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consciousness • culture • cosmos

searching for utopia

Exploring humanity's timeless
quest for heaven on earth

The Evolution of Paradise

A journey through five millennia
of radical idealism

The Story of Damanhur

Unearthing the secrets of a thriving
utopian experiment

Is Iraq Gen-Y's Vietnam?

If so, why aren't they protesting?

Web 2.0 Wakes Up

Is the internet a haven for higher
consciousness?



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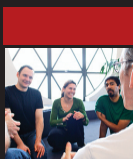


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What Is Enlightenment? is dedicated to a revolution in consciousness and culture. Guided by the evolving vision of founder Andrew Cohen, we are in search of a radical new moral and philosophical architecture for twenty-first-century society. We believe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

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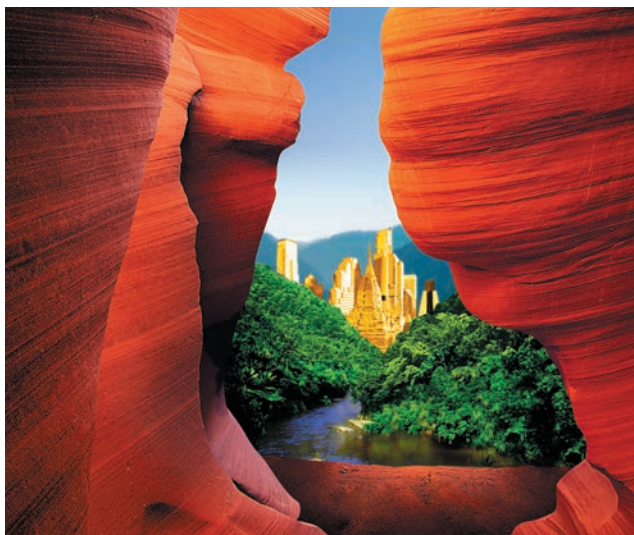
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SEARCHING FOR UTOPIA



From the idyllic Garden of Eden to Teilhard de Chardin's enlightened noosphere, our conceptions of utopia have changed dramatically over time. *WIE* takes a closer look at the evolutionary significance of humankind's enduring impulse to make heaven into a place on earth.

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An interview with historian Fritz P. Manuel

Seen through the lens of utopian thought, five millennia of world history become the epic story of humanity's unfolding hopes and dreams, offering a compelling perspective on the evolution of our consciousness.

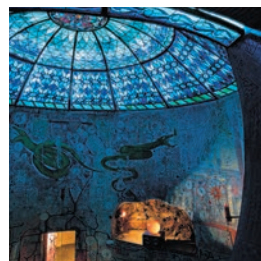
by Jessica Roemischer



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Decades after the mass communal movements of the sixties, the utopian impulse continues to thrive in ever new forms. Here we present four contemporary communities, each inspired by radically different visions, all focused on one thing: the dream of a better world.

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First there were the flower children, then there were the computer geeks, then the internet changed everything . . . A personal exploration of the surprising connections between them and what it all means about the future of human evolution.

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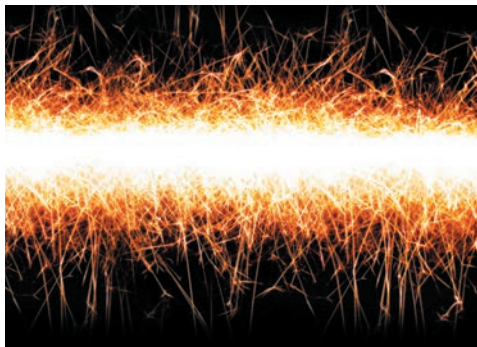


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The team behind Zaadz, the internet's popular new alternative community, shares the inspiration behind their bold vision to become the first global brand of the integral revolution.

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Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber

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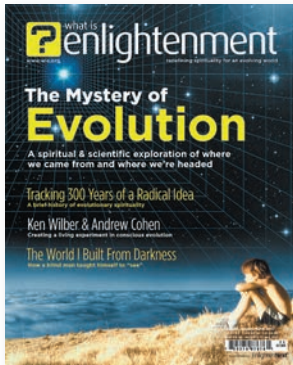
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How a New World Is Born

by Andrew Cohen





Issue 35
January–March 2007

ACCELERATING EVOLUTION

Your issue on evolution continued your delightfully high standards. “The Real Evolution Debate” helped me clarify the spectrum of evolutionary theorists, and I laughed out loud at your graphic of the Transhumanists’ rocket flying into outer space. I would like to add two ideas to the debate—the amazing acceleration in the speed of development itself, and the fact that our level of morality/spirituality is also accelerating.

Cells have evolved for billions of years and animals for millions. Tribal cultures evolved for tens of thousands of years, agricultural states for thousands, industrial states for a couple of centuries, and the current trend of globalization has been developing for only a few decades now. As Ray Kurzweil points out, the technological/economic pace is accelerating. But surprisingly, our moral/spiritual level is developing with it, as our view of “who is human” expands.

Soon, the competitive pressures of globalization will make racism and sexism as morally repugnant as cannibalism and slavery. Only fifty years

ago, a black or a female Secretary of State was inconceivable and a million Indians lost in famine was second page news. Today, Condi runs the State Department, Hillary and Barack face off for President, and a bright young woman in Delhi guides me through computer labyrinths or sells me house loans.

At this pace, we could reach Ken Wilber’s integral stage by mid-century and the start of the third-tier spiritual stages by the end of the century. But change engenders pain. We see it on our streets and on our televisions. We can’t push the technological baby back into the womb, so we must midwife it with skill and compassion. Please keep up your good work in making this revolution in human consciousness possible.

Carter Smith
Gardena, CA

DEFINING THE INTEGRAL WORLDVIEW

Bravo on your latest evolutionary-themed issue; it’s one of your best ever. The feature entitled “The Real Evolution Debate” was particularly important in the way that it helped define the integral perspective, carefully distinguishing it from the other closely related but less transcendent spiritual approaches to evolution which you profiled. Your work in helping to define and advance the integral worldview is much needed and much appreciated. However, in this article, even as you helped to clarify what is unique about the integral perspective, you simultaneously muddled the waters by including in your list of integralism’s “Major Figures” two less-than-integral authors—Sally

Goerner and Robert Godwin. Goerner equates her version of “integral” with Paul Ray’s “Cultural Creatives,” a group which is more or less synonymous with postmodernism. Godwin completely rejects the postmodern worldview, characterizing it as a form of pathology. While I do not think we need to narrowly define the integral worldview in terms of strict Wilberian orthodoxy, it seems that we might be able to at least agree that authentic integralism attempts to *transcend and include* postmodernism. Therefore, approaches that either fail to transcend postmodernism (like Goerner’s) or fail to include it (like Godwin’s) can perhaps be recognized as falling short of our emerging agreement about the contours of this important new integral perspective.

Steve McIntosh
Boulder, CO

A FAILURE OF SCHOLARSHIP

I love *What Is Enlightenment?* It is one of the few magazines I read cover to cover. I greatly enjoy the complexity of thinking that addresses the quest for the next organizing principle in our challenged world. It’s a solid intellectual meal among the junk food of most media. However, I am continually frustrated with the arrogant masculine bias of the magazine and many of the articles.

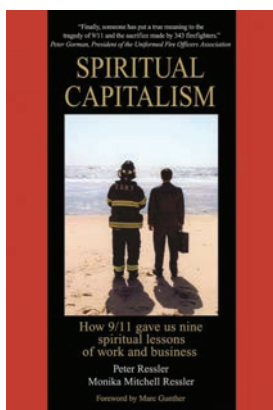
Robert Godwin’s recent article, “The Only Journey There Is: An Exploration of Cosmic and Cultural Evolution,” reveals that bias in many ways, and the word “Only” in the title is just the first case in point, implying that the writer has the “one true

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Letters

right and only way," rather than acknowledging that there are many viable paths to transcendence and immanence. The blanket statement that Jews were the first to "ever" treat their women as full human beings shows a failure of scholarship, unless you consider that stoning women to death for sexual transgression is a humane practice. While I agree that human consciousness is vastly different today than what dwelled within our ancestors, the statement that "all primitive cultures practiced human sacrifice" is also not supported by evidence, even though it is clear that some did—the worst being the Aztecs, which Godwin mentions. But he fails to examine the fact that we are still practicing human sacrifice today (the debacle in Iraq, the Nazi gas chambers, the drop of two atom bombs, the sale of weapons to indigenous cultures), and with even less consciousness and in ever greater numbers, reflecting that we are perhaps even more "split in mind" than our ancestors, even though we are more evolved in countless other ways.

As a woman writer on consciousness, history, and the evolutionary journey, it is amazingly difficult to get a voice in edgewise among those who are convinced they have all the answers. In your fifteenth anniversary issue, with pictures of past contributors on the cover, only twenty percent of the faces were women. Is this truly Integral, or is it something you plan to correct?

Anodea Judith

via email



Issue 34

September–December 2006

TWO WAYS TO "BE HERE NOW"

I read Andrew Cohen's interview with Eckhart Tolle with rapt attention and awe. I was moved to discover Tolle's profound immersion in the Self and the deep peace and rapture he continues to experience. But at the end of the interview, I couldn't help feeling that as profound as his perspective was, there was something equally (if not *more*) profound missing from what he was saying! In reflecting more deeply on this, it occurred to me that there are two ways to "be here now." One is where you are totally content to rest in the Self—the place of No-Time, Limitlessness, Total Peace, and Oneness. The other occurs when experiencing the Self becomes the essential ground from which you then dynamically participate with others to create a new and evolving state of consciousness in real time. At a time when the world is in deep crisis, and when we need to transform ourselves and how we interact with others in order to save it, doesn't it now become an act of selfishness just to seek Peace and Limitlessness for oneself?

Rod Sugden

via email

ENLIGHTENMENT FOR DUMMIES

As a long-time reader of *What Is Enlightenment?* and one who even understands what Ken Wilber is saying in *Integral Spirituality*, I am concerned about the direction that *WIE* appears to be headed on an increasingly accelerated scale. In order to accomplish your seemingly dauntless task of pushing and pulling modern man into his next evolutionary stage, it will be mandatory to reach into and grow the minds of at least a persuasive majority of voting Americans. This means, among scores of other things, helping a majority see that although they are decidedly important, there are larger issues at stake beyond social security solvency, health care reform, tax equities, racially and sexually charged issues, and moral relativism in the White House and the halls of Congress (just a few of the key me-me issues that pasted the voting bloc together that recently "won" control of both houses of Congress).

WIE, from its Mensa-level spiritual center to its coterie of mind-bendingly intelligent contributors, is increasingly ratcheting its level of rhetoric out of the cognitive reach of average men and women on the streets of America who will be needed to vote for—and then successfully manage—the changes we urgently need to survive. We need an enlightenment movement that can be comprehended by the majority in our culture, not by just a few million who happen to be blessed with superior intellects. I believe we have seen enough failed Presidential campaigns to say with little doubt that men and women of highest intellect are not always successful with communicating nuances of their head trips to the common man. So if you wish to accomplish something really meaningful, please focus a few more of your efforts on articulating concepts

that our men and women in the vast middle with twelfth-grade-level comprehensions can understand and internalize.

Failing all else, what may be needed is a *WIE*-written and -published issue of *Enlightenment for Dummies*. The really hard work, the really high-payoff work, would be for *WIE* to frame human enlightenment values in terms that average people with average intellects will want to incorporate into their lives.

Edward J. Coyle

Los Angeles

I OWE YOU ONE

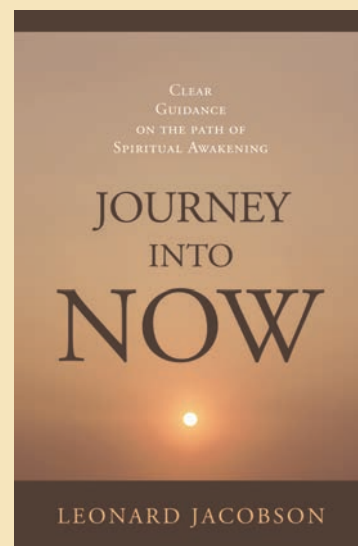
Coming from a fundamentalist Southern Baptist religion, I'm new to this enlightenment stuff, and your magazine was the escape route from an abusive marriage. Please keep pointing us "new guys" to the path of enlightenment. You have helped save a drowning man in a sea of self-righteous, holier-than-thou, etc.

Garry

via email

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IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP!



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editorial



I'VE ALWAYS HATED THE WORD “community.” Since we started working on this issue, I’ve spent a lot of time thinking about why that is, and I realized it’s because there is no evolutionary tension or vertical imperative in the way that word is typically used. Maybe it’s because I grew up in the sixties, but I always found the notion of being part of a community loathsome because it seemed to imply that I would have to give up my personal freedom. I remember, back in the days when I was a seeker, I would often go to Buddhist meditation centers (even though I was never a Buddhist) to engage in long retreats. When people saw that I kept returning, they would inevitably ask if I wanted to spend some time with the community in order to do service. And I always, without hesitation, said “No!” All I wanted to do was sit in the meditation hall day in and day out. All I wanted to do was get enlightened. I didn’t want to spend any precious time working in the kitchen or engaging in seemingly endless psychological processing with other “community members.”

