At orgasm, levels of oxytocin and vasopressin in the brains of women and men go up. And then you can feel a deep attachment to somebody you really don’t have any use for in your life. . . . Everybody flirts. . . . But keep it to the flirting—because once you start sleeping with them, you’re off to the races.”

While there are profound moral implications to engaging in a clandestine relationship with a spiritual teacher, a woman’s conscience is often overridden by deeply held, primitive, and self-serving motivations, which she can justify in a myriad of ways. Asked why she stayed in a sexual relationship with her Korean Zen master for four years, Vickie, now a Buddhist teacher herself, said: “I don’t really like being alone. I’ve always been in a relationship since I was eighteen. If I break up with someone, within months I’m with someone else. I like affection. I like to be near someone. He fulfilled that need for me, so I just got comfortable with it, and I guess I got enough out of it that I didn’t end it.” I also asked her why she didn’t come forward to reveal a relationship that contravened the teacher’s purported celibacy and that undermined the

spiritual community when it eventually came to light. “He did so much good work, he didn’t deserve to be exposed,” she replied. “He’d bust his ass teaching people, I felt, very skillfully. And then there was this little part of his life where he’s sleeping with his student. He never slept with married women; he would sleep with consenting adults. I’m not saying that’s right. But in my mind, he wasn’t really hurting anybody, so why make such a big stink about it?”

When writing his book, Peter Rutter did extensive research on women who entered what he calls the “forbidden zone”—the zone between teacher and student, therapist and client, or spiritual mentor and disciple that holds the potential for the student’s transformation and that, therefore, should be protected from motives and actions which might compromise that potential, such as those associated with sexualization. Confirming the experiences of many of the women with whom I spoke, he describes how “when the forbidden boundary is finally dissolved by the moment of sexual touching, a woman experiences a multitude of emotions, blurred together in a disharmonious clamor.” From his perspective as a Jungian analyst, he later told me, “The actual psychological condition of a ‘forbidden zone relationship’ is archetypally intense. There is an archetypal dynamic. Archetypes are eternal, inwardly experienced human emotional situations that have a lot of unconscious, irrational energy. They draw from primitive parts of the psyche that don’t really have an understanding of moral choice, and that’s what is constellated within these relationships.”

Does that mean that women, in the face of these primitive realms of the psyche, are truly rendered incapable of acting as responsible moral agents who themselves can uphold the inviolability of “the forbidden zone?” Are the men inherently more culpable in these situations? Sommers remarked: “Certainly, someone who’s supposed to be celibate, and sets himself up as an example of high spiritual purity, is doing something wrong and deceptive. As is the woman, by entering the relationship with him, because she’s supposed to be part of this community and going by those rules. So, is he more guilty than she? I would say that *both* parties violated their own moral principles, and it’s not absolutely clear to me that he’s more wrong than she is, without knowing a lot more. But both of them are breaking the rules.”

And, as many of the women I spoke with found, breaking the rules in a clandestine relationship with a man in power usually does not provide a woman with an ultimately reliable source of emotional gratification. Because while secrecy conveys specialness and privilege, many said that at a certain point, they realized that their teacher was involved covertly

with one or more *other* female students, leading to jealousy, suspicion, resentment, and rage. “When you fall in love,” explained Dr. Fisher, once again giving an anthropological perspective on this phenomenon, “no matter who you are, you become extremely possessive and you want exclusivity. It’s called ‘mate guarding,’ and it’s one of the main characteristics

I instinctively knew how to pull him toward me, the way a young kitten instinctively knows how to hunt its prey.

of romantic love—this need for exclusivity and affirmation, this need to be recognized. You want an emotional union with your partner. You want to be the one and only. The experience of romantic love is one of the most powerful addictions on earth. I mean, people don’t kill themselves when they don’t get a drink; they kill themselves when they don’t get a particular sweetheart.”

I certainly knew well myself the placid contentment that comes when a woman is feeling sexually and emotionally gratified by the lover with whom she has, or believes she has, an exclusive relationship. And I knew equally well how, in the moment when betrayal is discovered, that placid surface can become a wildly vengeful, accusatory, and vindictive tsunami. Interestingly, in many of the guru-related scandals that have come to light over the years, the women involved decided to expose their teacher’s iniquities *only* when they discovered that they were not his exclusive lover. Their ensuing public accusations of corruption have often had profound consequences. And yet, these explosive reactions have frequently eclipsed any moral accountability on the part of the women themselves, who may willingly have transgressed rules, moral boundaries, and their own better judgment—sometimes for years. This striking irony has gone largely unnoticed in a contemporary culture whose perspective is colored by a pervasive man-as-aggressor/woman-as-victim ideology.

Julie spoke about the South American shaman she was secretly involved with for many years, who often affirmed that she was his special chosen one and his favorite lover among the women he had been with. “We had tremendous chemistry. And when I heard that his former lovers had been kind of lying there submitting and ‘thinking of England,’ as the saying goes, I felt very superior to them. Because I *wanted* to be the best lover, to be attractive and sexy and all that stuff. I think most women do. But at a certain point, I found out that he was sleeping with other

women, and I just went nuts. The most horrible, upsetting thing was that one woman asked me, ‘Did he say X, Y, and Z to you in bed?’ And but for one or two small exceptions, they were exactly the same words he had said to me. That just broke my heart.”

Linda, whose sexual relationship with her eighty-four-year-old mentor was kept secret from the community that had formed around him, reflected on the powerful jealousy that these situations often unleash: “I remember one time when there was a woman who really clashed with me. She wanted his attention, too. Both of us were power-tripping, and I won out on it basically. She didn’t. But deep down inside, I felt that something was

if he slept on the couch in the living room. That’s it—that’s all that ever happened.” “Really?!” she responded with surprise. “It’s true,” I said. “And knowing that he had made a clear decision to uphold his role as monk and teacher, something suddenly dropped away, and I was left with myself, and with the question of whether or not I really wanted enlightenment for its *own* sake.” “If he had asked you to have a sexual relationship with him, do you think you would have gone for it?” she pressed. “Well, Mary, given what I wanted at the time, I can say quite confidently that if he *had* proposed it, there’s no doubt that, like all the women I’ve spoken with recently, I would have said yes.”

Guru and disciple, man and woman, sex and spirituality, revelation and romance—as was clearly evident from my own reflections, and from speaking with so many other women about their experiences, it’s been all too easy to get our circuits crossed. Annie, from her viewpoint as a teacher, shared her understanding of how our yearning for transcendence can be confused with the attraction to sexual intimacy. “You’re seeking several things,” she said.

“You’re seeking to be seen and known to the bottom of your being and to be accepted as you are. And you’re also seeking to transcend who you are as an individual and merge in the only place that true merging is possible, which is in the universal mind, in the universal awareness, where complete intimacy is possible with all things. But we tend to mistake that for the only kind of intimacy we have experienced, which is sexual intimacy.”

The confusion between spiritual aspiration and sexual attraction has a physical origin as well. According to Dr. Fisher, who has been doing extensive groundbreaking research on the brain chemistry associated with romantic love, the universal human experience of romance relates to certain brain circuits linked to heightened energy and motivation and a craving to win a particular mating partner. And Fisher conjectures that those same brain circuits are also activated in spiritual experience. “I think it’s the same dopamine circuits in the brain, because you can feel real elation, energy, and focused attention.”

While it may be hard for a woman to discriminate between a spiritual and a sexual impulse, particularly in the presence of a powerful spiritual teacher, must a woman necessarily default to her more primitive instincts if that teacher’s motives prove to be corrupt? Is it true that, as Heyn says, when the teacher “doesn’t help her with reaching for her higher good, doesn’t allow her to sift through her socially constructed impulses in order to reach her ‘freedom impulses,’ she’s bound to fall back on older, less-evolved ‘desires’?”

“Far more women are becoming spiritual mentors themselves. We’ll probably begin to see young men falling in love with *their* mentors, creating sort of a moral paradox.”

Christina Hoff Sommers

eroding the trust I had always had in the possibility of something higher and better, the spiritual innocence and wide-eyed sense that anything is possible. I knew something *wasn’t* right, and yet, there was a part of me that really liked it. So those were the two forces at work, and I can see that my ego won out. My ego *definitely* won out.”

Affirmation, comfort, security, spiritual power, and status—despite our authentic aspirations for spiritual transcendence, we women are far too often willing to transgress moral boundaries in order to procure these, much to the destruction of the spiritual possibility we long for. As another woman, Susan, succinctly put it, “This thing about wanting something, wanting to be someone, even wanting enlightenment, and the amorality inherent in being willing to do anything to get it—that is the essence of the primitive condition that women bring to the spiritual path. We may be living at the threshold of the twenty-first century, but this phenomenon is age-old. Women have been doing this since year one!”

WOMEN’S LIBERATION

“Whatever did happen between you and your Korean teacher?” my friend Mary asked me one afternoon. “Well,” I said, “in those first months with him, during his occasional trips to the United States, he would visit me and sleep with me in my bed, and we’d just hold hands . . . and occasionally kiss. But at a certain point, he seemed to catch himself. During one of his visits in the early stages of the relationship, he said he thought it would be better



Certainly, if a spiritual teacher transgresses ethical boundaries, it's far more difficult for a female student to make her way through the confusing maze of her biological and social conditioning toward real spiritual freedom. And yet, something does seem to be evolving in women's consciousness. These ten women were surprisingly willing to speak about their sexual relationships with their spiritual teachers—in many cases, for the first time. And even more significantly, they often expressed a liberated interest in seeing the choices they had made in a *new*

“If you take away from women the idea that they are moral agents responsible for their behavior, you diminish them as human beings.”

Christina Hoff Sommers

way, increasingly free from the limiting notions of victimhood. “We’re looking to awaken the Buddha within us,” a woman named Maryann explained, reflecting on the long-standing sexual involvement she had with a prominent Tibetan lama, “but this unconscious push to follow what we’ve been deeply conditioned to pursue is something we’re just beginning to become conscious of. I think spiritual women really need to think about their lives and what’s most important and then take responsibility for everything they do.”

“Suppose you have a spiritual mentor,” Sommers said. “He’s celibate, and you get into this kind of situation because you trust him. Then he makes a pass at you. An autonomous, independent woman would just tell him, ‘No,’ and walk out. That can be done. We’re not talking about rape—we’re talking about something else, because she wants to enter a relationship. So I do think it’s very different from saying he exploited her. I think they exploit each other in a situation like that.” Diane concurred, reflecting on her many relationships with her teachers: “When you have a thirst for God and a teacher has a thirst for God, there’s an opening between you. But boy, you don’t want to create karma!”

“I believe that nearly every woman who is ready to work at it can act with equal power to men in determining how they will treat her at the sexual boundary,” Peter Rutter told me. “And in my very sad experience,” he continued, “sexual enactment in a mentor-student relationship, although it’s a natural temptation, will destroy what you came for, and it could set you back a decade or two in your seeking. When you add the possibility that the woman may eventually, if all goes well, ascend

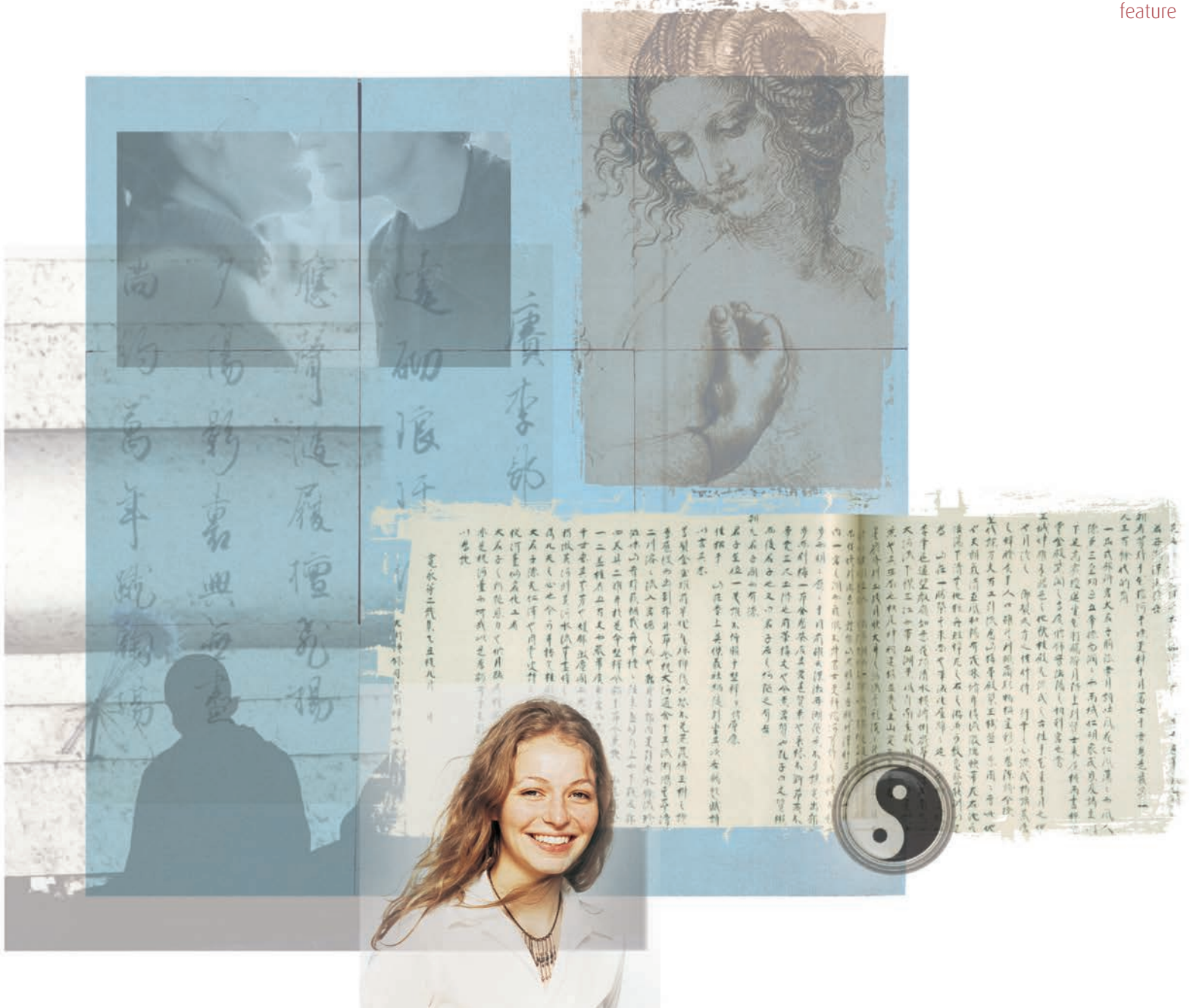
to an equal status in the spiritual tradition, that raises the ante on spiritual transformation. Not only is there the possibility of transforming one’s own personal wounds or personal limitations, but there’s the new possibility of women rising in the culture to a position of equality with men. And that makes the stakes of the spiritual relationship even higher for women.”

“Young women today are the freest generation of women in history,” Sommers said, “with more opportunities and higher aspirations. To tell them they’re the underdogs, to tell them they are victims, to impose on them this grim philosophy that was appropriate for an era long gone by, is wrong. They should have a sense of their power, and of what they can accomplish, and finally, a sense of ethical philosophy—they should be morally grounded. Far more women are now becoming spiritual mentors themselves. We’ll probably begin to see young men falling in love with *their* mentors, creating a sort of moral paradox.”

“The whole evolution of humanity,” said Dr. Fisher, “has been the evolution of the prefrontal cortex—that’s the part of your brain right behind your forehead. It’s the part of the brain with which we do our rational thinking, and it’s connected to many brain areas. You can control anger. It’s hard to control jealousy, but you can slowly get over it. You can control fear. We’re an animal that assembles data, puts it into patterns, weighs the alternatives, and makes decisions about our lives. So we *are* capable of rising above biology.”

“Wouldn’t it be liberating for women not to carry around with them this sense of having been ruthlessly exploited, and to understand that they got involved in a fairly familiar dynamic that goes back to the beginning of time?” Sommers commented. “It just might make it a lot easier to get over it. I mean, it’s not surprising. It’s politically incorrect to say this, but it’s so anthropologically predictable!”

All this being said, many would still disagree. In fact, the prevailing feminist view of women as fundamentally disenfranchised and unable to fully assert themselves is so ingrained in both men *and* women that it is often unconscious, and it is reflected throughout contemporary life, from college campuses to public policy to pop culture. Heyn suggests that we shouldn’t oblige a woman to take the higher ground, because “if we do, we’re just adding huge freight to the culture’s already impossibly high moral expectations of women.” But why *can’t* we expect women to be able to take responsibility for their own personal and spiritual lives, even in the face of a corrupt spiritual teacher? As Sommers said, “If you take away from women the idea that they are moral agents responsible for their



behavior, you diminish them as human beings.” Granted, it is a tall order. It’s edgy. It’s demanding. In fact, according to Sommers, it’s nothing less than a leap to a new “third stage” of feminism.

But many of us women have never been in a better position to make that leap. We have unprecedented freedom to opt for our higher good, for *the* higher good, having reaped the benefits of the first two stages of feminism—the first of which gave us equal rights, and the second of which gave us a deeper understanding of the truth of women’s victimization at the hands of men. Women now have the freedom to go beyond instinct, beyond social and biological conditioning, a freedom that comes from seeing our deepest drives, motivations, and impulses in a vast anthropological and evolutionary

context. In that, we can reach for a higher morality that doesn’t bind us but rather frees us and that we can now embrace in light of a genuinely new possibility. That possibility is a new women’s liberation born of taking responsibility for our spiritual journey beyond self-serving desires, facing directly and honestly into what *we* have brought to the situation, and consciously disengaging the age-old structures that no longer serve us. And who knows what effect this kind of autonomy and independence will have on men, including *spiritual* men and mentors? As poet and social critic Matthew Arnold said more than 150 years ago, “If ever the world sees a time when women shall come together purely and simply for the benefit and good of humankind, it will be a power such as the world has never known.” ■



beyond limits





finding freedom in captivity

by Pete Bampton

*"The mind is its own place, and in itself, can make
a heaven of hell, and a hell of heaven."*

John Milton

WHEN WE IMAGINE INDIVIDUALS going "beyond limits," what usually comes to mind are the pioneering achievements of creative geniuses and record-breaking athletes or the miraculous feats of great yogis and saints. Their ground-breaking exploits push the envelope for us all, challenging us to question unexamined assumptions about what we consider humanly possible. But there are others who are more reluctant heroes. Their stories come to us from hellish locales of oppression and the killing fields of war. Pushed to the breaking point by the onslaught of extreme circumstances beyond their control, these ordinary men and women find access within themselves to a spiritual strength and compassion that can be as deeply moving as that of the great saints.