Little did I know that when I became a spiritual teacher, several years later, the essence of the realization that people would experience as a result of spending time with me would be defined by a powerful urge to come together with others in order to share the higher state of consciousness and new perspective that were being revealed. Before I knew it, I had my own community on my hands! This was nothing I had anticipated or ever really wanted, and yet it seemed to be the spontaneous result of my own awakening. When any one of us awakens in a profound way to a higher state of consciousness, our values inevitably begin to change. We are naturally drawn to others with whom we can share our newly discovered revelation, because in their company we feel we

can share the deepest part of our self, our soul, in ways that are ordinarily just not possible. Being together with others in this shared higher context becomes the source of a newfound faith and conviction in the inherent joy and goodness of being alive.

Contrary to my previous culturally conditioned interpretation of the word “community,” I now see our most important philosophically and spiritually based relationships as the only ground upon which conscious or intentional evolution can actually occur. Without being deeply connected with others in a conscious commitment to a shared ideal, there is no way that we will be able to create any kind of future that we are going to want to live in!

It’s been deeply rewarding to put together this issue that you are holding in your hands because while tackling the topic of community and utopian idealism, we were gently endeavoring to challenge our culture’s habitual and often well-founded skepticism about the possibility that human beings can actually come together for a higher purpose without making a total mess of it. And it’s been quite an adventure—from the esoteric wonderland of an impressive and unusual community in the Italian Alps to the digital dreams of our cyber-utopianist friends at Zaadz.com. I hope that we have succeeded and that our efforts will inspire our readers to think of ever-new ways to come together with others in a shared ideal that will be one step toward creating a more enlightened future for us all.

Andrew Cohen
Founder and Editor in Chief



Saints on a Train

What's made up of many colors, sings perfect pitch, and refuses to harm anyone? Stumped? It's the Agape International Choir, singing at the upcoming Gandhi King Peace Train Procession and the Living Legends of Nonviolence Conference. The event is sponsored by the Association for Global New Thought (AGNT), and it will honor the sixtieth anniversary of **Mohandas Gandhi**'s passing and the fortieth of **Martin Luther King, Jr.**'s. Now for those of you who have never heard **Rickie Byers Beckwith** and the extraordinary collection of singers

that she directs for husband **Michael Beckwith**'s Agape Church, let's just say that they rock and they roll, and they've got all kinds of soul. And they'll be performing their special brand of celebratory devotional music to kick off the conference in Los Angeles the day before attendees board an all-day train bound for San Jose.

The train ride itself and the larger event will feature workshops and seminars exploring that unique peaceful force that does no physical harm and yet managed to move some rather dramatic mountains in the

twentieth century. Gandhi called it *ahimsa*, translated these days as "nonviolence." And in order to help emphasize just how powerful peace can be when it springs from a committed conscience, the event will feature three individuals with names that are hard to miss—**Yolanda King**, Martin Luther King's daughter, and **Arun and Ela Gandhi**, grandchildren of the legend himself. All three have committed their lives to spreading the message of peace and nonviolence, and they will be helping AGNT inculcate a new generation of spiritual activists with the knowledge, courage, and passion for transformation that once transformed an attorney into a revolutionary and a southern minister into a civil rights hero.

So get your bags together, go and bring your good friends too, because the Gandhi King Peace Train promises to be quite an event. And hopefully, after the LA-San Jose leg, we can get the train to begin service between Tel Aviv and the Gaza Strip . . .

—CP



Tokyo Peace Foundation Embraces California Activist

Each year, the Goi Peace Foundation of Japan selects an outstanding individual or organization to receive its Peace Award. The 2006 recipient was author, speaker, activist, and *WIE* contributor **Duane Elgin**. In explaining its selection, the foundation cited Elgin's "outstanding contribution to promoting new vision, consciousness and lifestyle conducive to the creation of a new civilization."

For Elgin, author of the 1981 best-seller *Voluntary Simplicity*, such recognition is well deserved. An eloquent speaker with a warm, engaging style, he doesn't pull any punches when it comes to describing the earth's precarious situation and our responsibility for it. Yet all in the same stroke, he infects his listeners with an irrepressible optimism and faith in humanity's ability to come together and respond

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"Now, according to some, if you have enough information, everything in the physical universe is predictable by the physical laws of cause and effect. But when you add awareness, all bets are off! Nothing disturbs the direction of events as much as an increase in awareness."

— *Make the Best of What Happens Next*, video podcast

"The problem with our student of consciousness is that he is an expert about concepts of consciousness, but he can't do anything about the real problems of life. While he has a lot of second hand knowledge about life, he lacks the skill to change his life into something that's better. It's time for him to look inward. Time for him to do Avatar."

— *Bottled Consciousness*, video podcast

"The product of Avatar is a Source Being, an awake Source Being who has experientially realized that he or she is not a body, is not bottled up consciousness, is not thoughts, memory, or imagination floating in the bottle. A Source Being is a self-determining, non-material spirit, compassionate, positive, and responsible."

— *Bottled Consciousness*, video podcast

"Avatar teaches the use of proven navigational tools that can be used in harmony with your own integrity, to pass safely across the uncharted turbulence of the mind into the region of the soul."

— **Harry Palmer, *The Avatar Journal***

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to the crisis.

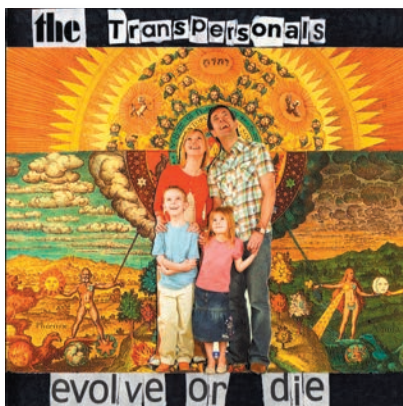
Although this was Elgin's first trip to Japan, he is no stranger to Japanese philosophy. In his acceptance speech at the award ceremony held at the Bunkyo Civic Hall in Tokyo, Elgin told the audience that the Japanese aesthetic concept of *wabi-sabi* has taught him that "modest things can, in their elegant simplicity, reveal a deeper beauty and mystery in the universe" and that it

was one of his inspirations in writing *Voluntary Simplicity*. He also credited the Japanese teaching of Zen with helping him to appreciate the power of the awakened mind.

Elgin offered some cultural enrichment in return. A day before the ceremony, while addressing hundreds of youngsters from all over the world who attended the gathering, he showed videos of people who offer free hugs in

the streets of U.S. cities. The next day, after Elgin received his award and delivered his acceptance speech, one of these youngsters called out "Group hug!" and before he knew it, Elgin was surrounded on stage by hundreds of hugging people. For pulling off this "good vibration" feat in Tokyo, of all places, we nominate Elgin as the State of California's cultural ambassador to Japan.

—IM



Britpop Gets Integral, Says "Evolve or Die"

There's a new sound coming out of the hazy clubs of England these days. Actually, it's not that new, but the words accompanying it certainly are. Four youngish lads from Bristol—**Timothy Hurford, Matt Bane, Luke Barter, and Howlin Lord**—are reinventing the lost art of psychedelic rock with some post-postmodern lyricism and a trans-ironic, heart-on-sleeve passion for spiritual evolution. They call themselves the Transpersonalis, and they're a band on a mission to change consciousness as we know it.

"The vision of the band is one of making the transpersonal vision exciting

and accessible through the medium of popular culture," they recently told *WIE*. "Today, we believe, there is a growing spiritual movement strongly rooted in the perennial philosophy, with strong foundations being laid and bridges being built (by Spiral Dynamics, integral philosophy, etc.) across previously difficult gaps." The band's modest goal is to be an "inspiring advertisement for those who are seeking and a celebration for those who have made it across to the transpersonal domains."

Already gaining popularity through their regular UK performances and

MySpace page—where a number of songs and videos can be found—they're hoping to release their debut album, *Evolve or Die*, sometime later this year. And if their frequent references to the works of integral philosopher **Ken Wilber** happen to fall on certain "second-tier" ears, they may soon find themselves rocking alongside integral songsmiths **Stuart Davis, Ed Kowalczyk, Saul Williams, and Kenji Williams** (no relation) at the avant-garde edge of a revolution in music, culture, and the Kosmos at large.

—TH



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Radio Lab (radiolab.org) is a fun, educational, and hip investigative-philosophical radio program produced, broadcast, and podcast by a New York public radio station, WNYC. In each of its hourlong downloadable segments, Radio Lab's two whimsical, terribly smart hosts, **Robert Krulwich** and **Jad Abumrad**, examine a different intriguing topic such as time, space, morality, and even out-of-body experiences.

What you will not find here is dryness. The dialogues, sound effects, and commentary are mixed, spliced, shuffled, and rearranged into an almost musical counterpoint, spiced with the wit and humor of the hosts. Of course, nothing's perfect: the hosts don't seem to have a spiritual bone in their bodies. But they're open-minded, curious, and engaging in topics that are important to spiritually minded people everywhere. Best of all, they're having a heck of a good time—and making sure their listeners do too.



WHEN A LITTLE HELP GOES A LONG WAY

Today we sent twenty-five dollars to Gursel Hairula. We were among the forty who, together, loaned this owner of a small rural transportation business in Bulgaria the two thousand dollars he needed to repair one of his buses. None of the forty know each other and none know Gursel. We became his lenders through Kiva (kiva.org), a microfinance website that puts small entrepreneurs in economically disadvantaged regions together with people who are willing to loan them small amounts of cash.

Kiva takes the well-known concept of microfinance and enables normal folks to become microfinanciers and make a difference in people's lives. Are the loans repaid? So far, Kiva has had a one hundred percent repayment rate (in the microfinance industry in general, the loan repayment rate is ninety-seven percent). Either way, with twenty-five dollars at stake, no one is going to lose sleep over it, but Gursel and his family may sleep a lot better.



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ORGANIZING THE BLOGOSPHERE

If one blog is good, then eighty must be golden. At least that seems to be the strategy of the popular new website **intentblog.com**. Founded by **Deepak Chopra** and his two children, **Mallika** and **Gotham**, along with filmmaker **Shekhar Kapur**, IntentBlog has used its extensive Rolodex of

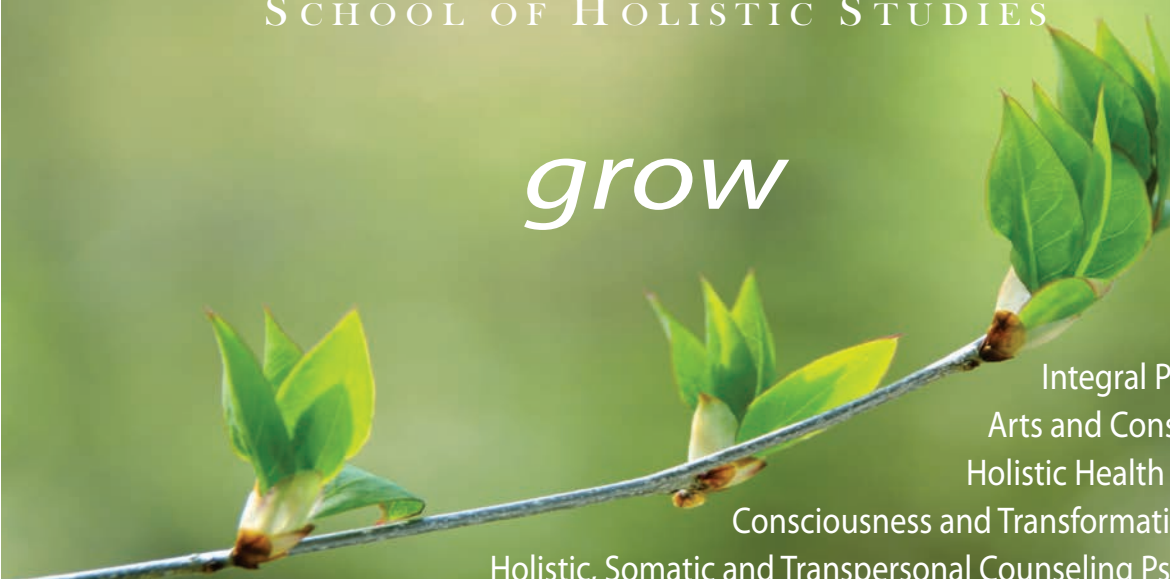
connections to invite some fascinating figures to write their thoughts, articles, poems, quotes, recipes, or anything else that comes to mind on this one consolidated blog site. The subjects range from spirituality and relationships to business and technology to media and entertainment, and the list of people who have lent their time and words to the site includes high-profile figures such as **Dave Stewart** of the band Eurythmics, **Rabbi Michael Lerner**, filmmaker **Velcrow Ripper**, and physicist **Amit Goswami**. Chopra himself is a regular blogger, somehow finding time in his ultra-busy schedule to contribute a great deal of content to this family project. IntentBlog boasts an international flavor, with a particular

emphasis on Asian writers, and the fast-growing site is as popular in India as it is in the States (where its content is picked up by Yahoo).