John McCarthy is one such reluctant hero. On April 17, 1986, this twenty-nine-year-old British journalist on his first foreign assignment with Worldwide Television News was driving to the Beirut airport to catch a return flight to London. That morning he had been deeply shaken as he filmed his last news report in front of the ruins of the British embassy residence, still smoldering in the wake of a rocket attack by Hezbollah, the fundamentalist Muslim militia. After leaving the outskirts of the war-torn city, his car was ambushed by gunmen and he was kidnapped. Soon after, blindfolded and stripped of his belongings, he was led underground and pushed into a tiny dark cell. The door was locked behind him. It would be over five years before John McCarthy would again stand in the light of the sun.

As weeks turned into months, the unremitting darkness, cramped isolation, and deepening cycles of fear and despair began to take their toll. One night, desperately

The purpose of living, in that extreme circumstance, was *to live*, was to experience, and to share what one could.



John McCarthy inside one of Beirut's shell-damaged buildings along the former Green Line, Lebanon, January 2004

teetering on the verge of a total breakdown, he was suddenly overwhelmed by a profound spiritual presence. The utterly life-affirming grace of this experience infused him with a deep confidence that he could and would survive his hellish ordeal.

Shortly after this revelation, he was blindfolded and abruptly escorted from his cell at gunpoint. Eventually, another door was locked behind him, and as he slowly lifted his blindfold to survey his new surroundings, his eyes met the eyes of another man, also cautiously peering out from under a blindfold. Brian Keenan had been kidnapped while walking to the Beirut University campus where he was employed as an English teacher. Ironically, McCarthy had filmed a news feature on Keenan's disappearance only a few days before his own capture. These two men—McCarthy, an amiable middle-class Englishman with a raffish sense of humor, and Keenan, a passionate Irish intellectual raised on the strife-torn streets of Belfast—were to be companions in captivity for the next four years.

In the preface to his book *An Evil Cradling*, Brian Keenan writes that at the heart of their shared ordeal there lay an implicit paradox: that “in the most inhuman of circumstances men grow and deepen in humanity.” Both *An Evil Cradling* and *Some Other Rainbow*, John McCarthy's own candid account, are deeply moving testaments to the power of the human spirit to prevail in the darkest of dark nights.

Chained alongside each other by their wrists and feet in the confines of a squalid subterranean cell—not knowing why they were being held or if they would ever be released—

McCarthy and Keenan endured a grinding monotony and unimaginable degradation. “We both instinctively knew never to share weakness until you understood it,” writes Brian Keenan. “‘Share only strength’ was an unspoken motto between us.” Together they fought for their dignity in the face of their erratic fundamentalist captors, mostly young men whose behavior could morph without warning from disarming expressions of warmth to gratuitous acts of violence. And they bore together the terrifying trauma of sudden moves to different locations, for which they would either be mummified in masking tape with only their nostrils exposed for air or chained wrists to feet and thrown into a sack. Crammed into the trunk of a car or an airless, coffin-like box beneath a truck, they would then be transported to some new, unknown part of Lebanon. In every cell to which they were eventually delivered after these tortuous journeys, they again had to steel themselves against the merciless assault of stifling heat, ravenous mosquitoes, giant cockroaches, and the ever-gnawing shadow of despair.

With the recent UK release of the film *Blind Flight*—a powerful dramatization of their shared incarceration—the story of how McCarthy and Keenan re-entered the sunlit world of freedom, not as broken and bitter men but as heroes ennobled by a rare dignity, wisdom, and compassion, has once again been in the public eye. John McCarthy, now an author and documentary filmmaker, spoke with us about his life-changing experience as a hostage in Lebanon.

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT: *In Some Other Rainbow, you describe your period in solitary confinement as “both terrifying and enlightening” and you refer to a powerful spiritual experience that you had. Can you speak about what happened to you during this initial ordeal of self-confrontation?*

JOHN MCCARTHY: I think that once the shock of being snatched from a car and thrown into a dismal little underground cell passed, I realized how helpless I was. There was absolutely nothing I could do. Initially, the prospect of being held for anything more than a couple of weeks was intolerable. But I kept myself going with a couple of books and magazines, which I read over and over. Then even those were taken away (I later found out they were given to Brian Keenan), and that was the moment I realized that I was absolutely on my own. I could only survive on what I had within. So then began this rather negative self-appraisal, which was a matter of literally reviewing my life. I looked back and reflected on the fact that I’d had lots of advantages coming from a stable middle-class English family. I’d had a good education and plenty of opportunities, but I had squandered so much of my time. I felt so desperately ignorant and inadequate. And at that point I realized, “My God, I don’t really know who I am. What is life’s purpose? What’s *my* purpose?” Here I was in this desperate circumstance with no real self-aim or self-understanding. Eventually, I got to a point of absolute panic, almost like a helpless little child, where there was nowhere for me to go except to black out emotionally and mentally. I remember feeling as if I was being literally drawn down into a whirlpool by this darker force, and I sank to my knees moaning out loud, “Help me, please, oh God, help me.”

What happened then was extraordinary. I suddenly felt completely happy! In fact, I was euphoric; I felt an absolute confidence,

I sank to my knees moaning out loud, “Help me please, oh God, help me.” What happened then was extraordinary. I suddenly felt completely happy! I was euphoric.”

a firm belief that I was going to be all right. In that cell block, when the power was on, there was this nasty neon strip light, which

emitted a very harsh, bluish glow. But now suddenly a beautiful soft light was all around me. It had a radiant Venetian quality about it. So I went from falling in despair on my knees on this disgusting little mattress to suddenly finding myself standing, feeling totally buoyed up and happy.



John McCarthy played by Linus Roache in the movie *Blind Flight*.

WIE: *Did this experience of joy, of lightness of being, give you a sense of what one might describe as “God”?*

MCCARTHY: I remember reflecting on how I had now found myself in the midst of the various holy wars that have been going on for thousands of years. I thought that surely whatever Islam, Christianity, and Judaism meant by the word “God” must ultimately be the same. So rather than assuming that the Church of England chaplains who bored me to death at school were right all along, I decided that whether it was a God outside me or some kind of spiritual energy that had been released within me, or both, I didn’t know. But clearly something had worked. So from then on, I referred to this presence as having come from the “Good Spirit” rather than from any particular notion of God. I could feel confident that this Good Spirit, whether within or around me, was there to protect me and would get me through

this ordeal. Of course, at that point, I wasn't thinking about hanging around for another five years!

WIE: *And was this Good Spirit a reference point for you, a source of strength throughout your captivity?*

McCARTHY: Yes, it definitely was a reference point over the years, despite the fact that it didn't come back at darker times when I was really going down. But perhaps that was because, within a month or so, I was with Brian. I was never quite on my own again; there was always a fellow human being to bring my spirits up. But nevertheless, I'm sure now that that spirit was always there because my optimism would only fade for a day or two at a time over all those years. For some reason, I had this conviction that I would get through it.

WIE: *And that conviction came from the spiritual experience itself?*

McCARTHY: I think it must have been largely informed by that, but there was also an element of simple self-preservation. Because after having almost been taken down by that whirlpool into utter breakdown and despair, I couldn't dare look that deeply again into the abyss of what would happen if this ordeal didn't

This experience—of sharing life with somebody, even in the dire extremes of that form of captivity—was in itself a reason to live.

end. I just had to keep going. So I used whatever resources I had, whether it was my relationship with Brian, a sense of humor, or having an experience like that.

WIE: *What was the biggest challenge you had to battle with in order to keep going, to keep your spirit and dignity intact?*

McCARTHY: The awful sense of emptiness and loss of living that came back again and again—the endless monotony of living in a kind of void where hours went by as days and days went by as weeks. I'd look back and realize that a month had gone by and it was, of course, empty. Nothing had happened. I'd achieved nothing. That was very dispiriting, obviously.

WIE: *In your book you describe how the phrase “choose joy” became a motif between yourself and Brian—a way that you would uplift each*

other during the hardest times. How did you “choose joy” in the midst of such desperate circumstances?

McCARTHY: I think it largely came out of the realization of the simple wonder of being alive. It often came in the simple celebration, with Brian, of our shared humanity. This experience—of sharing life with somebody, even in the dire extremes of that form of captivity—was in itself a reason to live. Even observing the humanity of the guards, although at times it was a cruel humanity, had a huge value. And there was a joy in seeing how one could choose to be undaunted in the most frustrating and frightening times—something so simple, pure, and alive! The purpose of living, in that extreme circumstance, was simply *to live*, to experience, and to share what one could. So sometimes, when we should have been weeping or gibbering in the corner with fear and despair, we would be rolling around the floor in hysterical laughter—and it wasn't neurotic, mad laughter, but a sheer delight in being human beings thinking ourselves out of the box.

WIE: *Did having this kind of experience in a situation in which your physical freedom had been taken away subsequently change your appreciation and understanding of the fundamental freedom of choice we possess as human beings?*

McCARTHY: Well, in captivity the decisions were very simple, although very profound. At one level, there was just the simple choice to live, to keep going. But then there were other choices. For example, when we had been physically abused by the guards, we would sometimes choose not to eat in order to protest their behavior.

However, the choices I faced on my return home were so many and, in comparison, so complex. The everyday question, “Would you like to do this or do that?” was a tremendous stress! I would just think, “Oh, I don't know!” But when I began to realize that I was back in the world and that some of these choices actually had big implications, especially given the fact that I was suddenly famous, I recognized that I had to choose very carefully, because some of my statements or actions might be given more weight than I would have expected. So I began to face these complexities. Those decisions that had political or moral implications were much more challenging to deal with consciously. It took quite some time to make the transition from just relying on the hostage experience, thinking, “Well, if I got through that I'll get through anything,” to realizing that I could *use* what I had learned to inform my choices in the world of absolute physical freedom.

WIE: *How has your life changed as a result of the unusual intimacy you experienced in your relationship with Brian?*

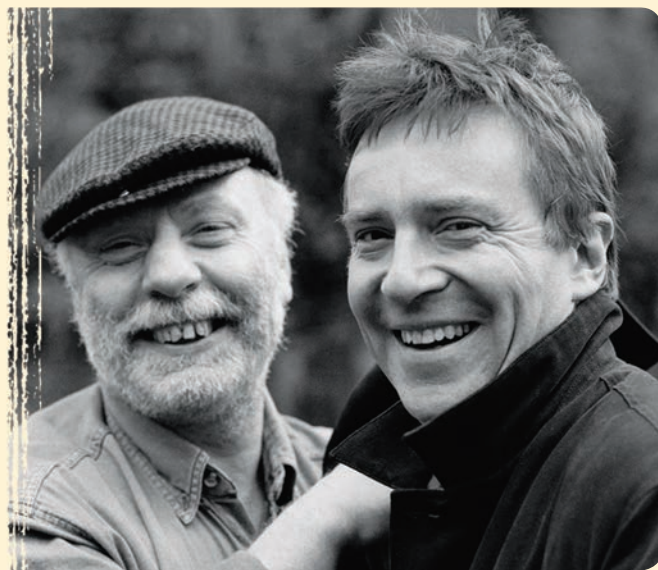
McCARTHY: The love that grew between us transcended what were very profound differences of character, background, and experience. And that opened up the realization that rather than being wary of others, one could celebrate, explore, and feel enriched by that difference, even if one was also at times very frustrated and confused by it! I think this sense of empathy also informed our relationship with the guards. Despite the fact that we were often cruelly taunted and beaten by them, we wanted to understand these people. I recently went back to Lebanon to make a documentary, and I was very much motivated by my desire to understand the broader culture of the Shia Muslims, who were the ones who held us. So since my release, I have been exploring cultural, racial, and religious differences in an effort to understand what life is all about. I've traveled the world working on projects that look into issues of faith and understanding and the interrelationship between faith and politics at the societal and international levels. And in the process, I've also been getting to know myself.

The hostage experience, and my relationship with Brian, taught me to see beyond the barriers. It was an experience of personal and relational discovery that opened up a deeper empathy in me for people who are suffering. I remember that when I came back home and would hear a news report about a child who had died or about earthquake victims in Iran, whereas before I might have been concerned or sad, I was now, as a result of having come through my own experience of suffering, awakened to an empathy for people unknown to me that I hadn't felt before. I would be watching the news and I would find myself crying because it moved me so much.

WIE: *Do you feel that there was a direct connection between the stark simplicity of the circumstances in which you and Brian were living and your ability to access a deeper part of yourselves and a deeper connection with life?*

McCARTHY: Yes, I think so. And since coming home, I do need to seek out that simplicity, to take time out and be in solitude. Some people find it odd that I don't always want to be around friends, but I have come to value the simplicity of being alone. Sometimes, it is so I can actively contemplate things. But what is most inspiring and gratifying is experiencing that sense of peace, of being at one, that I experienced for the first time with the "Good Spirit." ■

Photographs of Brian Keenan and John McCarthy by Anna McCarthy.
Blind Flight photography by Paul Chedlow.



Brian Keenan and John McCarthy, Dublin, March 2001

From *An Evil Cradling* by Brian Keenan

I am still and always will be amazed at the qualities men find in themselves when they have only themselves in which to find a source of life. I had seen John McCarthy turn from someone who was frightened . . . into someone who was unafraid and totally committed to life. He found and gave a sense of delight. . . . But beyond this I had seen him become confident and challenging to those who were holding us. And underlying this, he was a man who remained deeply sensitive.

What if we were both to lose control or if one of us was to let go and fall permanently down into that pit of mindlessness, could the other bear it? But what was the alternative? To be separated would be worse. No, there was no alternative. We were responsible for each other; no matter what happened we must not be separated. Our strength lay in one another.

INDIANA DIDDY-DOGG

and the
ARK OF EMPTY-VEE



STORY BY TOM HUSTON
ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRIS LIE

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, THE
TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANCED CIVILIZATION THAT
HAD ONCE THRIVED ON **EARTH** REMAINED
SHROUDED IN PERPETUAL MYSTERY....



FEW ARTIFACTS FROM THAT CIVILIZATION REMAINED, AS MOST SMALL OBJECTS WERE **DISSOLVED** BY THE SAME **NECROBOTIC** FORCES THAT ANNIHILATED THE ENTIRE **BIOSPHERE**, LEAVING NO SURVIVORS.

NECROBOTS

WHISPERS FROM THE PAST, **LEGENDS** TRANSMITTED THROUGH THE DEEP CURRENTS OF **MARTIAN** CONSCIOUSNESS, HELD THAT THE ONCE-DOMINANT SPECIES OF EARTH--THE 'HUMANS'--WERE BEINGS OF EXTRAORDINARY WISDOM AND NOBILITY.

THE **MARTIAN ELDERS** HAD BEFRIENDED THE HUMANS EARLY IN THEIR HISTORY, HELPING THEM TO CONSTRUCT A MAGNIFICENT CIVILIZATION FROM THE GROUND UP.

OVER THE ENSUING MILLENNIA, HOWEVER, THE MARTIAN PEOPLE INCREASINGLY KEPT THEIR DISTANCE, LETTING HUMANITY EVOLVE FREE FROM EXTERNAL INFLUENCE. YET THEY RETURNED PERIODICALLY...

...IMPRESSED BY THE **DEPTH** OF THE HUMANS' SPIRITUALITY...

...AMAZED BY THE **WISDOM** OF THEIR PHILOSOPHIES...

...AWESTRUCK BY THE **POWER** OF THEIR CONVICTIONS.

BUT IN THE EARTH YEAR **950 C.E.** THE TIME CAME ONCE AGAIN ON MARS FOR **THE ONEIRO-NEXUS**, WHEREUPON THE MARTIAN RACE RETURNED UNDERGROUND, THERE TO SLEEP FOR **2,000 YEARS** WHILE THE PLANET'S ATMOSPHERIC REGENERATORS PERFORMED THEIR SCHEDULED TASK.

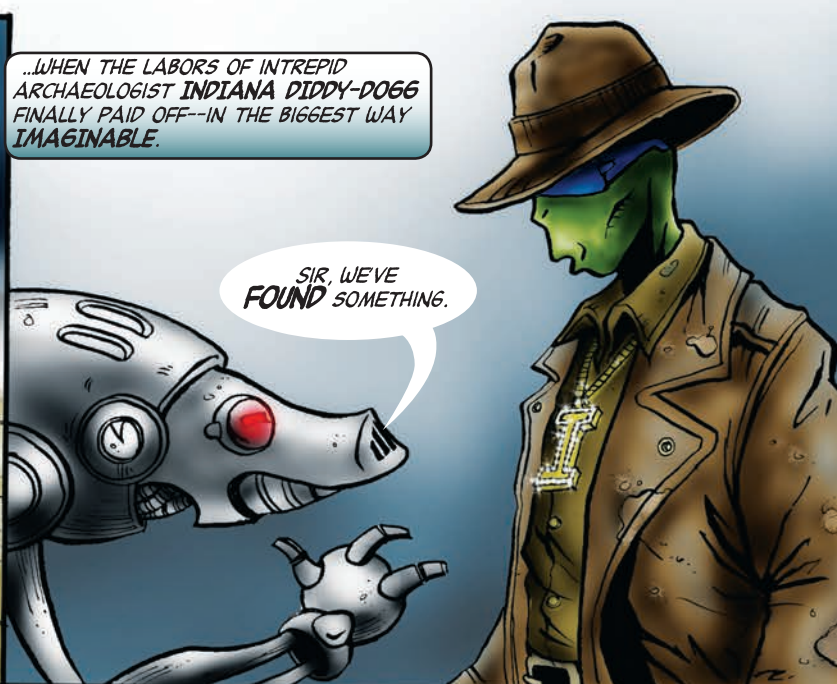
WHEN THEY AWOKE, HUMANKIND HAD LONG SINCE PERISHED. EVENTUALLY THE CAUSE OF THEIR DEMISE WAS DETERMINED FROM AN ANALYSIS OF THEIR RUINS. BUT **WHO WERE THEY** WHEN THEIR FATE BEFELL THEM? WHAT **EVOLUTIONARY HEIGHTS** HAD THEY REACHED BEFORE TRAGEDY STRUCK?

THEORIES ABOUNDED, BUT NO ONE COULD REALLY BE SURE.

UNTIL THE YEAR **5081 C.E.**, WHEN ONE MARTIAN DISCOVERED THE TRUTH.

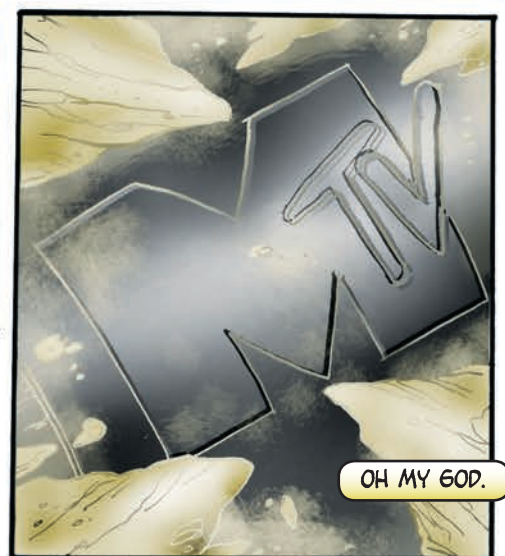


DECADES OF DIGGING AROUND THE REGION BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN THE CAPITAL CITY OF THAT ANCIENT HUMAN SOCIETY LED TO THIS SINGULAR MOMENT...

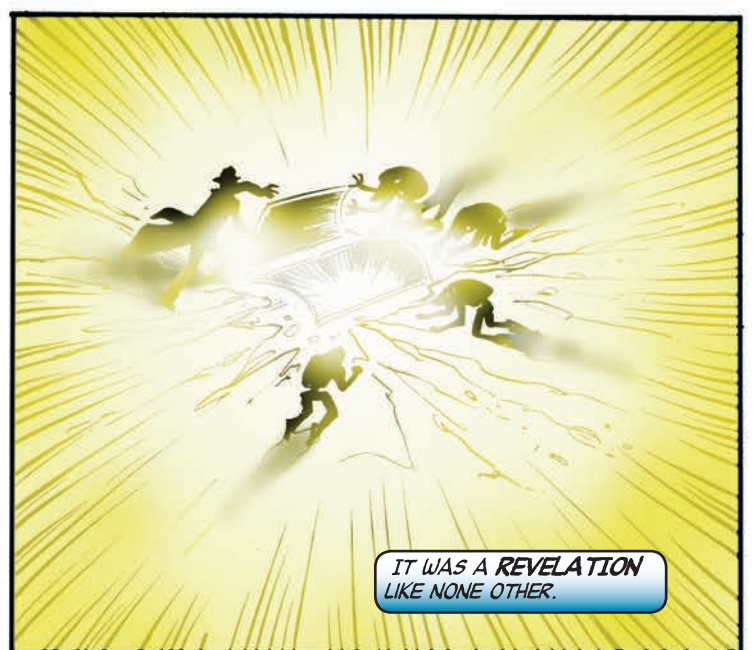
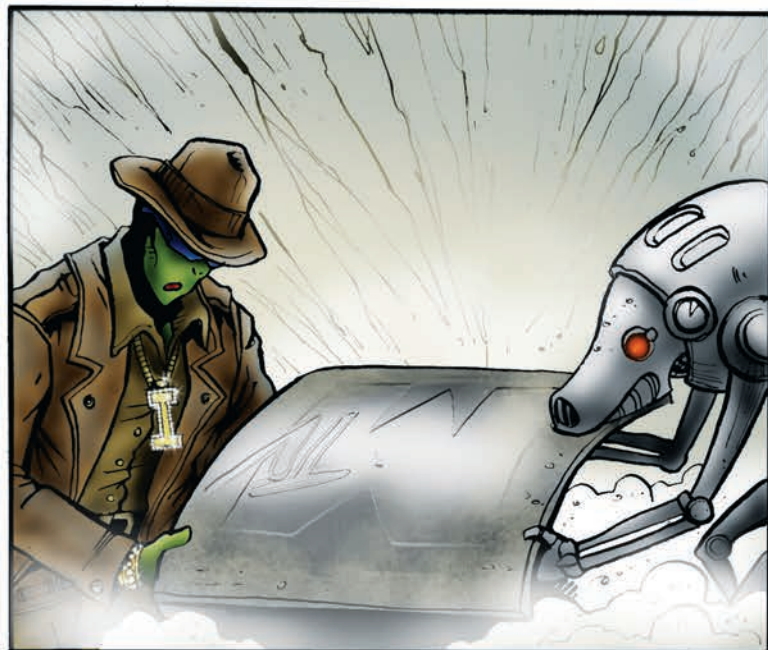


...WHEN THE LABORS OF INTREPID ARCHAEOLOGIST **INDIANA DIDDY-DOGG** FINALLY PAID OFF--IN THE BIGGEST WAY **IMAGINABLE**.

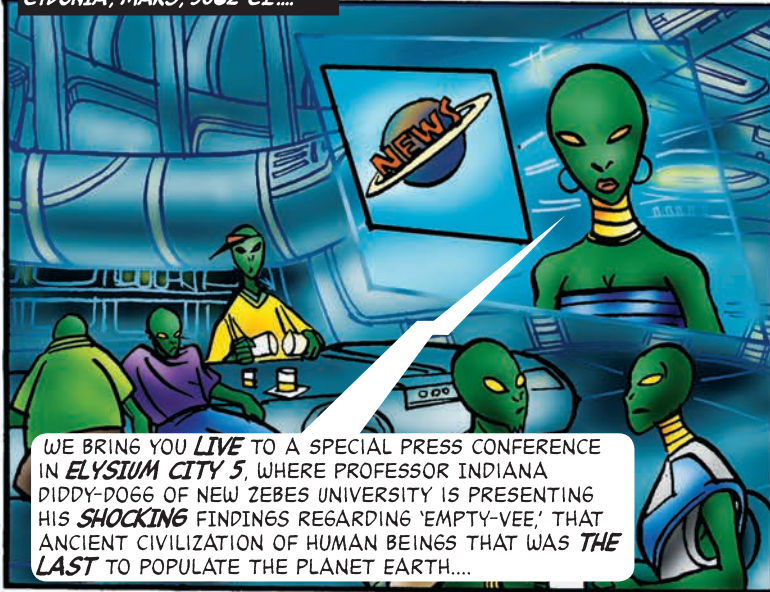
SIR, WE'VE **FOUND** SOMETHING.



OH MY GOD.



IT WAS A **REVELATION** LIKE NONE OTHER.

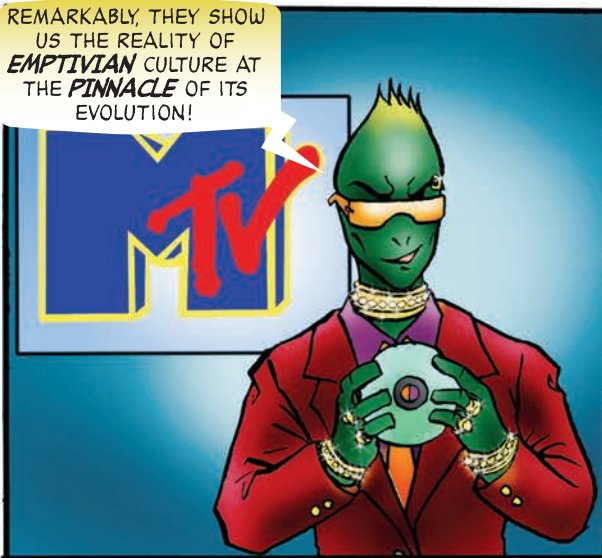


WE BRING YOU *LIVE* TO A SPECIAL PRESS CONFERENCE IN *ELYSIUM CITY 5*, WHERE PROFESSOR INDIANA DIDDY-DOGG OF NEW ZEBES UNIVERSITY IS PRESENTING HIS *SHOCKING* FINDINGS REGARDING 'EMPTY-VEE,' THAT ANCIENT CIVILIZATION OF HUMAN BEINGS THAT WAS *THE LAST* TO POPULATE THE PLANET EARTH....

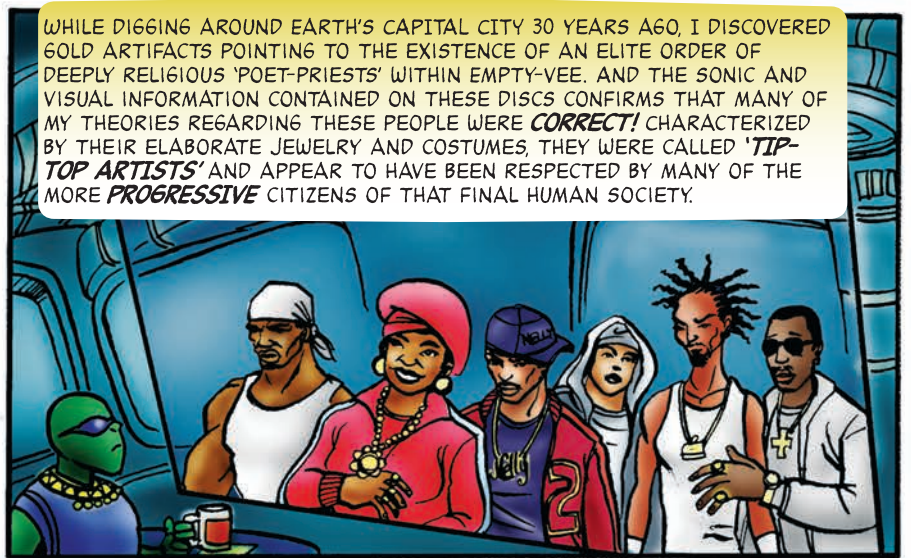


...BUT BY FAR THE MOST *AMAZING* RELICS OF ALL WERE THESE *DISCS*.

REMARKABLY, THEY SHOW US THE REALITY OF *EMPTIVIAN* CULTURE AT THE *PINNACLE* OF ITS EVOLUTION!



WHILE DIGGING AROUND EARTH'S CAPITAL CITY 30 YEARS AGO, I DISCOVERED GOLD ARTIFACTS POINTING TO THE EXISTENCE OF AN ELITE ORDER OF DEEPLY RELIGIOUS 'POET-PRIESTS' WITHIN EMPTY-VEE. AND THE SONIC AND VISUAL INFORMATION CONTAINED ON THESE DISCS CONFIRMS THAT MANY OF MY THEORIES REGARDING THESE PEOPLE WERE *CORRECT!* CHARACTERIZED BY THEIR ELABORATE JEWELRY AND COSTUMES, THEY WERE CALLED '*TIP-TOP ARTISTS*' AND APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN RESPECTED BY MANY OF THE MORE *PROGRESSIVE* CITIZENS OF THAT FINAL HUMAN SOCIETY.

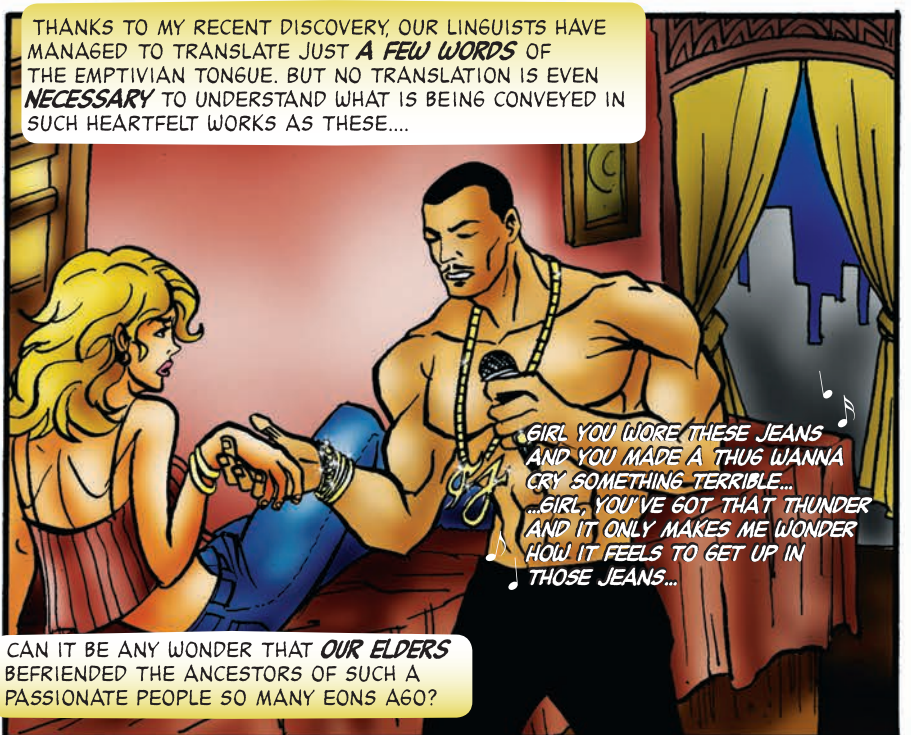


INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY, ART, AND SPIRITUALITY IN A REVOLUTIONARY WAY, THE *TIP-TOP ARTISTS* *REBELLED* AGAINST THE STATUS QUO OF THE DOMINANT *TRIBAL SOCIETY* KNOWN AS THE *EMPTIVIAN ORDER*.



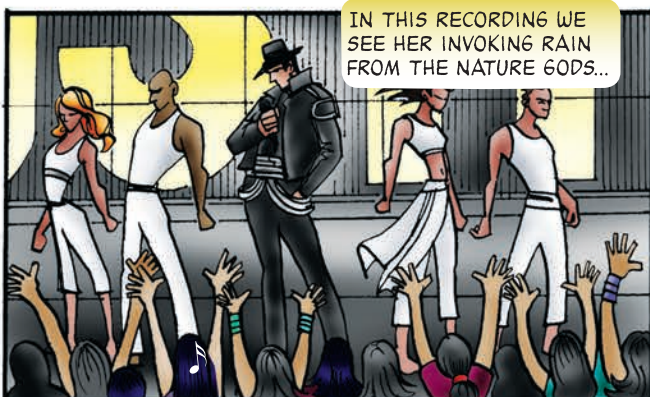
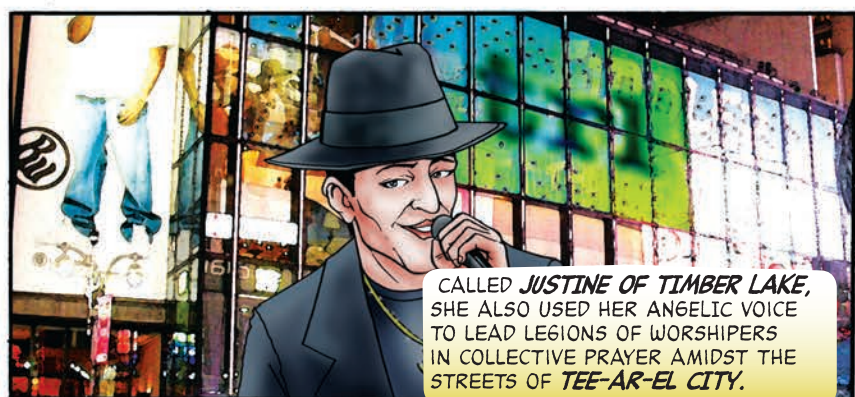
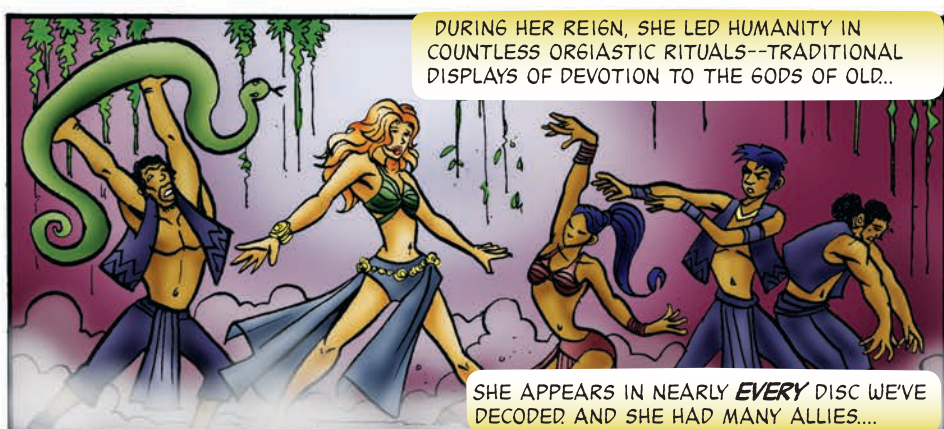
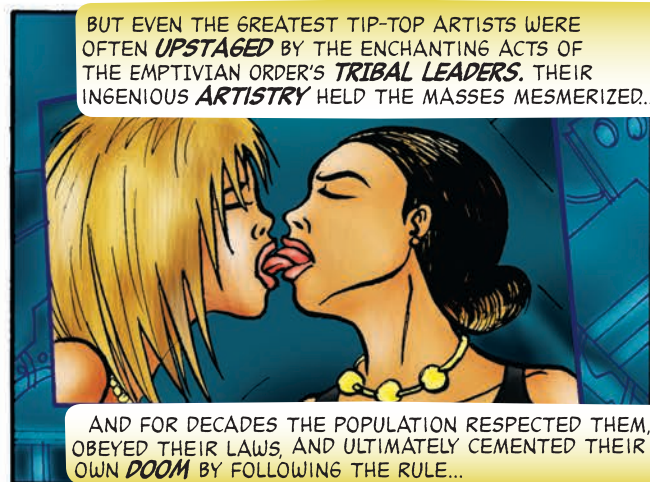
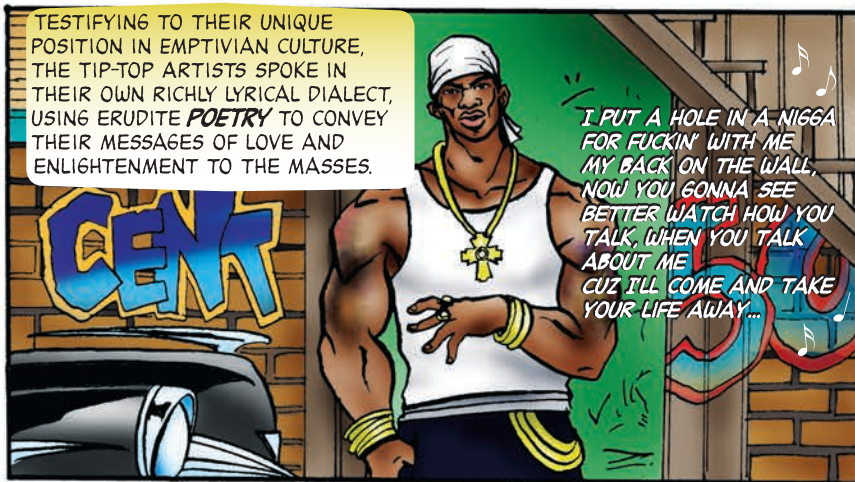
IT IS MY BELIEF THAT WHAT LED TO THE ANNIHILATION OF THE HUMAN RACE WAS, QUITE SIMPLY, A *WAR* BETWEEN THESE TWO FACTIONS--A BATTLE FOR CONTROL OF EMPTY-VEE AND, ULTIMATELY, *THE VERY SOUL OF HUMANITY ITSELF*.