With a new blog appearing on the web every few seconds by some estimates, a little bit of consolidation goes a long way, and given its high-profile support and already active community of readers, IntentBlog likely has a bright future. So if you're looking for deep thoughts on globalization, war, media, science, the environment, spirituality, or religion, or perhaps just whimsical musings on the latest cultural trends in Mumbai, all of the above and much more can be found on this impressive multifaceted new member of the progressive blogosphere.

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Here, There, and Mira Nair

Award-winning filmmaker Mira Nair, whose movie *The Namesake* has recently hit the screen, talks about her forthcoming documentary on the Beatles' short stay in India

Over the years, celebrated Indian-American movie director **Mira Nair** has crafted a number of exceptionally powerful feature films, each as sumptuous and full as an exquisite Indian meal, among them *Salaam Bombay*, *Mississippi Masala*, *Monsoon Wedding*, and, most recently, *The Namesake*—a moving, tender, and realistic portrayal of the complexities and challenges faced by two generations of a Bengali family living in the United States.

Nair started her career as a documentary filmmaker and is now planning to revisit this genre with a film about the Beatles' 1968 visit to India. For readers too young to remember, this was the culmination—and the last

chapter—of the Beatles' short romance with Indian guru **Maharishi Mahesh Yogi**, in whose Rishikesh ashram they stayed. It was an episode that ignited Western interest in Indian spirituality more than any other event before or after, and we were curious to hear more about the movie from Nair herself.

WIE: *What was it that attracted you to make a movie about this very specific time in the Beatles' career?*

MIRA NAIR: I was aware that they stayed at an ashram for eight weeks, but I didn't know that they wrote forty-eight songs during that period.

WIE: *And it was happening during a very turbulent period.*

NAIR: Oh yes—the whole world was up in flames! Vietnam was burning, students were rioting in Paris, Robert Kennedy was assassinated in the USA. Beatlemania was rampant. And yet, in the midst of all this, they came here and had this amazingly creative period.

WIE: *So is the movie about their journey to India or about the songs they wrote?*

NAIR: It is about the nature of inspiration. It will ask questions like, "Why do these moments of inspiration happen, or not happen?" I want to explore these questions through the prism of the Beatles' visit to Rishikesh.

WIE: *You have a unique and powerful way of portraying the complexity of human nature. Do you think there is something specific in your life that enabled you to bring out this quality so fully in your movies?*

NAIR: It is a Punjabi thing to be unabashed, and I am unabashed. I just try to be *subtly* unabashed. [Laughs] Art has to be made from life. These films are very directly a reflection of the stage of life I'm going through.

I try to make the film a pure reflection of my feelings. It's a hard thing to achieve, and yet sometimes I manage. It's a synergy of things, and sometimes the Force is with you. [Laughs] I try to express every idea from the state of purity, like a pure thought, rather than do things mechanically. I really try to capture every moment. Every frame that I show you should be full of intention, because having an audience is a privilege that I must honor by taking the viewers somewhere experientially.

—IM



You can listen to this exclusive interview with Mira Nair at wieunbound.org/nair



Your 3-D Universe Is So Passé

A new way of looking at reality stretches the mind into multiple dimensions.

HERE'S A RIDDLE FOR YOU: What has lines, splits, and folds and is inconceivably bigger than the known universe? Give up? Why, it's the ten-dimensional *multiverse*, of course.

Over the past decade, the idea that we live in a cosmos consisting of more than the usual three spatial dimensions (length, width, and depth) has been inching its way ever further outside the bounds of science fiction. Promoted by brilliant, charismatic physicists such as Columbia University's Brian Greene and Harvard's Lisa Randall, theories suggesting the existence of ten, eleven, or possibly twenty-six dimensions seem to be gaining increasing shelf space in the science sections of major bookstores every year. Indeed, *The*

Elegant Universe, Greene's 1999 popular treatise on string theory (also known as M-theory)—which is the reigning contender among physicists for a multidimensional "theory of everything"—spent six months on the *New York Times* bestseller list and was even made into a two-part PBS television special.

But to those of us not up to speed on the finer points of theoretical physics, what could it mean for there to be *ten* or more dimensions? Most of us probably have trouble describing the three we commonly experience (to say nothing of that ever-elusive fourth dimension, *time*). Wouldn't the attempt to picture even higher dimensions of space and time paralyze the minds of all but the greatest scientists, mathematicians, and die-hard fans of *The*

Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the Eighth Dimension? Well, maybe. Seeking to somehow reassure the rest of us, Randall said during an interview conducted by Charlie Rose last December, "The fact that you can't picture [a higher dimension] doesn't mean that you can't *imagine* it."

And if that doesn't instantly clarify things, here to save the day is Canadian music producer and composer Rob Bryanton, a self-described "non-scientist with an inquisitive mind" and author of *Imagining the Tenth Dimension: A New Way of Thinking about Time and Space*.

WIE first learned of Bryanton's work when an intrepid reader sent us a link to his website, www.tenth-dimension.com, which serves as an

entertaining and interactive promotional vehicle for his book. Winner of a W³ Award for web creativity in 2006, the highlight of the site is a delightfully lucid Flash animation that, in less than twelve minutes, takes the viewer step by step from dimension zero (a single point) to dimension ten (another point), explaining how each successive dimension builds and expands on the dimensions below it. The triple pattern of “a line” (first, fourth, and seventh dimensions), “a split” (second, fifth, and eighth dimensions), and “a fold” (third, sixth, and ninth dimensions) elegantly

**Some believe
UFOs, ghosts, and
other paranormal
phenomena are the
best evidence we
have that higher
dimensions exist.**

repeats itself three times, expanding the scale of reality by mind-boggling orders of magnitude at each step. And by the time we arrive at the tenth dimension, which comes across as a kind of Teilhardian Omega Point encompassing absolutely every possible timeline of every possible universe, “there’s no place left to go.”

While it would take too long to explain its details here, the simplicity of Bryanton’s ten-dimensional model is striking, and he points out at the beginning of his book that what he’s proposing has little to do with the incredibly intricate mathematical formulas comprising the theories espoused by Greene, Randall, and other professional physicists. His multiple dimensions are purely speculative and built on logical consistency, requiring nothing more

than a basic grasp of high school geometry to understand. “Despite that,” he writes, “I would ask the reader to keep an open mind: sometimes, simple is better. I will argue . . . that this ‘simple’ viewpoint has many fascinating connections, not just to leading-edge string theory and physics, but also to the average person’s commonsense knowledge of how the world really works.”

His argument hangs together surprisingly well, testifying to the more than two decades of thought he put into his model before revealing it to the world. In chapters with such diverse titles as “The Quantum Observer,” “The Paradoxes of Time Travel,” and “Memos, Music, and Memory,” Bryanton’s multidimensional matrix manages to make sense out of more mysteries than any one theory should justly be able to handle. Yet he also makes it clear throughout his personable and reader-friendly text that the implications of this “new way of thinking about time and space” have barely begun to be explored.

That’s where everybody’s favorite parallel universe, the internet, comes into the picture. Besides hosting his animated tour through the ten dimensions, Bryanton’s website is home to a lively discussion forum, where a few main topics branch off into innumerable threads that take his 10-D idea in every imaginable direction. Under the “Altered States” category, one can find posts discussing users’ experiences of various psychedelic drugs, speculations about the Bermuda Triangle being an interdimensional gateway, and a peculiar discussion about a black brick that spontaneously appeared in one user’s living room from out of the blue (or was it the sixth dimension?). Another section of the forum, titled “The Philosophical/Spiritual Implications,” involves discussions of reincarnation, fate and

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free will, the existence of God, and the possibility that consciousness spans multiple dimensions, as well as the compelling idea that UFOs, ghosts, and other apparently “paranormal” phenomena may actually be the best evidence we currently have that higher dimensions do exist. (Intriguingly, Bryanton mentions in his book that two of the biggest unsolved mysteries of modern cosmology—the nature of dark matter and dark energy—might also be evidence of the unseen influence of a higher dimension.) Some forum participants have remarked on the similarity between Bryanton’s model and the ten *sefirot* of Kabbalah, which represent the hierarchical gradations of divine creation, while others

have suggested that the whole thing is just a novel elucidation of the paradoxical wisdom of Zen.

“I am continually fascinated at the many personal resonances people see in what I’m presenting,” Bryanton says. “In some ways, it appears that I have created a mirror which allows many people to see elements of their own belief systems. . . . This reaction has completely exceeded my expectations.”

Like the English theologian Edwin A. Abbott’s 1884 satirical novella *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, which presents the story of two-dimensional citizen A. Square and his harrowing encounter with a three-dimensional sphere, Bryanton’s

Imagining the Tenth Dimension is conveying the concept of alternate dimensions to an audience that might never pick up a book on cosmology, string theory, or quantum geometry. And judging from some of the comments it has been garnering in the blogosphere, it’s expanding worldviews, blowing minds, and provoking plenty of philosophical and spiritual inquiry as well.

“The line between leading-edge cosmology and some of the oldest philosophical questions ever asked,” Bryanton observes, “is sometimes a thin one.”

But one has to wonder: Is that a line in the first dimension, the fourth, or the seventh? ■

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Global Governance: Fantasy or Future Reality?

New models are forcing pundits, theorists, and leaders to consider the viability of a world government

IN AN ERA WHEN THE PROBLEMS facing humanity, such as terrorism, AIDS, global warming, and weapons proliferation, defy the borders of nation-states, the hot topic in academia and international affairs is global governance. How can nations cooperate with one another to handle these catastrophes? What models of governance will be able to encompass the unprecedented complexity that defines international affairs in the twenty-first century? The United Nations' inability to implement effective policies in a timely manner and the Security Council's breakdown around the Iraq War have created a vacuum in which more and more scholars, political scientists, and leaders are attempting

to plant their own models of a sustainable future.

One such model is that of Brookings Institute scholars Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay. Unveiled last year in *The American Interest*, Daalder and Lindsay's proposal is called a "concert of democracies" and would entail the world's sixty democratic nations pooling their common interests to create a voting bloc in the UN and the World Trade Organization. Together, the "D-60" would work for human rights and issues of global security and would be overseen by a secretariat and advisory board of "elder statesmen" who can "deepen cooperation." The board would include such leaders as Nelson

Mandela, Václav Havel, Carlos Menem, Bill Clinton, Junichiro Koizumi, and Manmohan Singh.

Daalder and Lindsay's proposal of an international advisory board strongly echoes Jakob von Uexkull's concept of a World Future Council. Launched in 2004, the WFC is designed to fix what von Uexkull sees as a crucial flaw in international institutions: a lack of trust between their leaders and the general public. It will be made up of one hundred outstanding leaders in human rights, science, the environment, economics, and religion so as to create a trusted moral authority that can weigh in on international issues and come together in support of specific policies. Recently, von

Uexkull reported that the first fifty members have been chosen, and the city of Hamburg has agreed to fund the launch and initial phase of the council. Indeed, over the next three years, the city will donate 2.5 million euros to the project as well as permanently host its secretariat.

Yet another new model of global governance is that of the International Simultaneous Policy Organization (SP), created by British businessman John M. Bunzl. Bunzl has been inspired by his readings of integral philosophy and is using its principles to create a system that he believes could “transform the international economy such that it operates in harmony with the global natural environment.” Bunzl’s ambitious model hinges on the theory that if international leaders implement policies at the same exact time, fears of putting their respective countries at

a competitive disadvantage will dissipate and nations could begin to cooperate with one another as a genuine community. Bunzl’s proposed policy changes for the first year of SP implementation would include increasing the regulation of international financial markets, canceling Third-World debt, banning and dismantling all nuclear weapons, and halting genetic engineering and its application in agriculture, industry, and medicine. Bunzl himself recognizes that “persuading all countries to adopt SP sounds like an incredibly tall order, and indeed it is.”

Can such a tall order realistically be fulfilled? One argument against SP is that just because policies are implemented simultaneously doesn’t necessarily mean competitive disadvantages disappear. In 2002, for example, the Bush administration proposed a policy similar to SP in regard to trade tariffs. The United States would agree to eliminate all U.S. tariffs on manufactured goods by 2015, thereby opening American markets to unprecedented levels of foreign imports, provided that other WTO members would also eliminate theirs in the same time frame. The proposal stalled almost immediately, mostly because other countries, especially in Europe, generally have higher tariffs than the United States does and would experience greater disadvantages. So, despite widespread agreement that tariffs, especially agricultural tariffs, are keeping Third-World countries in poverty, the initial competitive disadvantage proved too great, even though it would have helped millions of people.