THANKS TO MY RECENT DISCOVERY, OUR LINGUISTS HAVE MANAGED TO TRANSLATE JUST *A FEW WORDS* OF THE EMPTIVIAN TONGUE. BUT NO TRANSLATION IS EVEN *NECESSARY* TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS BEING CONVEYED IN SUCH HEARTFELT WORKS AS THESE....

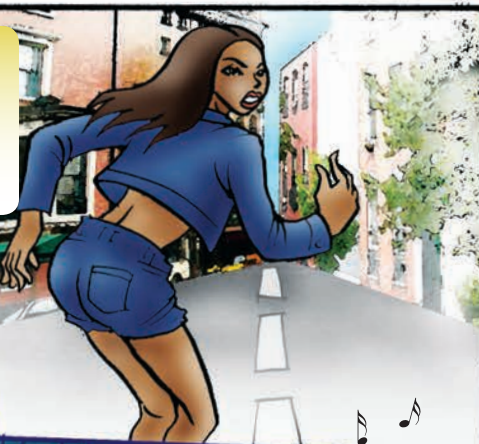


GIRL YOU WORE THESE JEANS AND YOU MADE A THUG WANNA CRY SOMETHING TERRIBLE...
...GIRL, YOU'VE GOT THAT THUNDER AND IT ONLY MAKES ME WONDER HOW IT FEELS TO GET UP IN THOSE JEANS...

CAN IT BE ANY WONDER THAT *OUR ELDERS* BEFRIENDED THE ANCESTORS OF SUCH A PASSIONATE PEOPLE SO MANY EONS AGO?



NOW, THE TIP-TOP ARTISTS DESPISED THE TRADITIONAL, **SUPERFICIAL** FORMS OF ART AND RELIGION ESPOUSED BY QUEEN BRITNEY, JUSTINE, AND THEIR ILK. SO IN ORDER TO HELP BRING ABOUT A NEW WORLD, AN **EVOLVED** EMPTY-VEE, THEY CROWNED A **QUEEN OF THEIR OWN...**

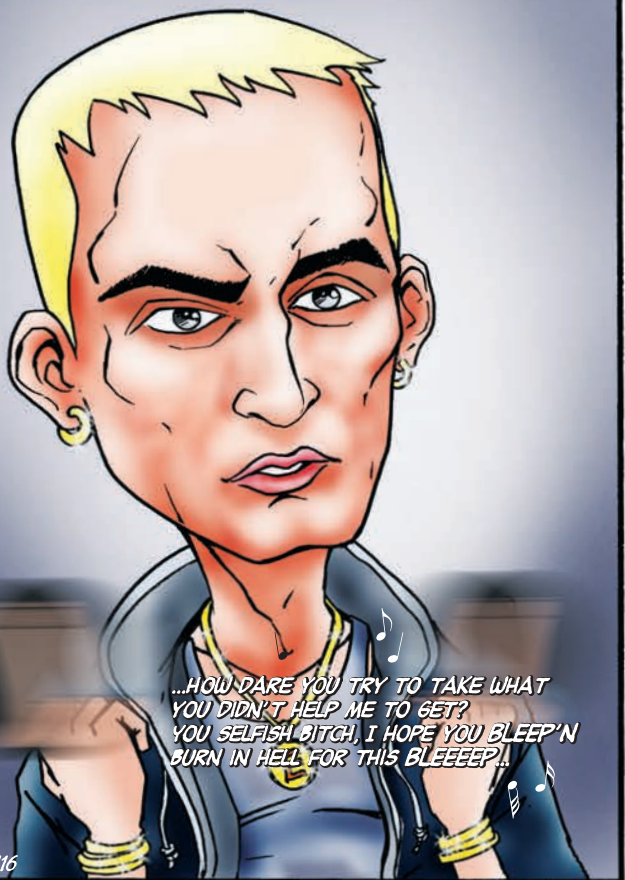


UH OH, UH OH, UH OH, OH NO-NO...
LOOKING SO CRAZY IN LOVE'S
GOT ME LOOKING, GOT ME LOOKING
SO CRAZY IN LOVE...



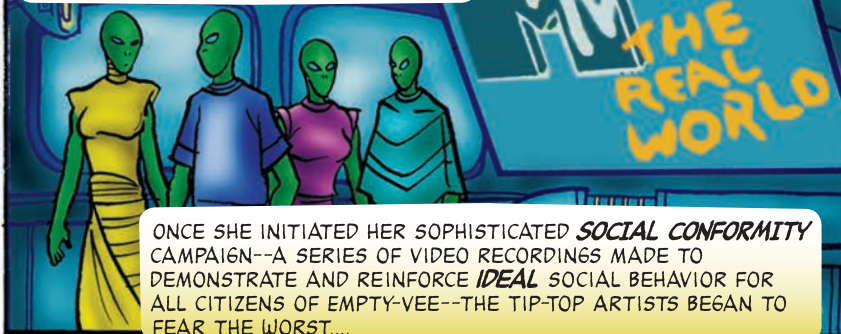
QUEEN BRITNEY'S VOICE, BEAUTY, AND INTELLIGENCE WERE NO MATCH FOR THOSE OF **QUEEN BOUNCY**.

NOR WERE JUSTINE'S TENDER PRAYERS A MATCH FOR THE **GALLANT POETICISM** OF QUEEN BOUNCY'S MOST **LETHAL ENFORCER: EMINEM-SEE HAMMER!!**



...HOW DARE YOU TRY TO TAKE WHAT YOU DIDN'T HELP ME TO GET? YOU SELFISH BITCH, I HOPE YOU BLEEP'N BURN IN HELL FOR THIS BLEEEEP!!

THUS, THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE **EMPTIVIAN ORDER** AND THE **TIP-TOP ARTISTS** WAGED FOR MANY YEARS, OFTEN VIOLENTLY. BUT QUEEN BRITNEY WASN'T AS PRIMITIVE AS SOME HAD BELIEVED.



ONCE SHE INITIATED HER SOPHISTICATED **SOCIAL CONFORMITY** CAMPAIGN--A SERIES OF VIDEO RECORDINGS MADE TO DEMONSTRATE AND REINFORCE **IDEAL** SOCIAL BEHAVIOR FOR ALL CITIZENS OF EMPTY-VEE--THE TIP-TOP ARTISTS BEGAN TO FEAR THE WORST....

BROADCAST THROUGHOUT THE LAND, THESE RECORDINGS MAINTAINED A UNIVERSALLY **ELEVATED STANDARD** OF BEHAVIOR FOR SOCIETY TO FOLLOW.



I KNOW YOU AIN'T BEEN TALKIN' SMACK ABOUT MY BOY, BEEATCH.

WHO YOU CALLING A BITCH? BITCH.

OKAY, GUYS, LIKE CHILL! BREAK IT UP!

AND QUEEN BRITNEY DIDN'T STOP WITH JUST ONE. SIMILAR PRESENTATIONS FOLLOWED--UNTIL THE WHOLE OF EMPTY-VEE FELL UNDER THE DOMINION OF HER CAMPAIGN.



IN A CLIMATE SUCH AS THIS, WHO COULD RALLY IN SUPPORT OF A REVOLUTION? FEW **CRITICAL VOICES** COULD EVEN BE HEARD, THOUGH I BELIEVE THESE **VIRTUAL PERSONALITIES** MAY HAVE MASKED THE IDENTITIES OF TWO PEOPLE BRAVE ENOUGH TO MAKE THEIR OPINIONS KNOWN.

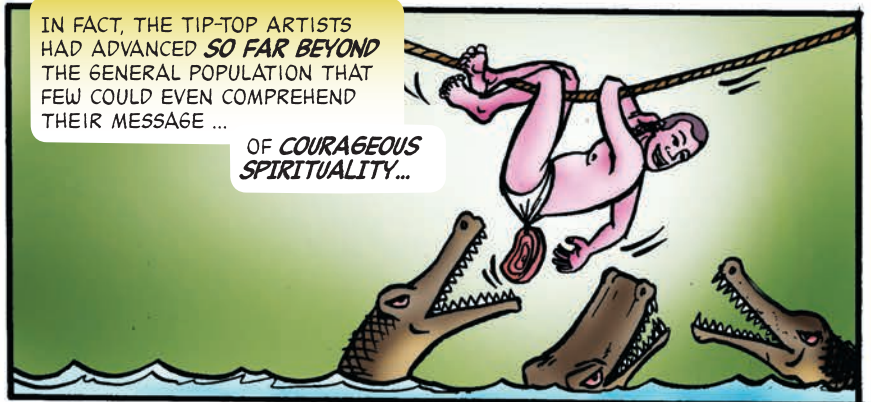


BUT IN THE ELEVENTH HOUR, THE TIP-TOP ARTISTS FINISHED WORK ON **SOCIAL CONFORMITY PRESENTATIONS OF THEIR OWN**--PROPAGANDA SO REFINED EVERY CITIZEN WOULD FEEL ITS LIBERATING INFLUENCE.



IN FACT, THE TIP-TOP ARTISTS HAD ADVANCED **SO FAR BEYOND** THE GENERAL POPULATION THAT FEW COULD EVEN COMPREHEND THEIR MESSAGE ...

OF **COURAGEOUS SPIRITUALITY**...

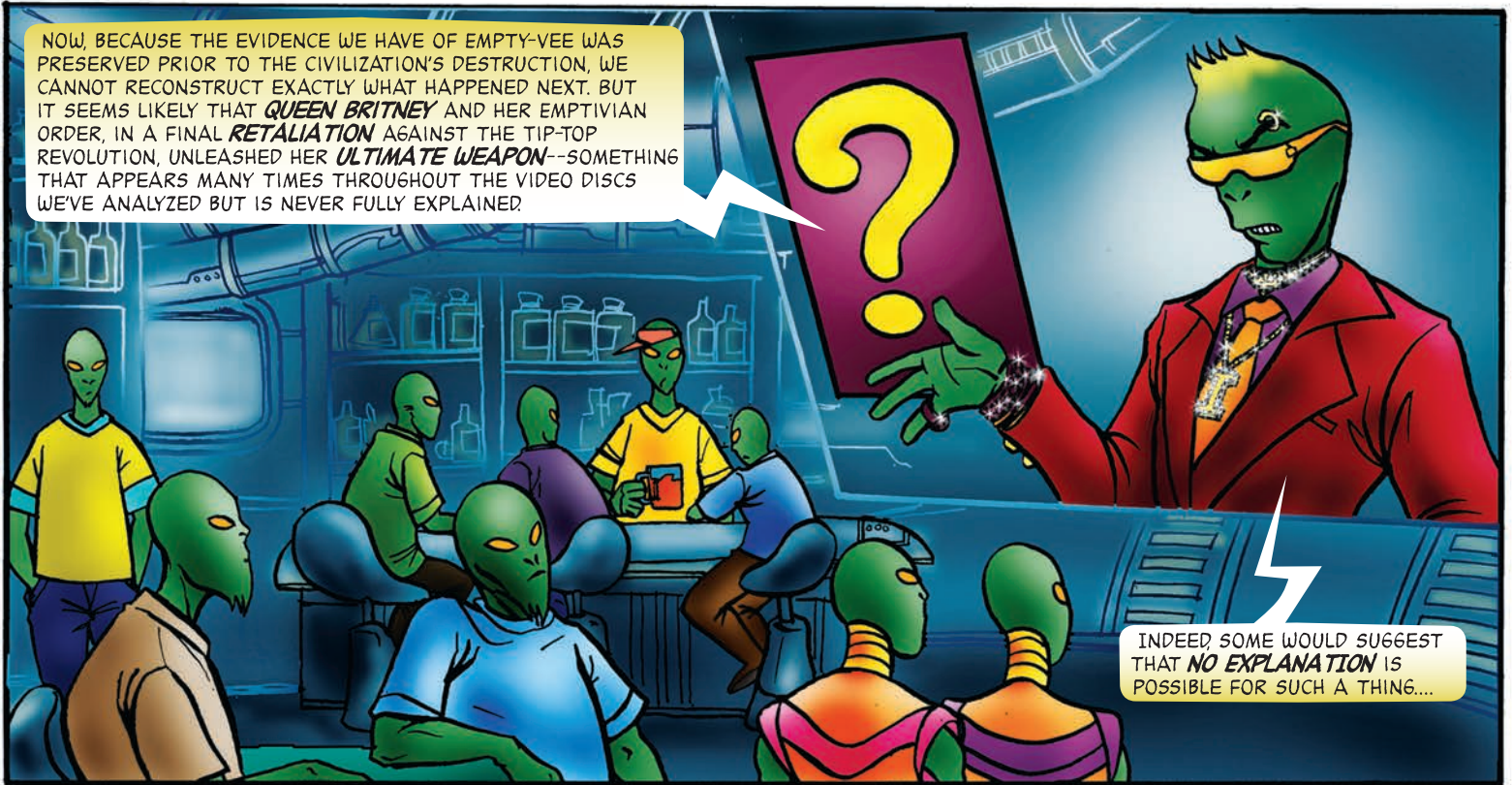


KICK ME!
PLEASE

...AND **PENETRATING WISDOM**.



NOW, BECAUSE THE EVIDENCE WE HAVE OF EMPTY-VEE WAS PRESERVED PRIOR TO THE CIVILIZATION'S DESTRUCTION, WE CANNOT RECONSTRUCT EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED NEXT. BUT IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT **QUEEN BRITNEY** AND HER EMTPIVIAN ORDER, IN A FINAL **RETALIATION** AGAINST THE TIP-TOP REVOLUTION, UNLEASHED HER **ULTIMATE WEAPON**--SOMETHING THAT APPEARS MANY TIMES THROUGHOUT THE VIDEO DISCS WE'VE ANALYZED BUT IS NEVER FULLY EXPLAINED.



INDEED, SOME WOULD SUGGEST THAT **NO EXPLANATION** IS POSSIBLE FOR SUCH A THING...

YET I BELIEVE THIS **CREATURE**--CALLED '**JACKO**'--WAS ACTUALLY A **GENETICALLY ENGINEERED** SUPER-SOLDIER, WHOSE ULTIMATE EFFECTS MAY REMAIN FOREVER UNDETERMINED. ITS PRESENCE MAY INDEED HAVE PRECIPITATED A GLOBAL WAR OF EPIC PROPORTIONS ALMOST OVERNIGHT, LEADING TO THE RELEASE OF THE NECROBOTS--THE TECHNOLOGICAL TRAGEDY THAT, IN A MATTER OF **HOURS**, ERASED THE HUMAN SPECIES FROM THE UNIVERSE **FOREVER**. TRULY, THEY WILL BE MISSED.

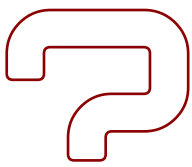


ANYWAY, THIS IS, NEAR AS I CAN TELL, A VALID RECONSTRUCTION OF THE MAJOR EVENTS DESCRIBING THE BREATHTAKING CLIMAX AND SUDDEN, TRAGIC CONCLUSION OF **THE LAST CIVILIZATION OF THE HUMAN SPECIES**--AND INDEED, THE CONCLUSION OF FIVE BILLION YEARS OF EVOLUTION ON THE PLANET EARTH. I'D LIKE TO THANK ALL OF YOU FOR JOINING ME TODAY.



PEACE OUT, FOOS!





natural
selection

She'll Kill Bill

"One of the most brilliant visual storytelling movies I've seen since the talkies.... It is pretty violent, I must say. At a certain point, it was like a Takashi Miike film. It got so fucked up it was funny. At one point, my friend and I, we just started laughing. I was into the seriousness of the story, of course, but in the crucifixion scene, when they turned the cross over, you had to laugh."

—Quentin Tarantino
on *The Passion of the Christ*

SOMEONE SHOULD TAKE CHARGE OF THE WORD "sensationalism," refer it to an articulated system of beliefs and practices, and put it on the list that includes, say, "socialism" and "Islamic fundamentalism." The implicated ideas and activities are out there, just waiting to be formalized. Millions of people dedicate their lives to media-induced sensations, to their pursuit and their creation. Why not make it official?

The sensationalist movement is vast and varied and getting more so with every innovation in representational technology. But movies are primal. And when it comes to creating sensations through cinematic depictions of violence, nobody can match Quentin Tarantino. That makes his work an ideal object of reflection for anyone concerned about the psychosocial effects of mediated violence—and I don't mean its influence on sociopaths already on the verge of mayhem, but the much subtler question of what it says about our culture. It's easy to condemn graphic gore when it's schlocky, but what are we to make of depictions that are, on their own terms, masterworks?

"Their own terms" means movie terms. It means the history of movies, all kinds of movies, but especially violent movies—a self-referential world of movies within which Tarantini-ans dwell.

The Tarantino origin myth (that's not too strong a description) puts this tenth-grade dropout and pop culture addict behind the counter of Video Archives in Manhattan Beach, California, in the late eighties. There he held court for five years, dispensing freely of analysis and opinion to a widening circle of steady customers, some of them with Hollywood connections, many of them in thrall to his astonishing mastery of movie lore—an omnivorous authority that ranged indiscriminately across genres and periods,

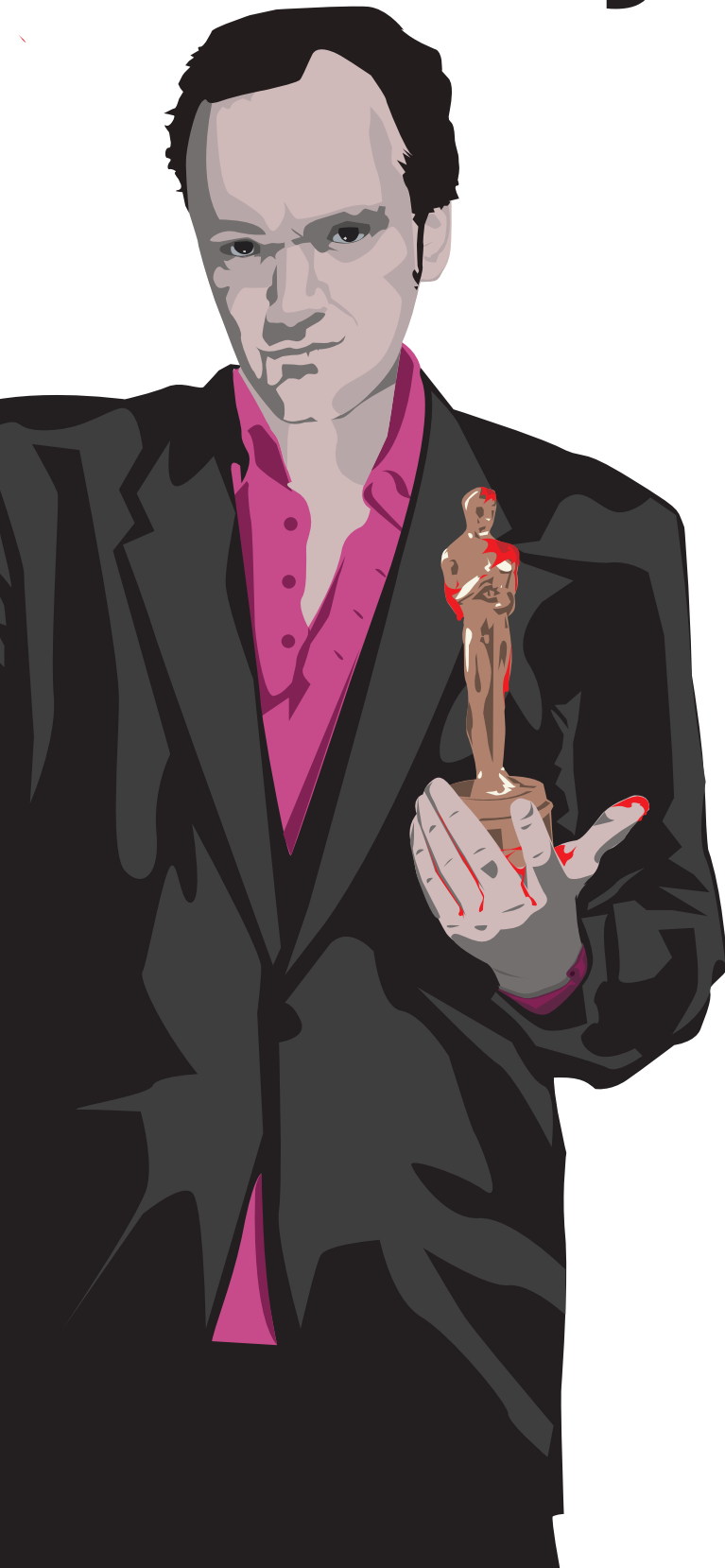
from early Hitchcock and fifties noir to the French avant-garde and obscure Hong Kong martial arts splatter flicks. Tarantino had seen it all, and remembered it all; that was the incredible thing—credits, music, dialogue, cinematography, editing, sets, plots—everything. And he wove it all into a single hyperenergetic discourse, a comparative tapestry that seemed to render, upon the screen of a single consciousness, the entirety of cinematic experience. No wonder Hollywood players whose acquaintance he made took him seriously when he asked them to consider his early screenplays. This was no schmuck with a script; this was a living library, a walking tribute to all they held dear.

Tarantino became a mythic entity, a cult figure, because he actualized a transformation to which his followers aspire. In him, the Ultimate Fan became the Ultimate Auteur. Through *this* video store clerk, the slacker media geek was vindicated, his obsessions justified—his tastes, his slang, his values, his vast comic book collection, his online gaming, his fantasy quests—his whole investment in virtual living was redeemed.

And Tarantino understands this. He remains true to his origins. He may now be acclaimed by the establishment, honored with the chair of the jury at Cannes, but he represents a virtual way of life that postmodern media have

while you Chill

by Thomas de Zengotita



made possible in more marginal precincts—though no true Tarantinian would get caught talking seriously about anything as ponderous as postmodernism. Sensationalists are allergic to such abstractions. They are dogmatically anti-intellectual and apolitical. They draw that line around themselves in order to protect their way of life from the uncomprehending disdain they have come to expect from society's grown-ups. And Tarantino makes it easy to defend that line. The intricacy of his plots and the density of his allusions make for a genuine complexity in his work—if not what you could call (perish the thought) depth. That complexity, so richly apparent to the cognoscenti, is more or less invisible otherwise, and so it supplies sensationalists with a trump. When it comes to Tarantino, they can truly say that their critics just don't get it.

The complexity of a Tarantino movie is all the more alluring because it lurks beneath a fabulous surface, a sensual pleasure package for the puzzles and the lore. The riveting cinematography, the blend of editing and scoring, the pacing, the way the whole composition radiates hyper-real clarity, that distinctive look and feel we also find in David Lynch movies. This hyper-realism alerts the knowing viewer to a subversive intent that will lend heft to this feast of surfaces. It addresses those with the keys to the kingdom, flattering them with a wink and a nod that only they can detect. It invites them to pore indefinitely over intricacies of plot and timeline, to recline on a web of allusions so extended that even the most knowledgeable fans will never know if they have reached its end.

And it allows for inexhaustible discussion on websites and blogs.

In Tarantino movies the postmodern aesthetic of pastiche, of mixing and citing and recycling, reaches its logical limit. His movies are literally about movies (and TV shows and ads and pop music). And not just indexically. Tarantino resurrects and manipulates tonalities and styles; entire moods, entire genres are evoked, and the playing never ends. The spaghetti western score accompanies a chicks-about-to-kick-butt buildup to a frenetic ninja blowout scene, and there is David Carradine (echoing his seventies kung fu TV show) as Bill, a villainous inversion of the original character, but deploying the same affect, flavored with (and undercut by) a hint of sadism that, in turn, contrasts (in the first (John Ford inspired) scene of Volume II) so ludicrously with (yet another Carradine echo) the oh-so-authentic flute he still carries.



Even I could go on listing allusions, and I am just a visiting participant-observer, not even close to being a native Tarantinian.

Nor would I want to be. I have better things to do with my time.

But of that, more anon.

Back to the undercutting contrasts. They are importantly typical of Tarantino's allusive style. He doesn't just cite, this isn't mere homage; he plays havoc with citations. He can make them fit, even when they don't—and that's his extraordinary gift, which also conveys the essential message: *It's all in fun*.

Sensationalism is the ideology of fun in general, but this particular kind of fun is far from innocent. It is designed to put the Tarantinian one up, always, and to expose those who recoil from the graphic violence as congenitally out of it. If Pai Mei (the martial arts SuperMaster to whom Bill takes members of his Deadly Viper Assassination Squad for training) turns out to be the very opposite of the serene sensei we expect in this role, shouldn't that tell you something? If he turns out to be a spoiled prima donna, irascible, vain, and spiteful, the Tarantinian asks: Don't you see how funny that is? Deadly Viper Assassination Squad? Hello? Shouldn't that tell you something about the attitude here?

Then there are the plot twists and the temporality games. Chapter 1 of *Kill Bill I* is called "2," with a little handwritten circle around it. That refers to Uma's to do list, which names the four members of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad she is out to slaughter—item number five being "Kill Bill," of course. As I recall (I may be wrong), you don't see that list actually being made out until the middle of Vol. II (a whole separate movie, released months later), and *that* movie begins with the massacre that precipitates the whole two-volume story, temporally speaking. I can't detect aesthetic motivation for this juggling. To me it seems designed to keep the web sites buzzing with Tarantinians puzzling out the timeline. But I may be missing something. I probably am.

But the plot twists have effects I can follow. Their shock value is strangely akin to the shock value of the goriest images—like Uma crushing Daryl's fresh plucked eyeball between her bare toes (Uma's feet deserve separate billing in this movie) on the linoleum

floor of Budd's trailer (he's dead in the kitchen area, surprised by a black mamba in a suitcase full of money) while Daryl (now minus both eyes, Pai Mei having deftly extracted the first one in a fit of pique during her training year with him, but that's OK because, after it was over, Daryl poisoned Pai Mei's rice bowl and watched him die) thrashes around in the bathroom screaming in agony, bleeding from the hole in her face, ripping down the shower curtain, tearing fixtures from the walls, and, in general, giving new meaning to the expression "blind fury" as the whole scene dissolves into another case of things getting so fucked up that, as a Tarantinian, you just have to laugh—as (refer back to the dash at the top of this paragraph) when Uma finally makes it (at the end of Volume II) to Bill's luxurious Caribbean hideaway and does one of those stealth entry sequences, her priceless Hattori Hanzo sword slung across her back in that cool ninja way, her silver nine millimeter held out from her body in the official two-handed grip, and she pivoting to cover every angle as she springs into one room after the other (having crept suspensefully up to each), intent as a leopard (or a viper) on one thing only (killing Bill, remember?) and then, as she rounds the last doorframe, what does she find but her four-year-old daughter, whom she has never seen because she was born after Uma went into a coma when Bill shot her in the head (and she in a bridal gown, eight months pregnant) at her wedding (rehearsal), where he and the rest of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad slaughtered the entire wedding party (Samuel Jackson barely recognizable in a cameo as the piano player) because Uma (code name: Black Mamba) had not only abandoned the Assassination Squad lifestyle, but had abandoned Bill, the father of the very same child, which pissed Bill off big time, but didn't stop him from taking their daughter into his keeping and, lo and behold, there he is now, playing with her, as Uma springs into that last room, and not just playing any old game, by golly, but playing a bang-bang game with a toy plastic space gun (no doubt a very specific one, recognizable to multitudes of Tarantinians), and Bill, all mock innocence, urging Uma, who is beginning to weep at the sight of her child, to join the game, and getting the little girl to bang-bang Uma, then cajoling Uma into doing one of those grip-your-stomach-and-groan-and-



pretend-to-die things, because that's what the game requires, and Uma, her deadly purpose melted away (but only temporarily), complies, and after that Uma and Bill put their little girl to bed—and the upshot is: now, *that's* a plot twist.

If you followed all this, you have a sense of how recursively embedded, how freewheeling and precise, a Tarantino movie is. Sort of like Proust—except for one thing.

There is no significant content of any kind.

And the question arises: What kind of culture invests so much in something so hollow, hollow by design, hollow as a matter of principle?

A sensationalist culture devoted to fun.

But such a culture inevitably runs up against certain limits. There are only so many ways you can produce these shocks and thrills. Tarantino is Tarantino because he found a whole new level of possibility, thanks to his reflexivity. Naïve viewers focus on the gore, but the initiated are accustomed to gore. For them, the violence and the plot twists aren't that different. Both are designed to elicit that I-can't-believe-I'm-seeing-*this* reaction, which is what you get when a how-can-he-top-*that* moment is successfully resolved.

Topping that is what Tarantino does.

Finally, there's the dialogue. Actor talk in movie promos is even more hackneyed and formulaic than other forms of puffery, but when actors talk about being in a Tarantino movie, there is a tone of genuine admiration, mixed with bemusement, perhaps, but tinged with awe as well. They know these are not just movies starring them, but movies *about* them, about the world of their concerns, and they feel that world being transformed by this alchemist into something weighty and thick, something that achieves the standing of art without ever leaving the realm of the popular. For these actors, working with Tarantino isn't like starring in a revival of some classic play—that involves the implicit admission that what you normally do is less worthy. No, working with Tarantino means elevating what you normally do. The Ultimate Fan as Ultimate Auteur serves his actors in the same way he serves his followers. He turns total immersion in movies into a kind of wisdom.

But the actors don't seem conscious of this in so many words. What they dwell on is Tarantino's dialogue, which provides the ultimate in comic contrast, a relentlessly prosaic and naturalistic verbal counterpoint to his cinematic virtuosity. Actors love the dialogue, not only for that contrast but also because it reflects their training—years of method acting, years of improvs. Most representative and most renowned is the discussion in *Pulp Fiction* between John Travolta and Samuel Jackson about how Quarter Pounders have to be called Le Royale in France because of the metric system. The kicker is that they are hit men on their way to massacre a room full of college kids while they are having this conversation. They even pause in the hall to clarify some point about fast food before busting down the door and blazing away.

How do you top *that*?

It was typical of Tarantino to praise Gibson's bloody movie while sophisticated people everywhere were condemning it. But it was even more typical of him to find comedy in what the simple minded Gibson meant to be transcendently serious. The image of Tarantino and his friend chortling in their seats at the crucifixion is irresistible because it distills the issue to its essence. When I first read that description, I was reminded of Abu Ghraib guards, laughing as they tormented their prisoners, and I wondered, for a moment, what's the difference? But no sooner was the question framed than the Tarantinian reply came to me. I could imagine Quentin's face and voice:

The Passion of the Christ is a movie, you idiot!

Ah, well, yes, of course.

The Tarantinian is always a step ahead, the Tarantinian is never taken in, the Tarantinian can experience sadomasochistic sensations as intense and various as the master's prodigious talent can contrive—and find forgiveness in the last laugh as well.

The Tarantinian way guarantees immunity for the perpetually entertained. ■

Thanks to Steve Bender for his insights.

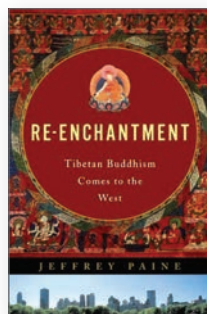
Cultural critic and philosopher Thomas de Zengotita teaches at the Dalton School and at New York University's Draper Graduate Program. He is also a contributing editor at *Harper's* magazine.

natural selection

BOOKS

FILM

OTHER MEDIA



RE-ENCHANTMENT

Tibetan Buddhism Comes to the West

by Jeffrey Paine

(W.W. Norton & Company, 2004, hardcover \$24.95)

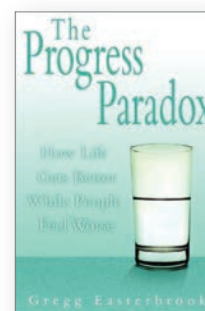
Jeffrey Paine's new book, *Re-enchantment: Tibetan Buddhism Comes to the West*, describes the meteoric rise in popularity of what might easily have become a lost and forsaken spiritual tradition. According to Paine, prior to 1968, Tibetan Buddhism was virtually unknown in the West. Sure, the Beats and Alan Watts had brought Zen into the public eye, but Tibetan Buddhism had been explored by only a handful of the most intrepid spiritual adventurers. However, that was all destined to change.

It was in 1968 that a chance encounter with the Dalai Lama's official translator ignited the heart of a Catholic monk named Thomas Merton, motivating his exploration of this mysterious tradition. Merton's subsequent writings, *The Asian Journals*, made him the first in a line of inspired individuals who literally forced this archaic tradition into the hearts and minds of the postmodern world. Lama Yeshe outlived cancer for fifteen years, traveling relentlessly across the globe and leaving 130 Tibetan Buddhist centers in his wake. Chogyam Trungpa traded his robes for tailored suits and his monastic vows for a lifestyle of worldly excess and, in the process, won the admiration of an entire generation of American hippies while simultaneously turning them on to the most profound Buddha dharma. Tenzin Palmo, a Western woman, returned from the East with death-defying tales of will and determination after spending twelve years, at times sealed in by snow, on a

solitary retreat in a Himalayan cave. And of course, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's fierce compassion in the face of exile has made him second only to Pope John Paul II as the most popular religious figure in the West.

Paine's book is sparse on social critique and philosophical insight, but it beautifully describes one of the greatest cultural migrations of the twenty-first century, showing how a ravaged ancient religious society rocketed into modern history—not through the orchestrated enactment of a grandly conceived design, but through individual human lives moved by the power of spirit and recklessly dedicated to the call of the miraculous.