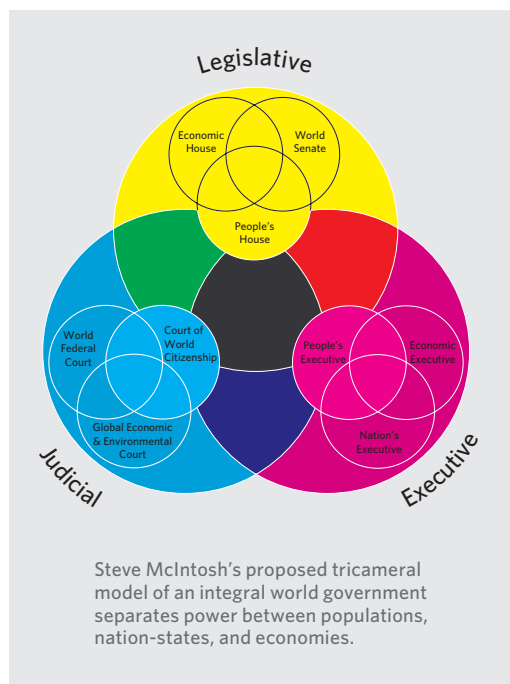
Perhaps one of the largest obstacles in the way of global governance is that people tend to see such ideas as idealistic and accused advocates of

neglecting to consider the legitimate self-interest nations naturally seek to protect. Other opponents believe that *less* government should be the goal of the future, not more in the form of an all-encompassing super-government. In his forthcoming book *Integral Consciousness and the Future of Evolution*, Steve McIntosh addresses these two concerns by pointing out that even if the world doesn’t *like* the idea of global governance, increasing globalization is demanding it. According to him, it can actually happen once the levels of “integral

A world federation may be the natural outcome of evolutionary pressures such as AIDS or global warming.

consciousness” among the most developed peoples of the world evolve to higher levels. What is integral consciousness? McIntosh defines it as a worldview beyond postmodernism that recognizes the legitimacy and “evolutionary necessity” of the many different stages of development in consciousness, cultures, and individuals around the world today.

When enough people begin to adopt this worldview, McIntosh sees the possibility of a “world federation” emerging whose objective is to “harmonize the needs of the modern and postmodern developed world with the needs of the traditional third world.” The constitution of this federation would be modeled on the American form of democracy, with legislative, judicial, and executive branches. However, each branch would have a three-part structure representing



populations, economic interests, and nations, respectively (see illustration). McIntosh's vision of how these branches would operate is at times quite creative. For instance, he proposes that each of the three executive branches could have its own "cabinet of consciousness," a committee of advisors that would represent different stages of development in the world. These cabinet members would lobby for their constituents' rights and seek to protect their livelihoods and environment. Membership in the federation would be determined according to the mean levels of consciousness of the individuals in a nation-state. Traditional cultures that were not democratized would be probationary members, able to receive the protection and privileges of the federation but not full membership until they became more democratized. If the system sounds inequitable, keep in mind that the UN Security Council is structured with similar imbalances of power.

Opponents of global governance might say that McIntosh is a naïve idealist. It's a common criticism of those who believe there is a possibility of a community of nations working together as a global democratic authority. McIntosh, on the other hand, sees himself as a practical realist and his world federation model as merely the natural outcome of evolutionary pressures such as terrorism and AIDS, which are demanding that the world move forward to the next stage of development in consciousness. It's an inspiring vision and one it seems the world needs more than ever before. ■

Maura R. O'Connor



Tune in to *WIE's* in-depth audio series featuring Steve McIntosh, "The Integralist," at wie.org/mcintosh



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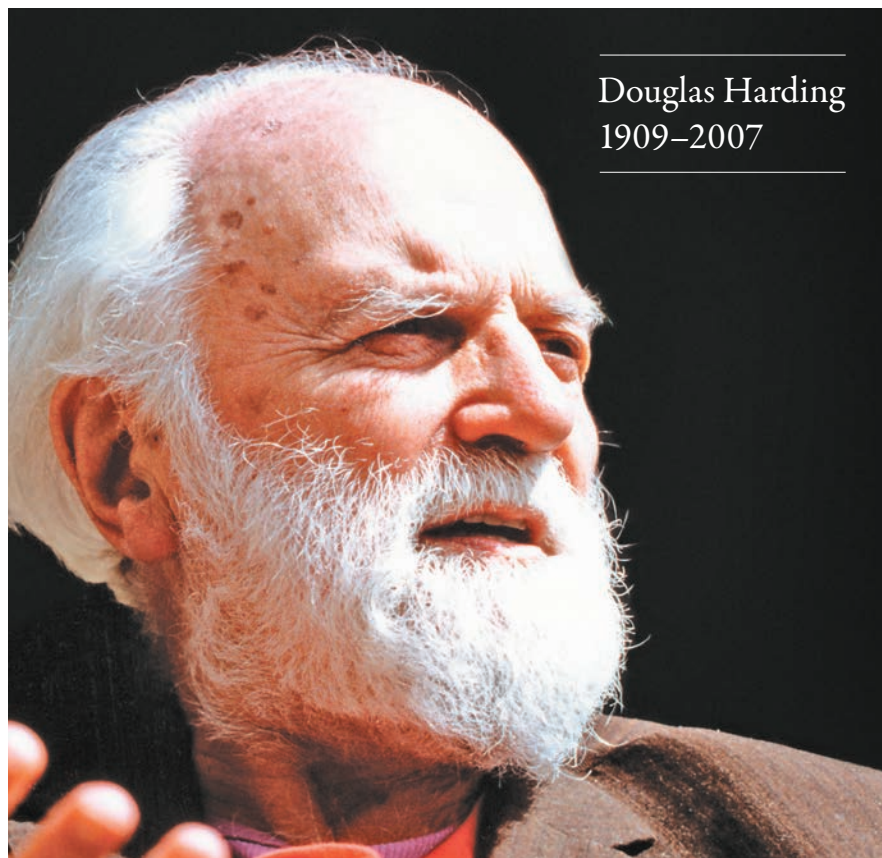
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The Headless Way

A Personal Reminiscence

by Chris Parish



Douglas Harding
1909–2007

“Do not go ungrateful into your everlasting bliss, but let your gratitude surface with your mounting amazement that anything at all exists and that only the first person singular present tense is really and truly awake and is none other than the LOVE that makes the world go round and leaves no-one whatever out.”

Douglas Harding

On the occasion of his ninety-seventh birthday last year

DOUGLAS HARDING PASSED AWAY

this January. A unique figure in the spiritual world, he was a totally original spiritual teacher, sage, unorthodox thinker, trailblazer, enlightened English eccentric (in the very best sense of the word), iconoclast,

Western Zen master in a lineage of one, and authentic human being—all rolled into one. Never exactly famous, he was nevertheless a permanent fixture in the landscape of the spiritual world, occupying a position similar to that held by another great figure who

was better known, J.K. Krishnamurti. After all, Douglas was teaching and sharing his “headless way” for something in the region of half a century.

I actually half suspected that he would live forever. His unbounded enlightened passion, vitality, sheer unstoppable enthusiasm for inquiring into life, and robust stature that he had well into his nineties always gave the impression that he was the wellspring of life itself rather than an elderly gentleman.

Born in 1909 in Suffolk, England, Douglas was brought up in a strict fundamentalist Christian sect. He had an unusual drive for self-inquiry, and he left the sect as a young adult to pursue his own path. Becoming an architect, he moved to India in the mid-1930s to work there. It was while in India that he had the spontaneous awakening that changed his whole life.

He wrote about this later in *On Having No Head*, the book for which he is still best known, with its unforgettable opening lines:

The best day of my life—my rebirthday, so to speak—was when I found I had no head. This is not a literary gambit, a witticism designed to arouse interest at any cost. I mean it in all seriousness: I have no head.

And Douglas did mean it in all seriousness. In fact, the remaining fifty years of his life were spent in pointing out freely, to all who came to him, that it is unbelievably simple to experience one's true nature, the Self, the Void, one's Original Face. He didn't particu-

larly mind what you called it; he was always just bursting with passion for others to see what he saw.

He invented no end of novel exercises and experiments to get people to see afresh, to directly experience the "first person view," where you can experience yourself, beyond any concepts of self, as being "headless," which was Douglas's particular way of describing seeing your true nature. It can sound facile and oversimplistic, but I can testify that his methods and pointers really do work; it was through Douglas and his exercises that I had my first experience of satori.

I first met him thirty years or more ago after long hearing of this legendary figure who claimed he had no head, who even had a song named in his honor in the sixties by the Incredible String Band. Douglas would throw open his house on the eastern coast of England every weekend, and anyone was welcome to stay there completely free of charge. I have fond memories of those weekends in the little village of Nacton with this gracious and extremely sincere man. We would all pitch in to cook meals alongside Douglas himself, and the weekend would be spent experimenting with his myriad exercises for self-awakening. I can still picture Douglas, eyes twinkling, tirelessly exploring the mystery of being with the enthusiasm of a child, although he was quite a learned man. He would quote the sacred scriptures of various religions and traditions, but he always emphasized that you test the scriptures by your experience and not your experience by the scriptures.

There was one time, perhaps fifteen years ago, that I heard him being interviewed on the radio in San Francisco, by Michael Toms if I remember correctly. The interviewer said, "Douglas, you're in your eighties and you have a grueling travel schedule, and yet you're so full of energy. How do you do it?" Douglas paused and replied, "Well, you know, it consumes such a lot of energy if you have to always keep up the pretense that you're a person."

I myself had the good fortune to interview him once about ten years ago at his home in England, and he still seemed to defy the normal laws of aging. He talked to me for five hours nonstop and then personally cooked us a meal. It was I who left exhausted at the end.

Thousands upon thousands of people came to see Douglas Harding over the years to experience his unconventional methods of pointing out our true nature. Revisiting him for that interview, I was curious to ask him whether people actually do transform after having these glimpses; in other words, does the insight or experience "stick"? Douglas replied that in his experience only a few people do deeply change, but that was up to them. The results depend on how seriously you take it and how seriously you practice it. His role was just to introduce them to their "original face."

But for Douglas, the exploration of the wonder and mystery of our true nature was a single-pointed life's passion, and with his passing we've lost a truly unique enlightened man. ■

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The Spirit of Science

Should Science Study Religion?

by James N. Gardner



JAMES N. GARDNER is a complexity theorist and essayist who is also a partner in a flourishing law and government affairs firm that he cofounded with his wife, Lynda Nelson Gardner. In addition to his recent release, *The Intelligent Universe*, he is also the author of *Biocosm: The New Scientific Theory of Evolution: Intelligent Life is the Architect of the Universe* (2003, Inner Ocean Publishing).

SHOULD THE TOOLS OF SCIENCE be used to study the phenomenon of religion? Or should the domain of the sacred remain a shrouded enclave, shielded from the prying eyes and profane proddings of anthropologists, sociologists, economists, and evolutionary biologists?

That is the striking question at the heart of an important book by Dan Dennett entitled *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. Dennett, a self-described “bright”—the stylish neologism signifying a person of the atheist persuasion that he and Richard Dawkins began to promote in twin op-ed essays in 2003—comes out squarely in favor of scientific scrutiny of the origin and nature of religious faith:

It is high time that we subject religion as a global phenomenon to the most intensive multidisciplinary research we can muster, calling on the best minds on the planet. Why? Because religion is too important for us to remain ignorant about. It affects not just our social, political, and economic conflicts, but the

very meanings we find in our lives. For many people, probably a majority of the people on Earth, nothing matters more than religion. For this very reason, it is imperative that we learn as much as we can about it. That, in a nutshell, is the argument of this book.¹

Religion has, of course, been studied previously, both from the inside by theological scholars as diverse in viewpoint as Augustine, Emil Durkheim, and Mircea Eliade and from the outside by pioneering investigators such as William James. But only recently have the sophisticated techniques of modern science—statistical analysis, investigatory methodologies developed in the fields of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, and methods used to associate genetic patterns with particular categories of behavior—been deployed in order to put religion under the microscope of objective, unbiased scientific analysis. Only now, in fact, do we possess the tool kit—especially the computational techniques—that will allow scientists to develop sophisticated models of the evolution of religious culture, analo-

gous to dynamic software models of linguistic evolution and viral mutation.

The approach advocated by Dennett—forthright demystification of a domain of human experience whose very essence is mystery, irrationality, and faith—has provoked predictable opposition, some of it from surprising quarters. In a review of *Breaking the Spell* published in *The New York Review of Books* Princeton physicist Freeman Dyson, forthrightly conceding his own pro-religion bias, chided Dennett for wearing his atheistic prejudices on his sleeve:

My own prejudice, looking at religion from the inside, leads me to conclude that the good vastly outweighs the evil. . . .

people and exposes them to dangerous ideas and criminal temptations, like an unfenced swimming pool or an unlocked gun room.²

But the whole point of Dennett's thoughtful book—regrettably obscured by anti-religious rhetoric that would get him stricken from any jury empanelled to adjudicate the merits of his argument—is precisely that the origins, developmental pathways, and internal dynamics of religious communities and belief systems should be subjected to intense scientific investigation, not shunned mindlessly as pathologies associated with the consumption of dangerous and outmoded cultural opiates. To argue

The messy science/religion/philosophy interface should be treasured as an incredibly fruitful cornucopia of creative ideas.

Without religion, the life of the country would be greatly impoverished. . . . Dennett, looking at religion from the outside, comes to the opposite conclusion. He sees the extreme religious sects that are breeding grounds for gangs of young terrorists and murderers, with the mass of ordinary believers giving them moral support by failing to turn them in to the police. He sees religion as an attractive nuisance in the legal sense, meaning a structure that attracts children and young

otherwise—to either dismiss the societal value proposition of religion ab initio or to agree with the late Stephen Jay Gould that religion and science are separate “magisteria” that should be contemplated in utter isolation and remain forever separated by a rigid cordon sanitaire—is not only literally irrational but also profoundly at odds with basic lessons of history.

As I pointed out in my book *Biocosm*:

The overlapping domains of science, religion, and philosophy should be regarded as virtual rain forests of cross-pollinating

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ideas—precious reserves of endlessly fecund memes that are the raw ingredients of consciousness itself in all its diverse manifestations. The messy science/religion/philosophy interface should be treasured as an incredibly fruitful cornucopia of creative ideas—a constantly coevolving cultural triple helix of interacting ideas and beliefs that is, by far, the most precious of all the manifold treasures yielded by our history of cultural evolution on Earth.³

In his classic Lowell Lectures delivered at Harvard in 1925, British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead put forward an intriguing explanation for the curious fact that European civilization alone had yielded the cultural phenomenon we know as scientific inquiry. Whitehead's theory was that "the faith in the possibility of science, generated antecedently to the development of modern scientific theory, is an unconscious derivative from medieval theology."⁴ More specifically, he contended:

The greatest contribution of medievalism to the formation of the scientific movement [was] the inexpugnable belief that every detailed occurrence can be correlated with its antecedents in a perfectly definite manner, exemplifying general principles. Without this belief the incredible labours of scientists would be without hope. It is this instinctive conviction, vividly poised before the imagination, which is the motive power of research—that there is a secret, a secret which can be unveiled.⁵

Whence this instinctive conviction that there is discoverable pattern of order in the realm of nature? The source of the conviction, in Whitehead's view, was not the inherently obvious rationality of nature but rather a peculiarly European habit of thought—a deeply ingrained, religiously derived, and essentially irrational faith in the existence of a rational natural order. The scientific sensibility, in short, was an unconscious derivative of medieval religious belief in the existence of a well-ordered universe that abides by invariant natural laws which can be discovered by dint of human investigation.

If Whitehead is correct, religion is not at all alien to scientific thought but bears an ancestral relationship to the set of intellectual disciplines that define our concept of modernity. Western religion, in short, is the father of Western science. What could be more fitting, then, than for science to focus the lens of skeptical inquiry on issues relating to its own dimly understood paternity—that is to say, on religious belief, the historical source of scientists' boundless faith in the discoverable rationality of the cosmos. ■

1. Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006), 14.
2. Freeman Dyson, "Religion from the Outside," *The New York Review of Books* (June 22, 2006), 6.
3. James Gardner, *BIOCOSM*, 226.
4. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 13.
5. *Ibid.*, 12.

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Integral Ideas

Horizontal Evolution & Collective Intelligence

by Allan Combs



ALLAN COMBS is a consciousness researcher, neuropsychologist, and systems theorist. He is a professor of transformative studies at the California Institute of Integral Studies and the author of over fifty articles, chapters, and books on consciousness and the brain, including *The Radiance of Being* (Minneapolis, MN: Paragon House, 2002).

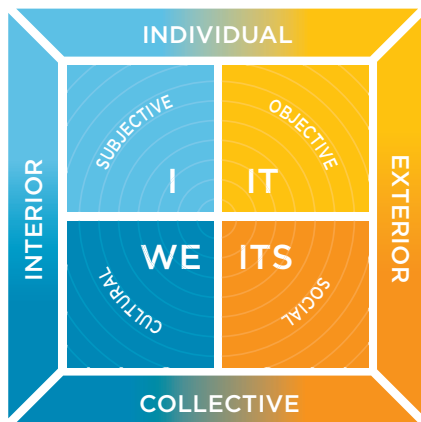
WE TEND TO THINK OF the evolution of consciousness in terms of vertical metaphors. Over the long course of history, consciousness seems to strive upward toward an embrace of ever more refined and subtle heights. This view is reflected, for example, in the spiritual teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the writings of many contemporary spiritual thinkers. Other explorers of consciousness, such as Teilhard de Chardin and Jean Gebser, have emphasized the idea that consciousness strives toward increasing intensity: the path from amoeba to human being is marked by the growth of intensity rather than by gains in elevation. No doubt there is some truth in both of these views. My aim here, however, is to introduce a different metaphor for the evolution of consciousness, one that emphasizes *breadth* rather than height or intensity.

The idea is simple. Over the long course of history, and especially during the past century, a variety of dramatically different ways to experience reality have become common. These are clearly seen, for example,

in science. I will explain in the paragraphs that follow.

The notion grows directly from integral philosopher Ken Wilber's recent elaboration of his four-quadrant model. To briefly review the basics of the model, it categorizes the entire Kosmos into four quadrants. The two left quadrants represent our *inner* worlds of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and meaning; the two right quadrants represent the *outer* worlds of matter and energy. Each side is further divided into an upper quadrant of *singular* objects and processes and a lower quadrant of *plural* objects and processes. Thus, the upper-left quadrant represents the inner world of private experience that each of us knows directly, and the lower-left quadrant represents the many experiences and values we share with others. The upper-right quadrant represents individual objects and events in the objective world of outer reality, and the lower-right quadrant represents collections of objects and events.

In his recent book *Integral Spirituality* and elsewhere, Wilber



Ken Wilber's four-quadrant model

enriches the division of the Kosmos in this way by noting that each quadrant also has its own kind of interiority. Consider the upper-left quadrant, for instance, which includes our reflections on our own thoughts and feelings. There is also a deeper interior to this quadrant that represents, for example, the unexamined flow of inner experience as it passes through consciousness during deep meditation or when we are drifting off to sleep.

The other quadrants exhibit deeper inner aspects as well. The upper-right quadrant, which represents individual objects and processes in the outer objective world, includes the human brain. But the deeper inner aspect of the brain enfolds the cognitive processes that take place within it. These cognitive processes are measured by various kinds of brain imagery and objective laboratory procedures but are often not experienced at all by the individual. Consider, for example, the unseen brain processes that guide our feet as we walk down a flight of stairs.

Now things get interesting when

we realize that the above categories have not been with us forever. Before the 1641 publication of René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, even the basic distinction between the inside and the outside, that is, the left quadrants and right quadrants, does not seem to have been systematically recognized—at least not since late antiquity. Indeed, it is said that Descartes literally *invented* the notion of consciousness, and it is certainly true that before Descartes the word itself meant nothing like it does today; rather, it referred to a kind of moral knowledge, more akin to the word "conscience." Even today the two words are the same in French.

From Descartes' time until the turn of the twentieth century, science was conducted almost entirely from the outer perspective of the upper-right quadrant. In other words, it was

horizontal evolution, we note that the lower two quadrants, which represent inner and outer plurality, were surprisingly late to be explored. It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that systems theorists began to examine the complexities of objective systems in the lower-right quadrant and that Niklas Luhmann and other European thinkers were breaking ground in the exploration of the deeper aspects of language and communication in this same quadrant. Surprisingly little was being done, however, to open up the deeper aspects of the lower-left quadrant, that is, mutual or *shared* experience. In the 1920s, the Israeli philosopher Martin Buber wrote *I and Thou*, examining the intersubjective depths of authentic human relationships. His pioneering ideas gained wide currency in the United States during the 1960s, but more for his emphasis on authen-

Communal consciousness is not new at all, but is reappearing today in a new form.

concerned with individual material objects moving in external space. This includes Newton's celestial mechanics as well as nineteenth-century efforts to understand the atom as a tiny solar system. In 1925, the young German physicist Werner Heisenberg, who had retreated to the treeless island of Helgoland to manage his hay fever, wrote the matrix equations that first represented the *interior* properties of matter, analogous to the inner cognitive processes of the brain.

Returning to our investigation of

ticity than for his recognition of the intersubjectivity experienced by two or more people sharing in authentic relationships.

Today, however, for the first time there seems to be growing interest in mutual intersubjective experiences. Several communities in the United States, for example, are experimenting with group consciousness and shared intelligence. Andrew Cohen's spiritual community EnlightenNext, for instance, is systematically cultivating communal intelligence as the

cutting edge of conscious evolution today. (The May–July 2004 issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* was dedicated to this topic.)

One interesting thing about communal consciousness is that it is not new at all but is reappearing here in a new form. The experience of being submerged in a group identity appears to have been a common aspect of hunting-and-gathering consciousness as it existed twelve or fifteen thousand years ago and beyond. The key feature of this ancient structure of experience, however, was that personal identity as we know it today had not yet developed at all, so individual identity was submerged in the identity of the group. Modern groups working consciously

toward communal intelligence, on the other hand, are going in quite a different direction. The EnlightenNext community seems to be finding its way into a kind of shared intelligence that develops around problem-solving situations and does not involve the loss of individuality at all. Each person adds his or her own unique contribution to the ongoing problem-solving process.

This kind of shared consciousness seems to be a form of intersubjectivity that penetrates deep into the inner dimension of lower-left-quadrant shared experience. The fact that it is emerging in today's world suggests that it may indeed be the cutting edge of the evolution of consciousness. I hope this proves to be the case.

Vertical evolution, as essential and important as it is, is a long and slow process. Waiting for it to inch forward is painstaking and disconcerting in a world that needs immediate medical attention for a distressing variety of ills. Collective intelligence, as a new emergent reality appearing with significant power and in enough widely scattered communities of well-intended individuals, might actually provide Archimedes a place to stand from which a heavy world can be moved. ■



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MY Generation

If Iraq Is Gen-Y's Vietnam, Why Aren't We Protesting?

by Maura R. O'Connor



MAURA R. O'CONNOR has been an associate editor at *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine for three years. She currently lives in New York City and Monterey, Massachusetts.

PUNDITS HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT the parallels between Vietnam and Iraq for a while, but now an Opinion Research poll released by CNN in November 2006 reports that the majority of Americans, fifty-eight percent, believe these two wars are starting to resemble each other. It isn't difficult to recognize the similarities. George W. Bush's leadership does nothing if not evoke the prideful bungling of Lyndon B. Johnson, while Donald Rumsfeld seemed to be doing his best Robert McNamara impression until his resignation last year. There's the ineptness of the administration's understanding of the social, political, and historical dynamics at work in the country we're fighting in. And there are even the dubious justifications for both wars: In 1964, it was the Gulf of Tonkin incident and misplaced fears about communism overtaking the Eastern Hemisphere; in 2003, it was the threat of weapons of mass destruction and then the goal of defeating Al-Qaeda, which we're terrifyingly short of

achieving four years in.

In addition, the nature of both wars—guerrilla combat that pits American soldiers against an enemy often hidden amid civilians—is similar. There are the tragically high body counts, some estimates of which put the death toll of Iraqi citizens at a shocking 670,000—a rate that seems sure to guarantee more than three million civilian deaths, as there were in Vietnam, if this war is to last as long as that one did. An interesting investigation by Phillip Carter and Owen West for *Slate* magazine claims that casualty statistics, which take into consideration medical improvements over the past thirty years, show that combat in Iraq is equally as devastating for American troops as Vietnam was, if not *more so*. "To send infantrymen," Carter and West write, "on their third rotations to Iraq . . . is akin to assigning a trooper to three tours in Vietnam: harsh in 1966 and a total absurdity by 1968."

But if Iraq really is like Vietnam, how come there aren't hundreds

of thousands of protesters on the streets, most of them young people? Where's the political outrage? Except for Cindy Sheehan and an impressive spate of demonstrations leading up to the invasion of Baghdad, there have been hardly any significant marches against the war and almost nothing on the scale of those held during the Vietnam War. We are now three years into the war in Iraq. If this were 1967 (roughly three years into Vietnam), four hundred thousand young people

generational differences these wars are revealing between today's young people and those of yesteryear. I believe there are two perspectives on this issue—one doom-and-gloom and the other infinitely more optimistic.

The doom-and-gloom one goes like this. Young people today represent the degradation and eclipse of American greatness, as demonstrated by our overwhelming cynicism, apathy, and self-centeredness. Whereas our parents fought for what they believed in and

Are we witnessing a sea change in the political proclivities of young people?

would be marching on the United Nations building in New York City. Or consider that, in 1969, just a few months after Seymour Hersh exposed the Mai Lai massacre of unarmed civilians, four students were *killed* and nine others were wounded by National Guard bullets while protesting at Kent State University. The next week, one hundred thousand undeterred students marched again. In contrast, when the Haditha massacre was exposed in 2005, in which it was discovered that unarmed men, women, and children as young as two years old had been brutally shot in their homes by American marines, there were hardly any protests to speak of.

Despite the remarkable similarities between the Vietnam and Iraq Wars, what I find most interesting is the

took a stand against inhumanity, we're happier to satiate ourselves with the internet and to consistently demonstrate an all-around moral deficiency. On top of it all, some posit that my generation is just plain stupider than those that preceded us—a CNN poll of 500 eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds showed that eighty-seven percent of us can't find Iraq on a map.