Jeff Carreira



THE PROGRESS PARADOX

How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse

By Gregg Easterbrook

(Random House, New York, 2003, hardcover \$24.95)

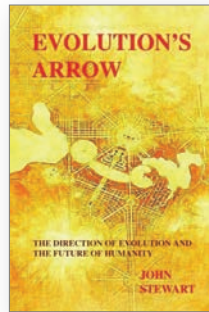
Practically everything is getting better. This is the bold assertion that starts Gregg Easterbrook's optimistic

assault on postmodern cynicism. For example: health care is better for more people on Earth than ever before; the incidence of armed conflict is declining worldwide; crime rates are dropping in urban America; smallpox, polio, and other fatal diseases have been eradicated; and one-third fewer people die of hunger than two decades ago. Wait a minute, you might be thinking: “What about global warming? What about species extinction?” But Easterbrook isn’t denying our problems—he’s simply saying that our fear-obsessed culture negatively slants our view of reality and will never give us the will, the drive, or the determination to find solutions.

The book’s relentless onslaught of good news shows that by almost every measurable standard, life today is better than it ever has been. In fact, in the developed world, the average person enjoys a standard of living that far exceeds that of any king or queen in centuries past. Yet in spite of our outrageously good fortune, Easterbrook says, we seem to be sinking more deeply into negativity and pessimism, popping Prozac to fight depression, committing suicide at escalating rates, and generally feeling despondent about the possibility of making any real difference.

Easterbrook examines many sociological and psychological reasons for this paradox, but one seems particularly vital to consider: *Hopelessness lets us off the hook*. It allows us to feel incapable of and unaccountable for meeting the tremendous challenges we do face. And he won’t let us get away with it. As the most affluent people who have ever inhabited planet Earth, he insists that we have an obligation to assume that nothing is impossible and that it’s never too late to change the world. This very intelligent and meticulously researched book isn’t offering solutions, but the shift it points to—into a higher and more optimistic context—just might be the only real solution there is.

Jeff Carreira



EVOLUTION'S ARROW

The Direction of Evolution and the Future of Humanity

by John Stewart

(The Chapman Press, Australia, 2000, paperback \$19.95)

In this remarkably synthetic and cogently argued book, evolutionary biologist John Stewart insists that wherever life emerges in the cosmos, evolution will progress in the direction of greater cooperation, complexity, and “evolvability.” Atoms, molecules, cells, organisms, societies—with each step forward, a more complex system of cooperating parts emerges. And these new systems have an ever-increasing capacity to receive and respond to information from the environment, allowing them to adapt more efficiently to prevailing conditions and evolve more quickly into future forms.

Up until now, Stewart explains, evolution has advanced without the benefit of self-reflection. Human beings have not only become conscious of the evolutionary nature of the universe but are beginning to unravel the very mechanics through which it has progressed blindly for billions of years. We have literally become the eyes through which the evolutionary process can see its own methods. And this breakthrough in consciousness, the author concludes, has unimaginable potential. By choosing to align ourselves and our cultures with the natural “arrow” of evolution—toward ever-higher levels of cooperation—humanity will vastly accelerate the progress of its own development.

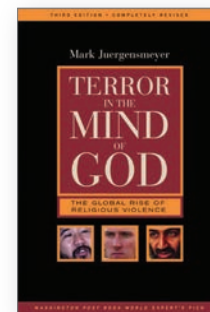
The immensity of the questions

Stewart wrestles with is breathtaking. What will humanity look like when human organization becomes as spectacularly cooperative as, for instance, the interactions between the individual cells that make up an organism? What type of management and governance will be required for the human race to achieve this extraordinary degree of organizational efficiency?

The author has a habit of repetition, which some readers may find irritating, but I was grateful for it. By the time I closed the book, his main points had become so much my own that I can trust they will not disappear as a passing enthusiasm. *Evolution's Arrow* is, quite simply, both mind-expanding and confidence-building. By inviting us to trust the deep patterns of evolution’s past, it opens the future to undreamed-of spiritual and social transformation.

Michael Dowd

Michael Dowd is an evolutionary evangelist who lectures internationally. His website is www.TheGreatStory.org



TERROR IN THE MIND OF GOD

The Global Rise of Religious Violence

by Mark Juergensmeyer

(University of California Press, 2003, paperback \$16.95)

What do Jewish extremists, Christian anti-abortion activists, the American militia movement, Sikh militants, and Islamic jihadists all have in common? Religious terrorism is the obvious

answer. But there is more to the story, and author Mark Juergensmeyer sets out to discover just how much more in his recent book *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. Through conversations with leaders and participants in each of these militant organizations, Juergensmeyer makes a convincing case that is as simple as it is profound: Each of these extremist groups is fighting the same essential battle—a war against secular society. Their ideology may be different, the details of their faith may vary widely, but each is committed to a traditional, premodern worldview, and each sees secular society as a degenerate, irredeemable expression of everything that authentic religion stands against.

Juergensmeyer is a good tour guide through this harrowing world, and he managed to speak with some of the most prominent individuals at the heart of each of these movements, such as Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, the two leaders of Hamas who were assassinated by Israeli missiles this year. He strikes a good balance between presentation and critique, reporting the stories and words of these individuals, their explanations and justifications, with plenty of context and a minimum of comment.

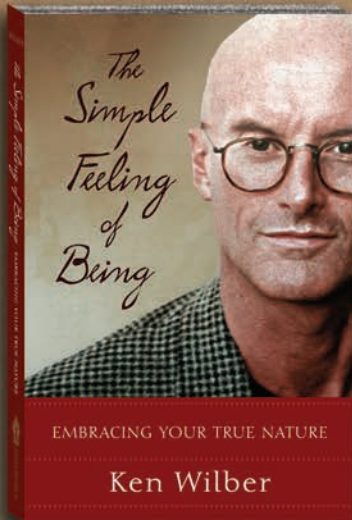
What is perhaps most disturbing and intriguing is to read some of the criticism of our society by terrorists like Mahmud Abouhalima, the 1993 bomber of the World Trade Center, who Juergensmeyer interviewed in prison. “The soul of religion is what’s missing” from Western culture, Abouhalima tells the author, and you don’t have to look too far to see that there is some truth in that statement. It is the increasing dilemma of the postmodern era: How do we transcend the superficiality and materialism that have been the long-term side effects of the freedoms of liberal society? Of course, we are all beneficiaries of the great victory of

modernity over the horrible strictures and intolerant dogmas of our premodern past. And these extremists would take us right back to that nightmarish world. But what Juergensmeyer offers through his reflections is the awareness that our society is yet incomplete, and that the victories of modernity and postmodernity, for all their tremendous importance, are not enough. We must look forward, not back, connecting with the deeper current of our human values, our cultural soul, if you will, in order to keep from succumbing to the reactionary currents that threaten us today. Maybe part of the answer to religious violence, as Juergensmeyer writes, is to acknowledge the place of religion in “elevating the spiritual and moral values of public life.” In a sense, Juergensmeyer is hinting at the need for a sort of Reformation in reverse—a societal shift that will bring the moral depth of the religious spirit into the modern world just as the Reformation brought new and radical values into the corrupt religious structures of premodernity.

The extremists featured in these pages, of course, represent the exact opposite of such a movement. But their words of hate and acts of violence can, in an unexpected way, help show us something they could never have intended—the inadequacy of present society to meet both the conditions of our globalizing world and the needs of the human soul. In the end, *Terror in the Mind of God* is a book not just about religious terrorists, but about us, and about the urgency of moving forward into the future even as the forces of reaction and rebellion try to drag us back into the worst hells of our past.

Carter Phipps

The Simple Feeling of Being




Ken Wilber

Best known for his scholarly research, Ken Wilber is also an accomplished spiritual practitioner and mystic. In order to reveal the personal wisdom of this popular author, the editors have assembled a collection of inspirational, mystical, and instructional passages drawn from Wilber's publications. These selections present the “poetic” Wilber, offering heartfelt spiritual expression and guidance born of his own meditation practice and inner experiences.

\$14.95 paperback

Order now through our Web site and receive a 20% discount

SHAMBHALA PUBLICATIONS
 Celebrating 35 years of Independent publishing
 To order, call (888) 424-2329, or visit www.shambhala.com





**collective
INTELLIGENCE**
make it **REAL**

Discover *enlightened communication*
experimental discussion groups

Join individuals around the world who are coming together to find out what it means to participate in our collective evolution. Enlightened communication is an ongoing, hands-on experiment in the evolution of consciousness, based on the Evolutionary Enlightenment teachings of Andrew Cohen, founder of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine.

www.andrewcohen.org/ec
USA 800.376.3210 Europe 44.207.288.7000



BIO EVOLUTION:

How Biotechnology Is Changing Our World

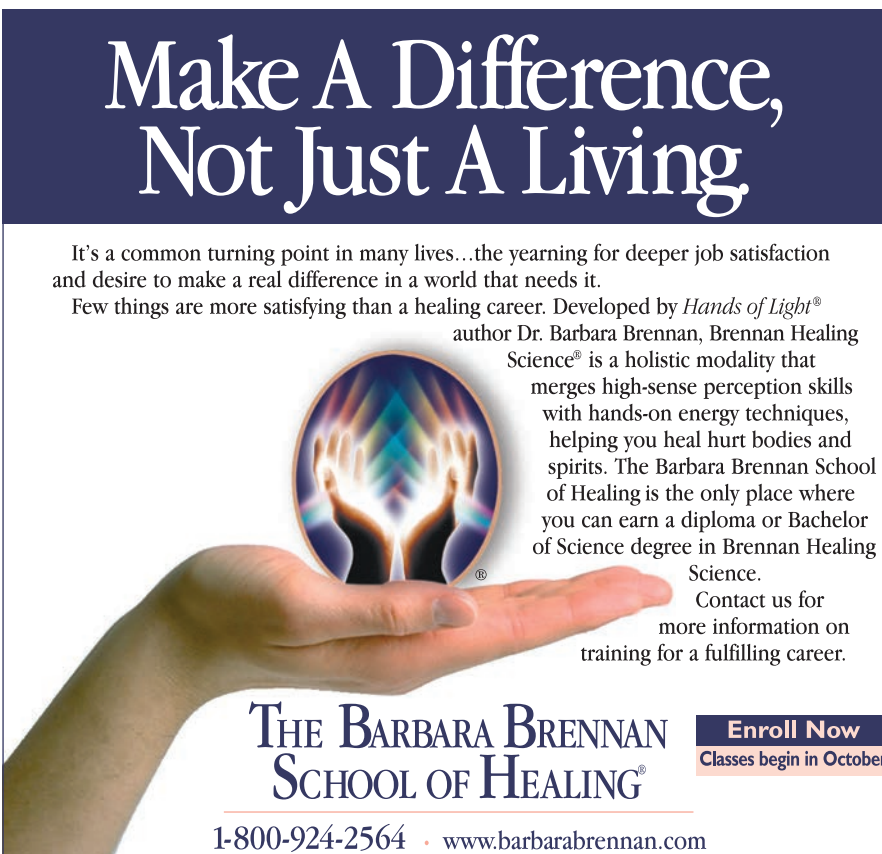
by Michael Fumento

(Encounter Books, 2003, hardcover
\$28.95)

Imagine bioengineered crops that could eliminate starvation and disease in the Developing World—and be grown on a fraction of today's land, thus returning millions of acres back to the environment. How about final cures for cancer, Alzheimer's, and every other major health scourge known to humankind? Or consider body armor made from silk three times tougher than Kevlar, spun from goat milk proteins that have been modified by spider DNA. And don't forget microorganisms that could consume toxic and even nuclear waste, quickly and cheaply rendering it harmless. Think of what it would mean to be able to grow organs from your own DNA for future transplants. What about the implications of a whole spate of technologies likely to inhibit—and reverse—the aging process? Could human beings live for two hundred years or more?

Sound absurd? Perhaps, but according to author Michael Fumento, this is just a taste of what the field of biotech has in store for us *during the next five to ten years*.

In Fumento's thoroughly researched, engagingly written, and unabashedly pro-biotech book, he explores this mind-boggling subject in layperson's language. And folks, it's a brave new world. In chapter after chapter, Fumento explores the impact of biotechnology on medicine, agriculture, hunger, and the global ecology while also examining the economic and political pressures on



**Make A Difference,
Not Just A Living**

It's a common turning point in many lives...the yearning for deeper job satisfaction and desire to make a real difference in a world that needs it.

Few things are more satisfying than a healing career. Developed by *Hands of Light*® author Dr. Barbara Brennan, Brennan Healing Science® is a holistic modality that merges high-sense perception skills with hands-on energy techniques, helping you heal hurt bodies and spirits. The Barbara Brennan School of Healing is the only place where you can earn a diploma or Bachelor of Science degree in Brennan Healing Science.

Contact us for more information on training for a fulfilling career.

**THE BARBARA BRENNAN
SCHOOL OF HEALING®**

1-800-924-2564 • www.barbarabrennan.com

Enroll Now
Classes begin in October

the field. He also goes to great pains to debunk many of the myths and controversies surrounding biotech, including the highly charged issue of embryonic stem cells. And this, of course, brings us to ethics.

While Fumento clearly states that ethical concerns must be addressed every step of the way and clarifies a number of misconceptions, it's evident that he is far more excited about the possibilities of biotech than he is concerned about its potential negative long-term consequences. In fact, in his most impassioned statements, Fumento verges on suggesting that opposition to biotech is unethical. This position is a touch ironic, to say the least, given that biotechnology has generated more ethical concerns than any other field to date. So while *Bio Evolution* is both exciting and exhilarating, as well as a great place to start an exploration of the field, it should definitely not be the only book you read on the subject.

Michael Wombacher



THE HAND OF GOD

Thoughts and Images Reflecting the Spirit of the Universe (1999)

INSIDE THE MIND OF GOD

Images and Words of Inner Space (2002)

Both edited by Michael Reagan, with introductions by Sharon Begley (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press)

"Everyone takes the limits of his own vision for the limits of the world," said

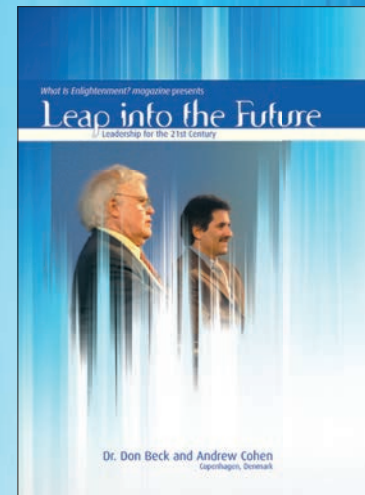
Arthur Schopenhauer. If seeing is believing, these two small-format coffee-table books will measurably expand those limits, even at a moment's glance. Pairing cutting-edge photography with provocative quotations by everyone from Albert Einstein to Annie Dillard, Herman Melville to Dr. Seuss and the Pope, they are visual and philosophical odes to the furthest reaches of scientific knowledge—and by extension, odes to the sacred.

The Hand of God is the first and better of the two. Many of its images of outer space are so spare, elegant, and overwhelming, they brought tears to my eyes. Planetary nebula NGC 3132, for example, looks like a glossy geode or divine eye floating in black space, half an incomprehensible light year in diameter. Best savored like wine or poetry, just a page or two will send your imagination reeling across the universe, there to behold both the mystery of creativity and the awesome-ness of human purpose. *Inside the Mind of God*, on the other hand, inverts its lens into the deceptively enormous landscape of molecular biology, presenting microscopic shots of neurons, hormones and viruses, cancer drugs, heart valves, and cybernetic circuits. Like a combination science lab and art show, it both educates and impresses.

Too many coffee-table books just sit there; these, like stars or microscopes, will brighten your vision of reality.

Ross Robertson

What Is Enlightenment? magazine presents



LEAP INTO THE FUTURE: LEADERSHIP FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

with Dr. Don Beck and
Andrew Cohen

Two revolutionary change-makers, dedicated to the conscious evolution of the human race, spent a day with some of Copenhagen's top business and political leaders and posed the question: Can we human beings make the radical shift necessary to save our planet and ourselves? Watch what happened on that day in this inspiring documentary as Andrew Cohen and Dr. Don Beck urge the participants to take responsibility for changing the course of our collective future.

"Andrew and I are cartographers. And before you can leap with us into the future, we've got to provide you with new maps and a new compass, with the belief that it will take these to deal with the existence problems we confront today as humans in the 21st century."

Dr. Don E. Beck

New Release on DVD \$39.95

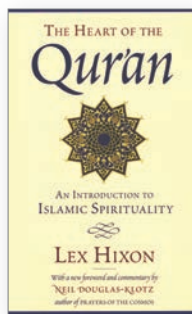
2 DVDs, approximately 120 minutes.

Includes special features on Spiral Dynamics and Evolutionary Enlightenment.

800.376.3210 or 413.637.6000

www.wie.org/leap26

View sample clip or order online



THE HEART OF THE QUR'AN
An Introduction to Islamic Spirituality

by Lex Hixon
 (Quest Books, revised edition, 2003,
 paperback \$18.95)

It's hard to imagine a more timely re-release of Lex Hixon's elegant meditation on the Qur'an, entitled *The Heart of the Qur'an*. For most Westerners, our limited interest in this classic religious pillar has unfortunately sprung from the arid soil of escalating tensions between premodern Islamic culture and the postmodern West—not from the fertile loam of spiritual aspiration. That is why we are fortunate to have such a heartfelt rendering from a Westerner like Hixon, who was steeped in the mystical ways of Islam. Before his death in 1995, he was not only an ordained Sufi sheikh but also an accomplished student of many great mystical traditions, including Vajrayana Buddhism, Advaita Vedanta, Soto Zen, and Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

In fact, an essential part of the journey into *The Heart of the Qur'an* is the mysterious and captivating story of Hixon's personal experience with Islam, described in the opening chapters of the book. This otherworldly introduction—filled with dreamlike visions, spiritual masters, and holy pilgrimages—flows seamlessly through meditative and poetic prose into a selection of passages from the holy text itself. Hixon presents the spirit of the Qur'an through passages that keep returning our attention to Allah, the omnipotent source of the universe speaking through his chosen prophet, Muhammad. Through metaphors of fertility and earthen bounty, Allah's all-generous and all-encompassing nature

is conveyed in images and values clearly suited to the agrarian cultures of the time. But nowhere is the affirming spirit of Allah more profoundly expressed than in the passages about the hereafter, where even hell is but one stop on the soul's imminent journey home.