The second perspective, the much more interesting one in my opinion, is that we are witnessing a sea change in the political proclivities of young people. The reason we haven't taken a position on the war is that there isn't a place on the political scale for us. We're not warmongering hawks, but neither are we antiwar or antimilitary. We hesitate to adopt the dovish views that many of our parents assumed

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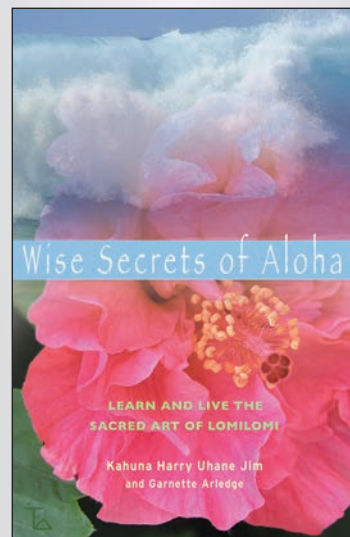


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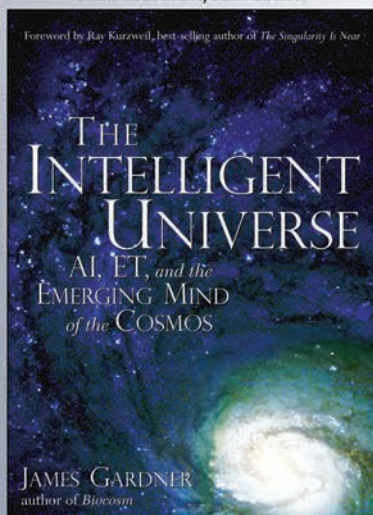
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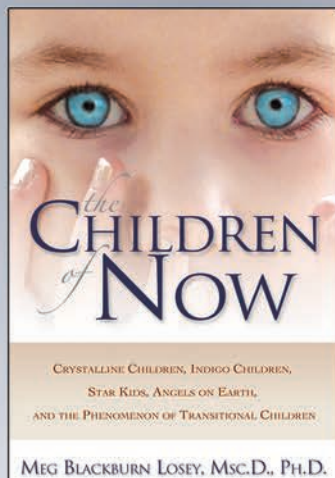


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in the sixties, and we don't want to apologize for American power in the way many liberals seem to do. Of course, neither do we want such power in the hands of an unbending, anti-intellectual conservative party. (Though undoubtedly, the number of young conservatives is rising steadily. See the November 2006 article in *Harper's*, "The Kids Are Far Right.")

This tricky political split many young people find themselves embodying—repelled by both left and right—was echoed for me while reading *The Audacity of Hope*, Democratic Senator Barack Obama's 2006 book, in which Obama discusses his "curious

desire for pragmatism and their distaste for what Obama calls "the lack of honesty, rigor, and common sense" on both sides of the aisle. There's a general sense of exasperation that these things haven't been manifested yet—as if each time we tune in to the news, the adults still haven't figured it out. It's the same fundamental exasperation that fuels every Jon Stewart or Stephen Colbert episode and the reason why political activism for many young people only goes so far as turning on the TV every night to watch these shows.

But exasperation isn't an authentic political position. Neither is being

Gen-Y'ers number seventy million, and by 2008, the majority of them will be of voting age.

relationship" to the 1960s and acknowledges that "as disturbed as I might have been by Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 . . . I understood his appeal." Obama, though at the age of forty-five not a Gen-Y'er by any means, could very well become a leader for today's younger generation if he can continue to speak to this political quandary in their hearts and minds. And if he can forge a new political identity for them, he could very well become president. Gen-Y'ers number seventy million, and by 2008, the majority of them will be of voting age.

Whereas Vietnam provided a platform for the radical idealism of many baby boomers, I think the Iraq War is revealing young people's intense

both anticonservative and antiliberal. We need to know what exactly we stand *for*, because sooner than most of us want to think, we're going to be the adults doing the leading. If we want to prevent a Vietnam or Iraq from occurring on our watch and, even more important, positively impact global affairs, we need to begin developing an unprecedented level of political sophistication now. We can't, as the young pop star John Mayer sings, just "keep on waiting / waiting for the world to change" and still proclaim, as he does, that "it's not that we don't care." It won't look like it did in the sixties, but my sense is that a real political change is possible. Getting familiar with an atlas would be a great place to start. ■

The Razor's Edge

Everyday Advaita

by Tom Huston



TOM HUSTON has been an editor at *What Is Enlightenment?* since 2003. He is a founding member of Ken Wilber's Integral Institute and a full-time student of Andrew Cohen's teachings of Evolutionary Enlightenment.

TODAY'S QUESTION: IN A SECULAR culture where everything is relative, and even many spiritual teachers tell us we're perfectly okay just as we are, what's a poor seeker of spiritual evolution to do?

I recently read an interesting essay by spiritual teacher and executive coach Robert Rabin in which he rakes two popular American spiritual teachers over the coals for clinging to the ancient, outmoded mystical Hindu philosophy known as Advaita Vedanta. As regular readers of *WIE* will know, I tend to be highly critical of Advaita myself, so when Rabin's essay turned up in my inbox one day, I was duly intrigued. Delving into the fall from grace of Advaita gurus Eli Jaxon-Bear, 60, and his wife, Gangaji, 65—who, last October, went public with an admission that Eli had engaged in a three-year affair with a student half his age—Rabin held nothing back in his assault on their spiritual philosophy. Indeed, he even launched a volley of verbal napalm on the great Advaita

master Ramana Maharshi while he was at it. I quote:

The transcendent ideal of spiritual attainment is flawed. It is an incomplete, distorted picture of who we are. Ramana Maharshi . . . did not go far enough on his journey of self-discovery. He only *went away*; he didn't *come back*. And we, in our hunger for truth, peace, and meaning, have come to mistake *going away* as the ideal. Ramana Maharshi needed to come back into a full, robust, sensual, sexual, passionate embodiment of that silence. We should not make his mistake.

You've got to hand it to the guy. I've never seen anyone with the cojones to criticize *Ramana*, perhaps the most universally revered Indian sage of the twentieth century. And Rabin doesn't stop there. He goes on to

write, "I would be more interested in what the Buddha might have said had he returned to the palace and become king. He, too, went away; and he, too, didn't come back." Now the gloves are off, but Rabbin defends his stance well:

I don't know why we have traded away our human beingness for transcendent ideals. . . . We love the idea that we are emptiness, or silence, or pure consciousness. We are these things, but not exclusively. . . . That's the hard part: to integrate enormous endlessness with our daily life. . . . If we are going to ascend, then let us remember to descend. If we are going to travel to otherworldly realms, let's not forget to come back to the kitchen where we eat.

That isn't the most inspiring example, perhaps, but he has a point. And it's a good one. At a time when humanity needs conscious, awakened individuals to renounce mystical navel-gazing and truly *engage*, actively helping our struggling world like never before, it's hard to argue with what he's calling us to. "We cannot live as pure consciousness," he reminds us, "except in this body, in this world, with each other."

Rabbin is pointing to what numerous contemporary spiritual teachers believe to be the cutting edge of mystical spirituality—namely, learning to *integrate* our deepest realizations of

transcendent Being with our ordinary, everyday, fully human lives. And how do they propose we do that? Simple: by accepting ourselves, warts and all, *exactly as we are*. "I suggest we get real, not ideal," Rabbin says. In other words, let's put an end to spiritual pretense in all its forms; let's stop avoiding the actual nitty-gritty condition of our lives in a naïve attempt to chain our humanity to unreachable ideals of purity and transcendence. Relating this back to the Eli Jaxon-Bear affair, Rabbin writes:

I don't think Eli is flawed, and I don't think he should stop teaching. In fact, I believe only now is he qualified to teach,

"I suggest we get real, not ideal." —Robert Rabbin

now that Toto has shown us the man behind the curtain. . . . Eli's humanity is not the flaw; the flaw is a teaching that forces us to live in shadows and carry secrets.

He does seem to be on to something here. In this day and age, a teaching of spiritual enlightenment that *doesn't* strive to make sense out of every dimension of our complicated postmodern lives doesn't really seem

worth pursuing. Besides, we already tried taking the transcendent path back in the sixties ("Be here now," anyone?). And as Eli and Gangaji are apparently finding out the hard way, it still doesn't work.

Yet as sensible as this new grounded, in-the-world approach to spiritual enlightenment seems, I can't help wondering if what Rabbin is proposing can really be considered "spiritual" in the first place. He says it's time to "get real, not ideal" and laments that we have "traded away our human beingness for transcendent ideals." But what does that really mean? What is authentic spirituality—or *enlightenment*, for that matter—if not a personal commitment to a tran-

scendent ideal? And what is the spiritual value of "human beingness" *without* any such ideals?

Granted, it's important that we don't whitewash the real complexi-

ties of life by identifying solely with that which is pure, immutable, and transcendent. But couldn't Rabbin be edging too far on the other side of the razor by suggesting that it's better to identify primarily with that which is basically mundane? I mean, I can't speak for him, but coming "back to the kitchen where we eat" isn't what gets me up and motivated to do three hours of spiritual practice in the morning (although it *is* usually enough to get me out of bed). No, what gets me

going is the innate, mysterious compulsion to rise up, to change, to grow, to mature, to develop, to evolve, and to otherwise *transform* my oh-so-less-than-ideal human self. Who knows where it comes from? Or where it's ultimately aiming? But if that experience of inspiration doesn't prove—to anyone who's felt it—that spirituality is inseparable from "transcendent ideals," I don't know what can.

Of course, I'm not the only one who feels that inner urgency. And it's strangely reassuring to know that Eli and Gangaji, at least, are starting to feel it as well. Sort of.

The January/February 2007 issue of *Spirituality & Health* features a two-page article about Eli's affair. The first

page is devoted to the story of how Gangaji and Eli are changing, growing, and "sharing their pain and truth" in dealing with their relationship crisis; the second, to a series of exercises created by the duo called "Tools for Conscious Couples," which has reportedly helped the couple become "united as never before." Apparently, they're beginning to realize that there are some basic human issues that simply abiding in the Absolute could never resolve.

Now, I'm sure Rabbin would be very glad to see that the Advaitins are finally coming around. But the recent publication of that article adds a new level of subtlety to all this, making me wonder if Rabbin's new enlightenment

is actually even *that* different from Eli and Gangaji's transcendent Advaita path in the end. Because, ironically, it seems that whether we prefer traditional self-transcendence (Advaita) or postmodern self-acceptance ("I don't think Eli is flawed"), the resulting spiritual lifestyle is essentially the same: The human self remains fundamentally unaffected by spiritual awakening, either ignored as it is or embraced as it is, but never *evolved* from what it is into something radically new.

And call me idealistic, but when I think of aspiring toward spiritual enlightenment, a state of profound and perpetual transformation is honestly the only thing I have in mind. ■



Creative friction

ANDREW COHEN & KEN WILBER



ANDREW COHEN: GURU

[n., Sanskrit]: one who teaches spiritual liberation from his or her own direct experience or realization.

Self-described “idealist with revolutionary inclinations” and widely recognized as a defining voice in the emerging field of evolutionary spirituality, Cohen has developed an original teaching for the twenty-first century which he calls Evolutionary Enlightenment. He is also the founder and editor in chief of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine.



KEN WILBER: PANDIT

[n., Sanskrit]: a scholar, one who is deeply proficient and immersed in spiritual wisdom.

Self-described “defender of the dharma, an intellectual samurai,” 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. His books include *A Brief History of Everything* and *Integral Spirituality*.



COMMUNITY AND THE UTOPIAN IMPULSE IN A POST-POSTMODERN WORLD

COHEN: The theme of this issue is community and what we could call the utopian ideal. Obviously, it's something we're both interested in and have a lot of experience with.

WILBER: Yes, that's true. But as you know, even though I have a fair amount of experience with Integral Institute, and we're trying to start local Integral Life Practice

groups and so on, that's never been my primary function. My job has primarily been to come up with the theoretical framework. I'm the pandit. You, on the other hand, are the guru, and in addition to doing theoretical work, you are down there in the trenches working to transform people's karmas. And you do that in a community. You *have to*—that's where it's done. So I don't mind talking about my somewhat limited experience on the practical side, and of course I have a whole lot of theoretical things to say about it.

RELATIONSHIP AND THE POSTMODERN PREDICAMENT

COHEN: The whole issue of relationship and relatedness is a very big deal for those of us in postmodern Western culture. You and I have spoken about this a great deal in the past—how those of us at the leading edge are individuals whose capacity for individuation, for developing ego in the positive sense of what that means, is historically unparalleled. Our highly developed capacity

The evolutionary impulse right now is calling us, compelling us to find a way to connect, not only with our own deepest sense of self but also with other people at a deeper level.

Cohen

for individuation enables us to objectify our experience to an extraordinary degree, to see ourselves and our own experience in a very big context. There have never been so many human beings alive who have had such a developed capacity to do this. But at the same time, the downside of it is that we've become so attached to this separate sense of self, this very capacity for individuation, that it seems to have made it harder and harder for us to sustain our relationships.

WILBER: Yes. And, of course, we have both heard of boomeritis. At the same time, there *is* a leading edge, and that is what we are going to particularly focus on.