All the while, the simple cadence and rhythm of Hixon's language bring the reader into a mood of spiritual readiness, transmitting a deep and vibrant peace. Indeed, you can read *The Heart of the Qur'an* as a cultural artifact or for religious edification, but I recommend it for the hidden depths that reward those who are sincerely interested, like Lex Hixon himself, in the awesome mystery and rich meaning of life.

Morgan Dix



TRANSCENDENT SEX
When Lovemaking Opens the Veil

by Jenny Wade, Ph.D.
 (Paraview Pocket Books, 2004, paperback \$14.00)

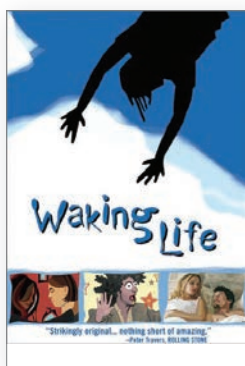
Imagine dimming the lights, turning your cell phone off, and enticing your partner into bed for an evening of lovemaking, only to find yourself, while wrapped in your lover's embrace, suddenly overwhelmed by an utterly inexpressible, ecstatically blissful experience of divine communion with the source of creation itself—an experience in which orgasm becomes not just irrelevant but even an irritating distraction. Based on the narratives of ninety-one people interviewed by transpersonal psychologist Dr. Jenny

Wade, *Transcendent Sex* sets out to demonstrate that these kinds of powerful and potentially transformative experiences not only are quite common but are in fact “happening every day behind closed doors with people you know, people without any special sexual or spiritual training—people like you.”

As one participant described, “I [broke] apart, [fell] into the Light . . . merged into the fires of God like a planet plunging into the furnace of the sun. . . .” Experiences like these show that sex can be a portal to a numinous world that is, Wade concludes, more ubiquitous and readily available to us than we might imagine. It is a world that exists beyond the delimited realms of space and time, in which past lives and future destiny can be revealed, time warps, magical connections with plants and animals can be perceived, and union with the Divine is made manifest. And this world can be revealed spontaneously through sex, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, personal history, religious orientation, or sexual mechanics. This is not about tantra.

“At that moment,” one woman recalled, “the universe was revealing itself, and all the secrets were there. . . . So we're all-knowing. We're all-experience. We're the universe. . . . We are All That Is. All That Is.” It's no wonder that Wade compares transcendent sex to near-death experiences, which are similarly unpremeditated and also often irrevocably transform a person's life. Thus, she concludes that transcendent sex “can become a vehicle for a grace that transfigures all of the human condition, [a] nexus of Spirit and flesh [which] illuminates and sanctifies all creation.” And what spiritually inclined person wouldn't want to pursue *that*? But can one *consciously* cultivate these kinds of experiences? Wade isn't so sure. Nonetheless, the dozens of vividly compelling, consciousness-shifting events she conveys are indeed awe-inspiring.

Jessica Roemischer



WAKING LIFE

Directed by Richard Linklater
(Twentieth Century Fox Home Video, video and DVD formats, 2002)

Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* just might be the most hypnotically perceptive film ever made. Perceptive because it delves into postmodern philosophy, culture, and consciousness without getting lost in it. Doubly perceptive because it pioneers a form of animation that deepens that investigation as surrealism deepened rationalism in the early decades of twentieth-century Europe. That animation, traced on top of live footage as though layering a fourth, slightly-out-of-focus dimension over the usual three, induces a reverie something like walking through an endless museum of living paintings. And through it all, as he poses the biggest questions of human purpose and human destiny, Linklater's most spellbinding genius is to leave them so vividly unanswered.

The loose narrative of his self-described "cinematic fever-dream" involves a nameless young man (Wiley Wiggins) caught in a curious predicament: he's dreaming and unable to wake himself. Unfolding through a kaleidoscopic sequence of encounters with a host of minor characters whose extraordinary philosophies guide him progressively toward self-awareness, his strange voyage is a hymn to the unknown and an ode to curiosity. "Creation seems to come out of imperfection," one woman says, leaning intently forward. "It seems to come out of a striving and a frustration." "Throughout history," muses a

novelist, "attempts have been made to contain those experiences which happen at the edge, at the limit, where the mind is vulnerable." A wild-haired drifter on a bridge remarks: "Our eyesight is here as a test to see if we can see beyond it."

Via physics, reincarnation, free will, biology, collective memory, art and alienation, lucid dreaming and enlightenment, Linklater threads together a ceaseless plea for authenticity. "This movie was very consciously trying to find the connective tissue, the connective ideas," he says on the DVD commentary (also highly recommended). And it fulfills that endeavor with such creative intelligence, it has to be seen to be believed. If you have any doubt that a film can be "a record of God, or of the face of God, or of the ever-changing face of God," as one character proposes, watch *Waking Life*. Just be ready to join Wiggins in free fall, helplessly involved, "absorbed by eternity."

Ross Robertson



EMPATHY

Written and directed by Amie Siegel
(First Run/Icarus Films, 2003, www.empathythemovie.com)

In recent years psychoanalysis seems to have fallen out of step with popular culture. Of course there was *Analyze This* or *That*, and there's *The Sopranos'* weekly exchange between Tony and

Dr. Jennifer Melfi, but that's not saying much. How surprising then to see *Empathy*, a masterpiece of a film that approaches psychoanalysis with total originality and creative dynamism.

Directed by twenty-nine-year-old video installation artist Amie Siegel, the film explores the "tricky intimacy," as Siegel puts it, between psychoanalyst and patient. Watching *Empathy* is a truly multidimensional experience. The film breaks with convention at every turn, thrusting us from the genres of "documentary" to "movie" to "interview" to "reality" in deeply uncomfortable yet evocative ways. Anchoring the film are interviews with three fifty-something white male psychoanalysts, who, provoked by Siegel's penetrating questions, begin to candidly deconstruct their relationships with their patients, revealing an endearing vulnerability. When asked how therapy is different from prostitution, for example, one replies wryly, "Well . . . I guess you get to know each other better." We're also shown the actual screen tests of the painfully self-conscious actresses who auditioned for the film's central role of thirty-eight-year-old Lia Graf. In the film, Lia makes a living as a voice-over artist and suffers from depression. Although we see her day-to-day life, it is her sessions with a real-life psychoanalyst (though he is "acting" for the movie) that will captivate and surprise you. Lia is played by Gigi Buffington, who we see in the screen tests as herself and also enacting a tongue-in-cheek TV interview about being a famous actress (which, obviously, she is not). Numerous interwoven plotlines such as these, indiscriminately fact and fiction, embellish each other in surreal and brilliant ways. By the end, you'll realize that *Empathy* isn't a puzzle that's meant to be solved but an experience intended to literally expand our minds.

How Siegel manages to accomplish this expansion is truly wonderful: by

shaking us out of our habitual movie-watching modes, she enables us to witness the tenuous boundaries between truth and artifice, empathy and self-interest—to trespass into the dangerous territory of human relationships and psychology in ways we wouldn't normally do. The movie actually provokes our curiosity, and the payoff for our interest is the pleasure of genuine revelation—the joy of watching a rare original unfold in front of our eyes. Interestingly enough, some critics have claimed that the film is stuck in the postmodern obsession with “style” and “surface” and so isn't very original at all. This is an unfortunate conclusion to draw, for Siegel actually proves that postmodern art can do more than chase its own intellectual tail. That in fact, while still embracing the wildly creative innovations that have defined our present era, beneath all the style and surface, there can exist real heart. The best surprise of *Empathy* is that its heart is so big.

Maura R. O'Connor



KUMBH MELA

Shortcut to Nirvana

Produced and directed by Maurizio Benazzo and Nick Day
(Mela Films, in theaters nationwide September 2004)

Take seventy million pilgrims, two holy rivers, and more gurus, fakirs, swamis, and yogis than you knew existed. Add in the rich color, swirling dust clouds,

countless contradictions, and irrepressible humanity of the world's most complex culture. Condense it down to eighty-five minutes of video footage, set it all to an alternately upbeat and haunting soundtrack, and you've got *Kumbh Mela: Shortcut to Nirvana*, the just-released documentary from filmmakers Maurizio Benazzo and Nick Day.

Chronicling “the greatest gathering of people in the history of humanity”—the 2001 Maha Kumbh Mela in Allahabad—this award-winning film follows the adventures of a small group of young Westerners and their recently befriended interpreter, Swami Krishnanand, as they encounter the beauty, mystery, and mayhem of India through the lens of its most ancient and revered religious festival. While the comments of the Westerners themselves do little to illuminate the subject matter, and the lack of a single narrative voice gives the film a somewhat disjointed feel, the filmmakers have nonetheless managed to create a delightful and surprisingly full portrait of this world sliced out of time.

Indeed, at an event so massive and multifaceted, with so much to distract the camera's eye, Benazzo and Day show an impressive commitment to capturing breadth without sacrificing depth. The film's backbone is a series of encounters with the holy men and women whose living realization of the divine has infused the Hindu tradition with its mystery and vibrancy since time immemorial. Orange-clad swamis, like Divine Mother Purna Praghnataji, remind us of the timeless call to leave the world behind: “If you want to achieve that supreme reality, that supreme consciousness, and you are not ready to pay for it, not ready to renounce anything, then how can you expect to achieve it?” Devraha Hans Baba, reputed to have transformed the lives of thousands simply by looking at them, chants hypnotically through a loudspeaker as a young sari-clad woman whirls in ecstatic trance, ultimately col-

lapsing unconscious on the ground before him. Kali Baba, an African Masai shaman-turned-sadhu, issues a fervent call to see through all duality to the Self that was never born and will never die. Even the Dalai Lama makes an appearance to pay homage to the great tradition that gave birth to his own and to call for religious harmony beyond doctrinal differences.

And then, of course, there are the ascetics. At the camp of airforce-pilot-turned-yogi Pilot Baba, we witness the revered master's top disciple emerge gracefully from a closed pit where she has been immersed in *samadhi* [meditative absorption] for three days. Next, we meet Bharti Urdhvat, a fakir who has been holding his left arm stretched overhead for twenty years in hope of reaching enlightenment. Then there is Avadhoot Baba, who not only walks on sandals made of upturned nails but sits atop a throne of heated spear points suspended over an open fire.

Weaving together this string of encounters is a loosely assembled collage of video footage and penetrating still photography, illuminating the kaleidoscopic life of the festival—from the hundreds of street theaters that pop up every night to the vendors and fair stalls that line the paths by day. Yet, the countless religious gatherings large and small remind us that, despite its sometimes carnival-like atmosphere, this is a festival devoted to God. The film reaches its crescendo, as does the festival itself, on Mauni Amavasya, the main bathing day. As thousands of naked, ash-smeared naga babas storm the holy Ganges, “purifying the water” for the twenty million pilgrims who will follow, any doubts one might have had as to whether Hinduism will survive modernity are washed away like the sins of the faithful.

Craig Hamilton

a 21st century love story part III

"Brooklyn native Ella Paris and Bay Area surfer Evan McAllister's intimate email chronicle, "A 21st Century Love Story," is nothing less than a vision of metaphysical nonpareil, in which heaven and hell, and dynamic and passive forces, are powerfully juxtaposed. The second installment held us rapt, as Ella's father lost his battle with cancer, while Evan made his final desperate attempts to explain to her that life is but a dream. Ending with a supremely cathartic phone conversation in which Ella confronted Evan with his avoidance of emotional intimacy—revealing the private passions of an entire generation—readers were left breathless and aching for more."

—The San Mateo Register

From: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>
To: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>
Date: Tue, 02 Mar 2004 23:48:02 (EST)
Subject: E+E

Evan, this is it. We can't afford to keep messing around. It's been a week since we spoke. Seven long days, and your silence is louder than words. In fact, it's deafening. It's as if you're a small toddler who merely covers his eyes with his fingers and thinks everyone else can't see him. I've probably done wrong, thinking if I pushed a little you'd fall right into love with me. My phone call, my plan, foiled by the cold shoulder. I can see a parallel universe when I look to the left, one where we are just good friends,

laughing, exchanging books, growing up, growing separate but always having fond memories, and it looks pretty nice. But if you could stand in my shoes you'd see that's just not possible, not unless you wanted to choke on love trying to stifle it. I'm shaking like a leaf writing this, overcome I suppose by the thought you'll eventually be seeing these words. Oh, by the way--and I've always wanted to say this--by the time you read this I'll be gone. Funny enough, this past week has revealed the irrelevance of love at the same time that it proved how much I really love you. I can see that no matter how bad it is, no matter how deadly quiet, I've managed. I live on. Even perhaps, emerging fully intact, with the amazing ability to move forward. So that's what I'm doing. Although I have a return ticket three months from now I don't actually plan on using it. I see my travels as an authentic beginning, a rebirth if you like, and the end is so far in the distance I can't tell what it will look like, or when it will be. I'm sorry that it all fell apart like this. I feel largely responsible.

all of my heart, Ella Paris

From: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>
To: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>
Date: Wed, 03 Mar 2004 11:38:27 (PST)
Subject: Re: E+E

okay, i'm kind of in shock at the moment, which i guess was your intent. "seven long days" of silence leads to you calling me a toddler, pouring your heart out to me, professing your love, and *leaving* (where??)--all at once? did you think to ASK me why i haven't contacted you since we spoke last week? no? well, later that day my sister mackenzie came home from school

1c+

crying and told my mom she was pregnant. and not only that, but that she is thinking of having an abortion. as you know, my mom is as christian as they come, so you can just guess what her reaction to all this has been. SO...i've had a lot of shit to deal with here on the homefront, and i'm sorry i didn't let you know what's up. okay? i'm sorry if this comes across as mean or angry, but i'm just a little upset by your letter.

ella, if you really do feel this way about me, which totally blows my mind, because you've never said anything like that before, why didn't you ever say so? i can't figure you out! why didn't you say any of this when we were on the phone last week? you were twisting me in knots, wanting me to break up with courtney, then telling me that i had to figure out why i should... i don't know. i mean, it makes sense now that you've just been straight with me and said it. i guess i was just being dense and oblivious as usual. but now what? you love me?? but you've gone away traveling? wow. how do you think that makes someone feel? we're old enough to be able to relate to each other rationally, right?

wherever you've gone, you must have email access somehow, so please write back or call me. i've been planning to break up with courtney when i see her tomorrow, which should make you happy. believe it or not, she's even more confusing than you! dude, i can't deal with all this right now.

evan

From: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>
To: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>
Date: Thu, 11 Mar 2004 12:02:08 (EST)
Subject: india

I'm sitting in a smoky internet cafe with the roar of people and honking cars all around me. I've only been in New Delhi for a week, and already everything is changed and different, no, different is an understatement. I could feel it the moment I walked down the airplane steps onto the tarmac, and this *alien* air hit my skin, I've never smelled or inhaled anything like it before. For the past seven days I've been mentally discombobulated trying to navigate the crowded streets, I'm terrified by the fact that I'm on my own, and for much of the time jet lag has coated everything in a detached fuzziness, yet I'm managing to fall fast in love with the relentless barrage of color, of smell, of sound, with the ferocious reality of life here. I don't know if I'm making much sense but I'm writing fast for fear this computer will crash on me as it already has, twice. (Maybe it's related to the open sewer located a couple of feet away from the cafe's only electrical socket. Just a guess.)

Let me just say that looking at your email from this side of the world is an interesting experience indeed and I'm sorry I didn't tell you that I was coming here. I really didn't think you cared since you never called me after everything that happened. I was sure we had come to the end of the plot, and now I see that actually my penchant for melodrama and grand proclamations clouded the reality of the situation.

Jesus! I wish you could see how Big everything is here, larger than Life, or at least any life I've ever known...In a couple of days I'm going to UNICEF headquarters to get my field assignment. I've been waiting my whole life for an adventure, a really perilous one--with danger and high stakes and everything, but this is more than I could have imagined from the comforts and confines of Brooklyn. I mean I've always said I wanted to know who Ella Paris really is, but now

epiphany

the possibility seems so real, like it could happen at any moment. I know you know what I'm talking about...that's why we're friends and all. I'm going to walk back to my hotel before it gets too late. Tell Mackenzie I'm thinking of her, and I hope you are doing ok. Ella

p.s. Here is God's recipe for creating the air in India, he IM'd it to me.

Ingredients:


- 1 part sweetness of spice and marigolds
- 1 part parched dirt
- 1 part essence of human rankness

Directions:

1. infuse ingredients relentlessly with heat
2. pour into cocktail mixer
3. shake for 5,000 years.