COHEN: And a big part of the postmodern predicament, for so many people, is that we find ourselves very sophisticated, very evolved and developed, but very much alone and experiencing a deep emotional, psychological, and spiritual sense of alienation. We all long for deeper connections, but we are unwilling to give up our attachment to our self-importance in order to be able to experience that connection. One extreme example of this is in Holland, where they have the most liberal society in the entire world. It's fairly common and socially accepted for couples to have this funny thing called an "alone-together relationship," which means, "We're in a relationship, but we live separately so we can each have our own space." The idea is to hold on, at all costs, to one's own space, personal freedom, and autonomy. I've spent a lot of time in that crazy country and most people are really unhappy.

WILBER: So I've heard.

COHEN: It seems that as we've evolved and developed, this truly miraculous capacity for individuation has really put us in a very difficult predicament. And so a big part of the evolutionary impulse right now is calling us, compelling us to find a way to connect, not only with our own deepest sense of self but also with other people at a deeper level. I think it's very difficult to even think about spiritual development today without speaking about how it relates to this desperate urge to connect with others.

WILBER: Right. Relationship seems to be more important than ever and yet more elusive than ever. That's the real irony of the postmodern situation, that the thing that is probably valued most highly, which is relatedness—everything is contextual, everything is relational—is the thing that people have the least of in any authentic sort of way.

COHEN: Yes. That's part of the irony and the tragedy of the time we're living in.

WILBER: The postmoderns or so-called cultural creatives have made community and what they call "heart" sort of their god. And that is a step up from modernity, but it's still problematic.

COHEN: Well, it was a step up, but because it's the highly individuated ego's "heart" they're talking about, it's now preventing things from moving forward. I see it as being a kind of arrested development.

WILBER: [Laughs] Well, yes. Because they've gotten stuck there, arrested development is a good a way to look at it, technically. In some cases, they've also gotten just flat out dysfunctional and even pathological. The thing about the postmoderns is that, as we've often discussed, they're at the stage of development that we call the green altitude or the pluralistic structure, or what Jane Loevinger calls individualistic, or Clare Graves calls relativistic. And this green or multicultural wave of development, which has pretty much defined the postmodern era, puts relationship and contextuality above all other values. But, as you indicated, it has also opened itself up to what we would call red-altitude impulses, which are not just highly individualistic and autonomous but self-centric, egocentric. All of these egocentric red impulses snuck into and have now flooded into postmodern culture and the postmodern experience, expressed as "Nobody tells me what to do." And this leads to what I often call boomeritis, where you have basically this green/red, pluralistic/egocentric mentality. And so, on the one hand, there's the ideal of this multicultural, multidimensional relational being—but "*only as long as it doesn't interfere with me and my desires.*" And so all of a sudden, we've got exactly what you're talking about in Holland: "Okay, we are going to be together, but only if it doesn't impinge upon our egos."

COHEN: Exactly.

WILBER: And then what's so important in the whole boomeritis or what I also call "pluralitis" game is you have to give it a high-sounding name! You take this frankly somewhat dysfunctional and even pathological thing and you relabel it. So it gets called "empowering" or "finding your own space" or "being true to your own self." But in many, many cases, it's nothing but the ego dressed up and gone to town in postmodern drag.

COHEN: Right. Which makes the problem just get worse.

WILBER: Much worse.

COHEN: Because if the individual hasn't found a higher and deeper part of themselves, whether through relationships with other people or through the experience of a higher or deeper state of consciousness, there really is no way out.

WILBER: There's no way out because the cure is actually mistaken for the disease. And so they say "no ranking, no judging, no hierarchies." All of those things, which are actually the way you grow *out* of this mess, are condemned as the *cause* of the mess. And that's a death spiral.

Relationship seems to be more important than ever and yet more elusive than ever. That's the real irony of the postmodern situation.

Wilber

COHEN: Exactly. The discovery of hierarchy and the inherently hierarchical nature of the evolutionary process is what *helps* us to begin to see this overblown, overexaggerated sense of self in context—to see what's come before and what lies ahead—and to realize that not only am I not the center of the universe, but I'm also *part* of a process that is infinitely greater than I'll ever be. I'm a small part of it, and also I have a *lot* of development to do. [Laughs]

WILBER: Well, yes. That's the pandit's approach—that's where you can step back, you can see, you can get a framework. I think an integral framework is one of the best ones out there, but almost any kind of developmental framework will help you stand back and get a little bit of perspective on yourself. That's kind of the *theoria* side of the street. But then on the other side, there's the guru's approach, which is the *praxis*, the experience of states of consciousness that take you beyond your ego, literally. They don't *relabel* your ego, which is what so many spiritual practices do, unfortunately, but they actually put demands on your ego—demands to make transcendental judgments leading to

Self and culture and nature go together. We have to liberate all three of them, or none at all.

Wilber

a truly expansive nondual evolutionary awareness. And that's a state experience, a very real, not merely theoretical experience. So there are two cures for the postmodern predicament. One is on the relative side, the *theoria* or pandit side: It's understanding the integral framework, and it has holarchies* and so on. And on the absolute side, the nondual side, the guru side, is a direct, immediate noncognitive higher-state experience. And guess what? *Both* of those approaches are condemned.

COHEN: Yes, because they both represent that which is *higher* than the highly individuated ego. That's certainly what the guru represents, *if* he or she is the real thing.

WILBER: Yeah. Both of those authentic forms are condemned as the *cause* of the postmodern lack of

relationship when actually they're part of the *cure*. It's locked us into a death spiral where the cure is called the cause of the disease, and the actual cause of the disease is embraced as the cure. And that makes it so very hard to get a handle on this.

COHEN: Because the ego is in the driver's seat and it's masquerading as wanting to actually spiritually evolve, as long as it is in control.

WILBER: That's the key—as long as *it* is in control. And that's the inherent bug in the whole game that goes with this pluralistic level of development. Pluralistic means "Nobody tells me what to do." And right there, you've got the problem. It is so very difficult to help people see a way out once they've really bought that initial set of premises. It takes reading eight or nine or twenty books and thinking it through deeply, and then hopefully having some profound nondual experiences that really get you beyond dualism and relativity and egocentricity.

COHEN: And also having some human examples of what it could maybe be like to be a little more evolved.

WILBER: All of those things, exactly.

COHEN: I often point out to people that for a lot of us, while the whole idea of evolution is something we believe in when it comes to cosmological evolution or biological evolution, when we talk about the evolution of *consciousness*, the evolution of the self, it's often very hard for us to relate to. The very concept is threatening to our ego because it forces us to consider the possibility that perhaps another human being might be more *evolved* at the level of the soul than we are.


WILBER: Right. How dare you suggest such a thing?!

COHEN: The minute you say it, there's this impersonal rage that arises. Speaking about the evolution of consciousness or the self at the deepest level brings out the boomeritis rage in the most extraordinary way. As long as you see evolution as something that's occurring outside yourself, it's okay. But the instant you believe in the evolution of consciousness, you *have* to accept

*A holarchy is a hierarchy of holons, where a holon is both a part and a whole.


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hierarchy at the level of the self, at the level of the soul, and that backs narcissism right into a corner.

WILBER: Well, that's the point. The great German idealists, and certainly Aurobindo, and virtually any really serious sophisticated enlightened sage today, East or West, have an understanding of evolutionary theory and don't have any trouble seeing evolution as the manner and mode of God's creation. But if a person doesn't believe in holarchy or learning or the unfolding of higher, wider, deeper modes of being, then of course they don't believe in evolution and the whole thing is just self-contradictory. This is what's known as the performative contradiction at the heart of so much of postmodernism.

COHEN: Sure.

WILBER: There are some very, very important things in post-modernism: the emphasis on community; the emphasis on relationship; the move to post-formal, which is the recognition that other modes of cognition besides merely rational ones are important; and contextuality, the understanding that all knowledge has a form of interpretation. All of those are important, but they're not the total story. They have to be woven into an even larger integral framework or they completely self-deconstruct, and that's what has happened. And so the question we're asking now is: How do we take those incredibly important truths and weave them all together into a coherent integral framework? It can be done, and better than it has been done so far.

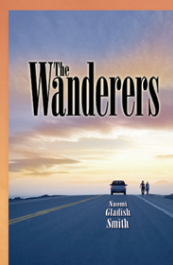
THE UTOPIAN IMPULSE

COHEN: I think it's interesting to begin to understand that the spiritual impulse is also an impulse toward higher relatedness, especially for individuals who are more developed. Initially, that impulse is felt as a desire to experience a deeper state, to be connected to life, to the deepest part of oneself, to wholeness. But then, as we begin to awaken to the deepest part of our self and that inherent wholeness, inherent fullness, we find that part and parcel of that spiritual impulse is a desire to connect and come together with other people in the context of the deeper wholeness that we've realized, that we've experienced, that we've awakened to. And I don't really think it's possible to separate

one from the other; in other words, it's not possible to separate the desire to experience higher states from the desire to meet and connect with other people at a deeper level. And that's why, I think, when people begin to awaken spiritually, often they are drawn to form new relationships, because they want to connect in the context of something deeper that maybe they weren't aware of or connected to before.

WILBER: I think so. I think that's another way of describing, basically, what the four quadrants are [See diagram, p. 41], in essence: I and We and It, or self, culture/community, and nature/the objective world. And all of these go together. So in terms of this thing we call community, it's not that there's a separate self that somehow dropped to earth, parachuted to earth, and then wandered around till it smashed into some

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other separate self. It's that self and other show up *simultaneously* and are, in fact, parts of the same thing. And the point I try to emphasize theoretically, and the point that you certainly emphasize in your practice, is that self and culture and nature go together. We have to liberate all three of them, or none at all.

COHEN: Yes, they're all part of that one whole. So when one's own self evolves, deepens, becomes more whole, then one naturally begins to seek for that same depth and wholeness in one's relationships with others. As we awaken to higher states of consciousness, as we begin to see our own presence here in this unfolding process in a larger context, and especially as we awaken spiritually, there seems to be a utopian idealism that is an inherent part of the evolutionary impulse itself. It's an urge toward greater wholeness, greater fullness, and even toward perfect relatedness. Of course, we can't forget that some of the worst mistakes that have

The utopian impulse often comes from sentient beings intuiting their absolute nature, their Buddha nature, their Christ consciousness, and therefore wanting that ideal as a realization.

Wilber

happened historically have been a result of this kind of idealism, but the drive toward utopia itself is part and parcel of the evolutionary impulse. I know I've felt that way from the very beginning of my teaching career, and obviously you are also driven or moved by a utopian impulse. I actually think that this impulse is part of the human experience at all levels, the minute we evolve beyond mere survival needs.

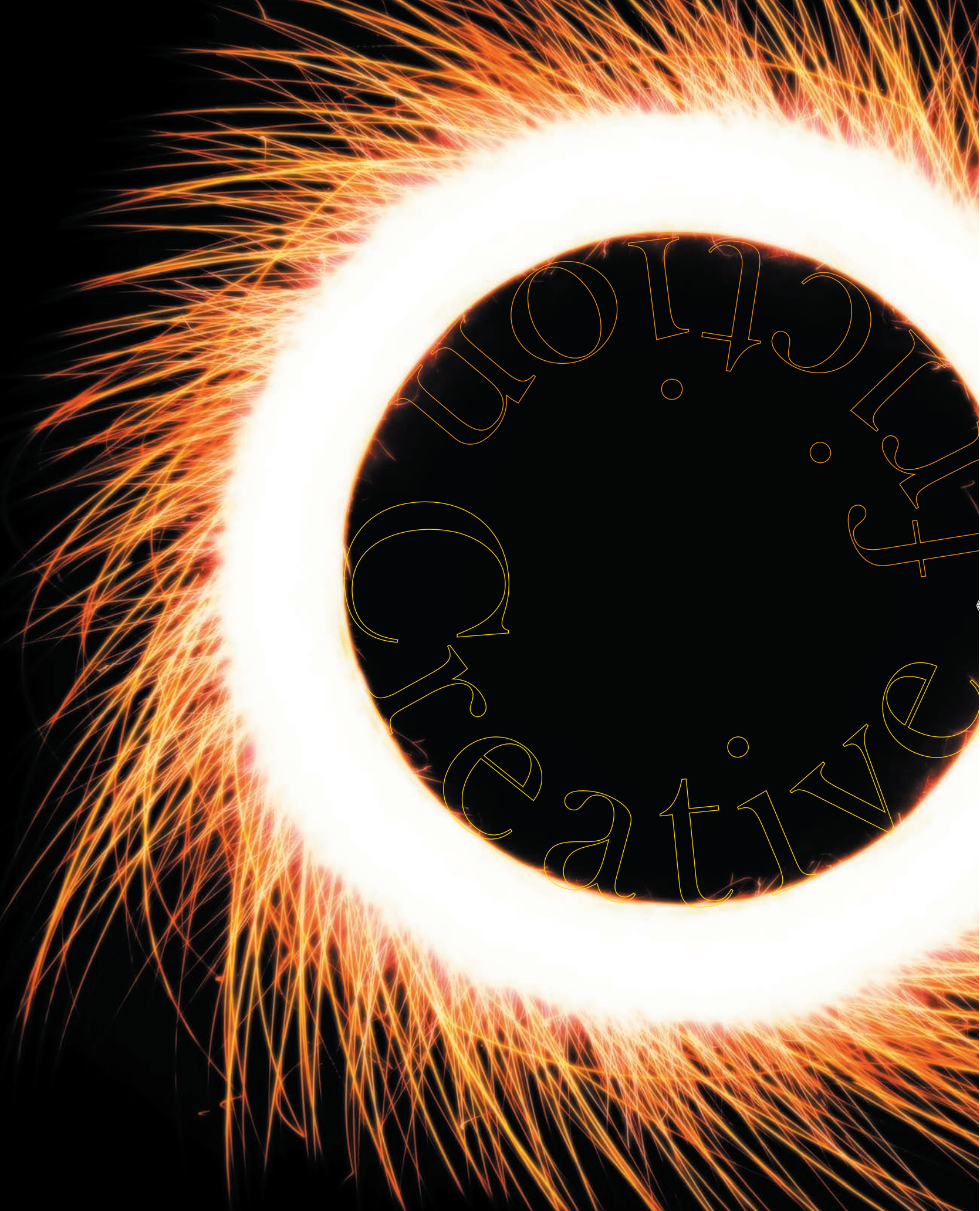
WILBER: Yes, I think that's true.