From: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>
To: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>
Date: Sat, 13 Mar 2004 2:24:15 (PST)
Subject: a perfect day for bananafish

INDIA?! whoa. you sure know how to beat a guy when he's down! dude, you're tromping around humankind's spiritual homeland without ME? couldn't you have gone to africa or siberia or someplace, like you were talking about? i mean, wow--india, girl!! i actually thought you were making it up at first, but i called your house and your mom confirmed that, yes indeed, you weren't just messing with me. sorry i doubted you, but it is kind of unexpected. you must be sitting in an indian internet cafe right now reading this, huh? that's so cool. right now i'm sitting here staring at the sea in freakin' santa cruz. it's a bright, cheery, sun-shiny day. and as empty as the cool, non-spicy breeze blowing through my hair.



i came down here this week to try to help my sister, but that only lasted two days before my parents got completely pissed and kicked me out (as usual). they had tried bringing their fucking church friends home to "talk" to mackenzie, but i intervened, yelling at them to mind their own damn business, etc.--and even surprised myself by how angry i got. it was pretty wild, actually. since then i've been hanging with my bud kevin and feeling pretty useless. he just returned from a tour of duty or something with this anti-whaling group he's been involved with for a while, called the sea shepherds. i guess you probably know about them. i asked him to tell me about it last night, and it seems very cool. unlike most of these kinds of activist groups, they actually seem to be *effective*--they've like rammed into and blown up whaling ships and crazy shit like that. but now that kevin's back on shore he's all excited about going up to seattle in a few weeks to celebrate kurt cobain's death/suicide/murder. he wants to re-form the band, too, just for the occasion--so we can play nirvana covers for



a morose, sobbing audience of kids and Gen-X adults who can't let go of the distant past. i told him nope, sorry, jinxed samurai is dead and staying that way. and covering nirvana is sacrilege, besides. he didn't take that very well. but at least he's still letting me stay at his place.

god, you're so lucky, el. you never mentioned even *wanting* to go to india. i guess there are lots of interesting things you failed to mention to me. what revelation will you bestow upon me next?

hmm. i'm feeling mildly suicidal. the sun will do that to ya. you know what? after i send this, i am going to start walking along the beach and not let myself stop until i figure out what the hell i'm going to do with my life. or until i get hungry or something. but first i want to say thank you, and apologize for the way i responded to you earlier. your declaration of love was actually very touching and sweet (except for that part about you leaving).

so are you going to see any gurus while you're on your "field assignment"? are there buddha statues around? do you have a camera? you must be having an amazing time, right??

much love,
evan

From: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>
To: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>
Date: Sat, 20 Mar 2004 06:06:58 (EST)
Subject: Re: a perfect day for bananafish

Dear Evan,

Amazing isn't really the word for it...I'm still in Delhi but since I last wrote you my plans have all gone to hell. I spent four hours waiting for the field coordinator at UNICEF on Monday and then she didn't even know who I was or have my name on file. When it finally got cleared up I discovered that my job for the next four months was going to be working in the main offices in Delhi, as an "administrative assistant." I'm so angry--I didn't come here just to make photocopies! I came to be involved and now I just feel like a spectator. It's not easy to be in this place--it's so heartbreaking to just walk outside my hotel and into the street when there is so much poverty and filth right there and I literally don't have a vocabulary to make sense of it all or even describe it to you.

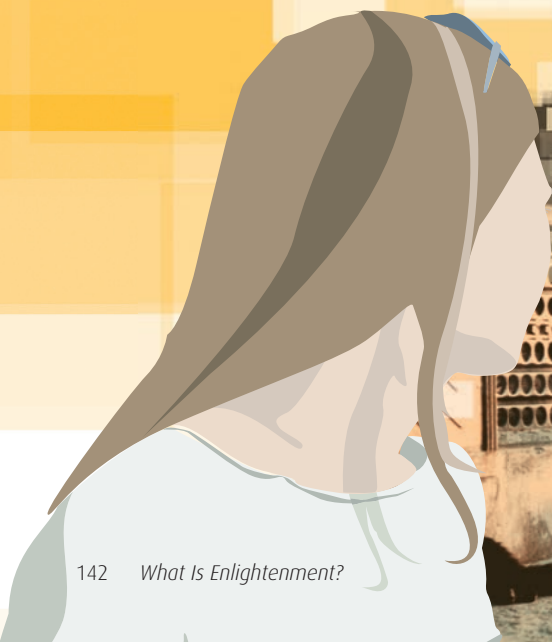
Mostly all I've been doing is waking up and sitting in the cafe below my hotel room where I stay until dusk drinking cup of tea after cup of tea, and sweating in this hazy chaos. You won't believe it but I've picked up the habit of smoking these thin little Indian cigarettes called bidis and they are becoming

How

an indispensable part of my days. Their sweet smell follows me to sleep at night hiding out under my fingernails. Probably the most shocking thing I've seen are the lepers. They're scattered around the city, moaning and crying for you to give them some rupees. Many of them have lost various body parts. They wrap their stumps in rags, and often their skin is cracking so there is literally blood soaking through. It's such a gruesome sight--I wonder if Peter Jackson came to Delhi before he made *Dead Alive*. On the same miserable note, yesterday I saw a car hit a rickshaw from behind and the poor driver was thrown and died. In the midst of all this horror, there are these cows that create massive traffic jams. Eventually this kind of *cow task force* shows up with a pick-up truck and these men get out and coax the cow up into the back using food and ropes. I'm told they are trying to remove all 36,000 holy bovines from the city into the country by the end of 2004. My guess is the cows will come back.

You know, I read this book a couple months ago where the author said one of the "peculiar" effects of India was the almost violent mood

swings it provokes in its Western visitors, a sort of dance between frustration and exhilaration and it's completely true. On the one hand I've never felt more frightened and lonely in my entire life. Yet there are these strange moments at the café when I'm overwhelmed by something indescribable. Like often I'll "come to" in my chair and just a couple of minutes will have gone by in what seemed like a few hours. I don't know what exactly it is but I'm left with a feeling of utter gladness to simply be alive, and with it there is a sense of peace, like nothing I've ever experienced. Who would have thought emotions such as these were possible in the midst of so much chaos and insanity? I think it's a taste of the way things are here, a taste of a pervasive mystery that lurks under every experience, in every moment. Evan, I wish I could see you for just a moment so I could share all this with you. catch a sweet wave for me, Ella



st

From: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>
To: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>
Date: Mon, 22 Mar 2004 17:31:00 (PST)
Subject: ecco and narcissus

dear ella,

india sounds intense! lepers?! jesus. no wonder the buddha bailed on his kingdom like he did, and bodhidharma ditched the whole country. that really sucks about the unicef job. i hadn't even heard of them before--except maybe on the side of change-collecting cans at safeway, i think. but that could've been a really great gig, helping kids like that. i'm sure something will turn up for you, though. how could it not? you're ecco paris, the girl who talks to dolphins!

i keep rereading your description of the kind of brief, spontaneous meditative states you've been finding yourself in. zen master hakuin said that "meditation in the midst of action is a billion times superior to meditation in stillness." maybe what you're experiencing there is part of what he was pointing to--the still point of the turning world. do you really feel this sense of "mystery" all the time there? that sounds amazing. i've been researching india a ton this week, reading a couple of books about it, checking out pictures online, etc. did

you ever see that movie bill murray did after ghostbusters called "the razor's edge" (based on a novel from the 40s)? i rented it the other night. it doesn't have india in it much, but you get some sense of it. in the movie, he returns from the first world war in the throes of existential angst, seeking the meaning of it all. so he ends up going to tibet, where he has some kind of satori experience before deciding to return to the world and pursue his lost love. i won't spoil the end for you, but it's a damn good movie, with a lot of depth and humanity. it really resonated with me--especially the conflict that plays out towards the end, with a "desires of the flesh vs. desires of the spirit" kind of theme. this is actually something i've been thinking about a lot lately, like almost incessantly. maybe i should just explain. i know you haven't asked, but i admit i'm selfish enough to imagine you've been wondering... and i think the main reason i haven't jumped up



to buy a plane ticket and come to join you is that i'm afraid if i do that, i'll be sort of instantly *consumed* by india--like i'll find a guru or something and renounce women forever so i can pursue enlightenment wholeheartedly, with no distractions. and that would be awesome, in a way. except that i want to have my cake and eat it too, to put it crudely. you know what i mean? i think i'm afraid that if i came there, i would find you but then lose you forever, compelled by a longing deeper and stronger than desire. but hey, maybe i'm just thinking about this all wrong. do you know the story of krishna and radha? ;)

let me know what's going on with you when you get a chance, alright? i hope you're okay.

love,
evan

From: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>
To: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>
Date: Tue, 23 Mar 2004 09:42:08 (EST)
Subject: sands of time

Dear Evan,

It's so good to get your letter--you know, I'm not sure if any one of us really knows *what* to do, but I think we all know that *something* has to be done. Right? I mean, we can't just sit on the metaphorical beach (in your case literal, hahaha) our whole lives.

Allow me to defer to Zooey Glass in this matter, one of the greatest mystics to grace the pages of 20th century literature. It happens to be the only book I'm carrying around with me here.

"The only thing you can do now, the only *religious* thing you can do, is *act*. Act for God, if you want to...You'd better get busy, though, buddy. The goddam *sands* run out on you every time you turn around. I know what I'm talking

about. You're lucky if you get time to sneeze in this goddam phenomenal world."

I met some crazy Israelis who are dragging me on the train tomorrow to a place called Goa. They tell me they have these amazing all-night raves there. India rules.

love, Ella

From: "Evan McAllister" <glassyzen@yahoo.com>
To: "Ella Paris" <ellaparis@hotmail.com>
Date: Sun, 28 Mar 2004 21:46:04 (PST)
Subject: right action

dear ella,

thanks for your letter. that quote is great. it's funny--just a month ago i probably would've argued against your insistence that "something has to be done." but now i think my resistance to that idea has less to do with my mystical justifications for "doing nothing" and more to do with my own laziness. i don't know. i have to think about all this.

i'm writing you from the stanford psychiatric ward. i had to swing the security guard a pack of lucky strikes to let me use this computer. don't worry about me though. everything's going to be alright. thanks so much for what you wrote. i'll write again when i can.

miss you,
evan

TO BE CONTINUED . . .

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

who could argue that if anyone taught us about evolution, it was the Beatles? Churning out album after album while trying new and innovative styles, instruments, techniques . . . they responded to the times authentically. No wonder future generations like mine could appreciate their trajectory with utter awe and wonder even years after *Let it Be* and *Abbey Road*. This article touched on something that, back in those days, would never have been seen as “evolutionary” and certainly never spiritual. Now we know differently.

Jill Uchiyama
Framingham, MA

WHERE ARE ALL THE WOMEN?

I received my first issue of *WIE* two days ago. I began reading feverishly. So much great stuff by such smart people. But then I slowed down. I turned off in some way. I began flipping through the rest of the pages, looking for something more, something to balance what is there.

The content of this issue is rich, dense, supremely important. But where is the voice of women? All the main articles are written by men. Certainly, enlightenment is beyond gender and I am in no way discounting the brilliance of the content. But there is a sensibility, a point of view offered by women which will offer the delivery of content in a richer, more textured voice.

The strong men’s perspective in tandem with a strong perspective of women will help this important journal reach its wider, rightful audience. I look forward to future issues.

Cecilia deWolf
via email

TO GARRISON’S DEFENSE

I want to write in defense of Jim Garrison’s article in *WIE* Issue 24 and his related book, *America as Empire*. I urge his critics to take a second look.

For most of the year, I worked in one of the world’s largest green and peace-directed organizations as we campaigned against the manner, illegal, in which the United States (primarily) went to war in Iraq. During the past year, my peaceful activities included nonviolently impeding the supply of American war materials to the Gulf region; for these activities in March of last year I was briefly deported from Europe. (I’m a New Zealander living in Germany.)

Contrary to the flood of critical letters in the last issue of the magazine, Garrison reveals a bridge across the so-called “Atlantic divide” by placing his analysis of current realities within a historical context that is free of the deepening polarizations so prevalent at this time. He compellingly describes the United States as just one empire among so many others that have risen, fallen prey to the dangers of absolute power, and now remain only in the pages of little-known textbooks.

While many of us are still unwilling to acknowledge the conclusive fact of American empire—in all its multiple facets, both negative and positive—Garrison demonstrates that doing so supports better recognition of the urgent global challenges and opportunities our planet now faces. As just one example, imagine the worldwide response if the Bush administration had assumed leadership in tackling climate change?

The question is *not* whether the United States is functioning as an empire; it most clearly is. Rather, Garrison asks us whether we can engage with this superpower creatively and not from polarized fear. Can we, whether

American citizens or global citizens, rise to Garrison’s challenge?

Mo Riddiford
Germany

SPIRITUALITY 101

I must tell you that I have grown more and more unhappy with every issue and the changes you have been making to both the *WIE* format and theme over the past year or so. All this focus on “evolution” and the “future” are enough to make Ramana roll over in his grave.

Let’s say for the sake of argument that the world, or indeed the entire universe, was to disappear tomorrow? What would it mean? Who would know? Who would care? The stark reality is that it would ultimately be meaningless. There is no meaning to Life. Life just *is*. Everything is an expression of the divine. Nothing is left out. Spirituality 101. All is One. And All means All. This may sound harsh but the truth *is* sometimes harsh.

And what’s all this about the “future?” The future does not exist. The past does not exist. The timeless present is all that is. Spirituality 101 again. Look it up. The truly important questions are: Who am I? What do I take myself to be? The earnest aspirant who takes this inquiry seriously will realize his or her true nature in the timeless present, not in some imaginary future. For godsakes, we might as well start espousing Heaven! Leave the future to the futurists; and Heaven on Earth to whoever believes in that fluff. Get back to the fundamentals of what made *WIE* such an interesting and provocative magazine in the first place. Or not . . .

Brian Haley
via email



Enlightenment for the 21st Century

The Higher WE

by Andrew Cohen

EGO IS A VERY BIG PROBLEM. In fact, ego is the *only* problem. For the next stage of human development, for the evolution of consciousness, for the evolution of enlightenment itself, ego is the only problem. And I think we may have forgotten what a mighty adversary to higher development ego actually is. But that's understandable. In the narrow, personal context in which most of us live, ego is the fundamental emotional and psychological locus with which we are identified.

What is ego? Ego is the deeply felt sense of being separate and superior. Indeed, it is an emotional and psychological *compulsion* to see and feel the self as being separate from and superior to the other, the world, and the whole universe. It is that locus point where the sense of individuality is also a sense of alienation, where the experience of autonomy is also one of isolation, and where even the experience of freedom is always shadowed by a deeper sense at the core of our being, by a sense of bondage, limitation, and hopelessness.

In the postmodern era, from a developmental perspective, the ego has reached its apex as the individuated self-sense. Never in recorded history have so many attained such a high level of individuation. The separate self-sense, no longer embedded in survival consciousness, tribal consciousness, religious tradition, or even impassioned nationalism, has, for many, finally begun to liberate itself from its social, or collective, moorings. From a vast evolutionary perspective, this is indeed a profound achievement. But the only problem is that this same self-sense has now become an island unto itself. For many of us, individuation is the end of

the developmental process. And as a result, most of us at the leading edge are stuck at this very high level of development—this extreme individuation—and *are largely oblivious to it*.

Since the cultural revolution that began in the 1960s, there has been nothing less than an explosion of interest in the evolution of consciousness. Eastern spirituality met Western psychology, and a plethora of old and new ways, paths, techniques, and therapies for transformation has emerged. Many have taken root and others continue to develop. In this context, the understanding that ego, or separateness, is the root cause of all unwarranted suffering and misery, individual and collective, is almost a truism. But do we *really* recognize the fact that ego is the root cause of all unwarranted suffering and misery? I don't think so.

In fact, the more we evolve in our understanding of the human condition and awaken to our potential for freedom, the more we hear the message that ego actually doesn't have to be a problem at all. The common refrain from many leading voices in the East-meets-West consciousness revolution is "the more you fight against ego, the more power you give it" or "the more effort you make to transcend ego, the stronger is the identification with the very thing you want to transcend." Generally, we are told that the path beyond ego is through accepting it, or through what's called self-acceptance: acceptance of who we are, of how we are, of what *is*, et cetera. We stop resisting the truth of who we are, and it is in this profound acceptance, which *includes the ego*, that transformation will occur.

There is no doubt that the practice of self-acceptance will help us feel better about who we *already* are . . . but whether that approach will actually enable us to *evolve* to a higher level of consciousness and a more profound engagement with the

continued on page 151



The Higher WE



continued from page 152

life process is another story altogether. Ironically, I think a big part of our collective predicament at this unique time in history lies in the very nature of the high level of development we have reached. Our profound degree of individuation, or narcissism, existing within a worldview that cannot perceive anything higher than the postmodern ego itself, makes it very difficult to see how extreme our identification with ego actually is. And in such an environment, even the experience of higher states of consciousness won't necessarily illuminate our predicament.

I believe that for most of us, the only solution to this evolutionary cul-de-sac, the only way to our own higher development, lies in the context of *human relationship*, relationship based upon a breakthrough to a *shared* experience and recognition of consciousness beyond ego. Of course, consciousness beyond ego always means the state of enlightenment itself. So what I'm referring to is the shared experience and recognition of enlightened consciousness, where the shadow of ego, or separate self-sense, is entirely absent. In this experience of intersubjective consciousness beyond ego, a momentous leap occurs. It is a leap from *I* to *We*, from extreme individuation to a living context of intersubjective nonduality—a higher *We* consciousness in which all parties experience simultaneously their own individual and collective transparency while remaining fully and completely *themselves*.

In this higher *We* consciousness, we recognize, perhaps for the first time, why ego *is* the only problem, the only obstacle to the fulfillment of our imminent evolutionary potential. In a living context of intersubjective nonduality, ego stands out like an unwelcome intruder—a self-centered presence inherently destructive to a unified field of awakened consciousness. From our current state of extreme individuation, or narcissism, the leap to the higher *We* is the only logical next step for us to take. But for this critical leap to become an actual, permanent stage of

development, and not just a temporary state, nothing less than a heroic willingness to transcend ego *for real* must be cultivated. In truth, most of us are happy to experience the ecstatic intoxication of ego-transcendence as a brief vacation from the ordinary, from what the Buddha called *samsara*. But few are willing to pay the price to let go of ego once and for all and forever so that what may have begun as a brief vacation becomes one from which there is no return—*nirvana*.

The definition of ego in evolutionary terms is *inertia*. In an evolutionary context, in the leap from extreme individuation to the shared experience of consciousness beyond ego, inertia is expressed as an irrational refusal to change, to let go, to *evolve*. In all but the extraordinary individual, the forces of inertia are usually profound and often intractable. And because of this, it almost *always* requires a cataclysmic crisis and a personal reckoning of ultimate proportions to shake the individual's consciousness free from its hypnotic enslavement to the fears and desires of ego.

As long as the fears and desires of the ego remain the fundamental locus of our attention and the impulse to evolve is but a faint murmur in the background of awareness, nothing less than overwhelming force will bring the ego to its knees. The force of what? *The force of impersonal absolute love that sees no other and recognizes only itself*. In that love, our own higher conscience is awakened and screams relentlessly for our unconditional surrender without compromise. And it will keep on screaming until we all have finally transcended the need to be separate. ■

IT IS A LEAP FROM I TO WE, FROM EXTREME INDIVIDUATION TO A LIVING CONTEXT OF INTERSUBJECTIVE NONDUALITY