COHEN: If you're at a survival level, I guess utopia would just mean being able to have all the food and creature comforts that you can imagine. But beyond that level, there are many versions of it. For many of us today, an unenlightened version would be the American dream.

Of course, it never usually works out once you get there, but what's important to see is that once one has moved beyond mere survival, the utopian impulse is always there. It is part of what it's like to be deeply in touch with life and the evolutionary impulse, and I think it has really always been part of what's driving humanity forward. Of course, it's led to a lot of wrong turns and enormous catastrophic consequences at times; nevertheless, it's objectively important to realize that that's part of what drives us in our best moments.

WILBER: Oh, exactly. And I can give a slight tweak to what you're saying and tie it in with what I call the "Atman Project." One of the things that I've tried to show is that, indeed, there *is* this drive toward perfection, or this drive toward something better, this intuition that there's something fully whole that I can reach for that is better than anything that has gone before. In my book *The Atman Project*, I actually went back to the earliest stages of life and showed that you can see every stage of human development as a working out of the Atman Project: Human beings seek wholeness on the physical level because they intuit that they are infinite and eternal in a spiritual or absolute sense, but they apply it to a relative plane. They apply that intuition of perfect Atman [Universal Self] to the ego and try to make the ego into perfection.

Human beings, even according to the spiritual traditions, have at least two components to them: one is absolute and one is relative. And we intuit both. So the utopian impulse often comes from sentient beings intuiting their absolute nature—their Buddha nature, their Christ consciousness—and therefore wanting that ideal as a realization. Even the postmodernists do that. Community and relationship are really in a sense the Atman Project of the postmodernist. That's where they sense something can be better. That's where they sense their own deeper and higher ground. The best of them are goodhearted, genuine, moral, liberal-thinking people who want their political philosophy to stop prejudice and stop marginalization, because they think something utopian, something better can be brought into being. And so the Atman Project is that combination of a true intuition about an absolute, ultimate, great perfection, call it what you will—Godhead, Brahman, Tao, and so on—but applied to or through modes or bodies or memes or egos or cells that aren't perfect.



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Creative

COHEN: A very good example of that, which I often speak about, is what I call “the promise of perfection” that is inherent in the romantic and sexual impulse. For example, if you fall in love with somebody, if the sexual impulse is awakened and there’s a particular object of your desire, and then you fire it up with the romantic ideal, you become absolutely convinced, at least for a few hours, and maybe a few days or weeks, that you will find perfect happiness in the arms of that perfect other. That’s also a utopian impulse, an ecstatic reaching forth toward absolute perfection, fullness, and contentment. But of course, in that particular domain, it’s an illusion—a biologically and culturally programmed illusion.

WILBER: Absolutely. The Atman Project can latch on to any of the seven chakras. First, you try to achieve immortality, perfection, wholeness through the physical

Ongoing *creative friction* is the definition of deep spiritual, psychological, and emotional health and vibrancy in a community or intersubjective context.

Cohen

realm, the first chakra. And once you’ve tried everything in the physical realm and that doesn’t work, then you move up. If you can’t eat your way to God, maybe you’ll fuck your way to God, so you try the second chakra. That doesn’t work. Then you try power. Then you move up to the mental levels. Then you move up to soul. And finally, at the upper reaches, you stop seeking altogether. The authentic self, the evolutionary impulse, has exhausted all these relative planes that you have misapplied the intuition of perfection to. And now you are ready to simply awaken to that ever-present presence that *is* infinite and eternal and a great perfection.

COHEN: Well, in an evolutionary context, don’t you think that probably forever, or as long as this experiment in life, in creation, continues, there’s always going to be that kind of ecstatic reaching forward, reaching forth to manifest that utopian urge toward fullness,

toward perfect relatedness, toward profound integral interrelatedness at all levels, which, when you’re awake, is simultaneously always already fulfilled and always just about to be? We could call it a kind of enlightened duality.

WILBER: That’s an excellent way to put it. There are very different types of enlightenment, but one of the really important ones is just that: It’s going from trying to *seek* enlightenment, where you are driven by a sense of deficiency, of valuelessness, of lack of fullness—to discovering that ever-present wholeness. Then there is that “enlightened duality,” where even though you’re aware of the great perfection, you are still driven, not out of a lack but out of an overflowing.

COHEN: Yes. And hopefully, as we as a species evolve into higher stages of development, that overflowing is what’s going to be driving more and more of us.

WILBER: Abraham Maslow, when he was looking at the hierarchy of human needs, found that there were two different kinds of needs and there was a huge jump between them. The needs that go up from physiological needs to safety needs to belonging to self-esteem to the beginning of self-actualization are all what he called D-needs or Deficiency needs, because they are driven by people feeling that they lack something. But then the highest needs are those of self-actualization and self-transcendence, and those needs are not driven by deficiency but by what he called B or Being values. They are driven out of a sense of fullness, not out of a sense of lack. And that’s exactly what we’re talking about.

COHEN: Exactly. That’s what I mean when I use the term “top-down” as opposed to “bottom-up” development, which we’ve discussed at different times. To me, top-down means that you have reached that point of overflowing. It means you have transcended your ego to such a significant degree that while you are still interested in evolution or constant development, you no longer see yourself as not having arrived or not being on the other side. This attainment is something that can’t be faked. The question always is, To what to degree is an individual authentically resting in the fullness of their already enlightened self? To reach that point of overflowing, at least *fifty-one percent* of whatever the self

is must be abiding in that fullness, beyond ego. That doesn't mean that there is not an awful lot more of the self that needs to be consumed by the fire of the spiritual impulse. But when I say top-down, what I mean, specifically, is that the unenlightened *seeker* has died. So then it's a different kind of development or a different *relationship* to development. For example, if one has crossed that fifty-one percent threshold, it means one has to *act* like it. One can no longer behave like a hungry ghost—always seeking for fullness. It means the inherent fullness of one's being has to be acted out in one's personal conduct and also in one's relationships with other people. One has to display, demonstrate, and actualize the fact that one has realized the inherent fullness of one's ultimate nature.

WILBER: Right.

COHEN: And also one's relationship to development, to ongoing and perpetual evolution, would begin to express a certain kind of maturity, consistency, and self-confidence. That's what I mean by top-down. Because what I'm interested in is a unique kind of development that can happen *between* people, which can only occur when each and every one of the individuals involved has reached nothing less than that fifty-one percent point.

WILBER: As we've often discussed, one of the things that you are pioneering is a new form of intersubjective yoga. And in a sense, for intersubjective yoga to work—in order for the community to actually be a utopia in the positive sense, not the crazy, absolutistic, fundamentalist sense—*everybody* has to have reached that fifty-one percent point, which means they are being driven by overflowingness because fifty-one percent of the self is now full, and therefore is going to overflow. And that's an entirely different motivation. It's a motivation of superabundance and of overflowing top-down fullness, not a motivation of deficiency.

CREATIVE FRICTION

COHEN: The way I envision utopia is all about a potential that emerges when a lot of the factors that we've been discussing come into play. A group of serious and dedicated individuals would come together, and there would have to be a significant number of them who

have reached this top-down or fifty-one percent point of development so that they're no longer seeking in that desperate way, but they're fundamentally finders who are interested in higher development. They recognize the larger evolutionary context, the seemingly infinite developmental process that we're all a part of. And because they have each transcended ego, at least to a significant degree, they are able to come together in a context of what I call natural hierarchy. Natural hierarchy means that the inherent hierarchical context of life at all levels is realized, and you admit and acknowledge the hierarchical differences that exist between individuals at different levels. If we can come together in a context with other people where we can admit all this, see all this, without being threatened, and also have transcended our own egos to a significant degree, then a miraculous capacity for intersubjective creativity

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emerges. And that, to me, is when it gets really exciting. That's the whole point. Because then individuals come together not merely in a state of harmony or lack of conflict, which is the green or pluralistic ideal of peace, but in a process that I call "creative friction." To me, that is the definition of post-postmodern utopia, where, as you would say, we transcend and include our highly developed individuated self in a higher intersubjective process of engagement beyond ego. The living manifestation and expression of this creative friction that is experienced in an intersubjective context where hierarchy is recognized is the most extraordinary thing I've ever seen. That's living ecstasy; that's being one with the creative principle; that's God manifesting on earth *as, in, and through* all of us.

WILBER: I'm right with you on that. I think one of the subjects that there is the most confusion about out there is the nature of the enlightened state, and the nature of ultimate reality itself. What we too often find

I'm trying to get the self—whoever and whatever the self ultimately is—to be responsible for the perspective that has been revealed in the higher state experience.

Cohen

is some pretty loopy version of "the ultimate state is just the One." And there's no understanding of the One and the many, or the many and the One, or the whole notion that nonduality doesn't mean the absence of One or many but means neither One, nor many, nor both. It exceeds all of those, but it doesn't mean they're not present. I think earlier you called it "enlightened duality," where there is still the absolute One and there are still the relative many, but now they are consciously in a dance. And that's what's interesting. It's not that all of a sudden enlightenment means one hundred percent of the world becomes white light and everybody disappears.

COHEN: No way! But what's important here, especially in terms of making this leap beyond the postmodern

state of arrested development that we were speaking about earlier, is recognizing that *the absence of conflict, in and of itself, is not higher wholeness*.

WILBER: No, it's death.

COHEN: And even authentic saints can unintentionally tend to give people the wrong idea about this.

WILBER: Yes, I know.

COHEN: The absence of conflict is not enough. Authentic friendship—where human beings are creative partners, lovers of life, God, and spirit—requires individuals to be able to come together and *conflict* with each other in the most creative way possible. It's not necessarily going to be peaceful, but it will be ecstatic. It demands autonomy, a very highly developed capacity for autonomy and independence where you're willing to embrace and dance and argue and fight in the most creative way with other people.

But in order for that to happen, the ego has to be transcended to a significant degree by both (or hopefully many) parties, so then we can come together and begin to rub up against each other in the most creative way possible. Then it wouldn't be the ego that was creating the friction; it would be what we've often referred to as the authentic self, or the God impulse, that would be creating the friction itself. Now, for individuals who haven't taken that leap that we were speaking about, beyond fifty-one percent, this would not be seen as very attractive. But to me, that ongoing creative friction is the definition of deep spiritual, psychological, and emotional health and vibrancy in a community or intersubjective context.

WILBER: Yes, I agree with all of that. If you look East and West, there are two fundamental notions of the God-realized person, the enlightened person, the awakened person, the person who is saved or liberated. One is some version of the saint, or the *arhat*—and that's basically somebody who fundamentally is dead from the neck down. I don't mean to be irreverent, but it's certainly the notion that there is the absence of conflict. And there are not really even any positive qualities associated with such an individual, besides some very abstract virtues of universal compassion, or universal love, or universal wisdom and so on. The *arhat*, or the saint, is in touch with pure emptiness, pure perfection,

pure nirvana—not samsara. There's no form at all; it is gone.

The other version is the *siddha*. There was a big change, particularly with Nagarjuna in the East and Plotinus in the West, where it wasn't just emptiness *versus* form, or the One away from the many; it was the realization that emptiness and form are not two, and because that's the case, nirvana and samsara are not two. Now that's an entirely different ballgame, because now there is this creative tension where there is a nirvanic component and a samsaric component in every moment of existence. And so what you are doing is balancing and harmonizing the infinite aspect of every moment with the finite aspect of every moment. That creative tension is what evolution is all about, and what fullness is all about. And the *siddha* is the one who plays with emptiness and form and is in touch with both of them.

COHEN: Right.

WILBER: And that's a very, very different concept than dead from the neck down. The *siddha* is much more interesting, and the evolutionary *siddha* is really, I think, the only form of enlightenment that makes any sense at all. And it's certainly the one that we have to embrace now: an *integral evolutionary siddha*. And they're much more interesting characters.

COHEN: Yes. [Laughs] I agree wholeheartedly. And just to add to that, taking everything you said and then bringing it into the intersubjective context of relationship, the whole notion that being happy means there is no conflict is a very reductionistic way of looking at the meaning of happiness. For those integral evolutionary *siddhas*, happiness would mean that we are so much on the same page that we can really fight in the most creative way, in such a way that would challenge each of us, hopefully at the deepest level, the level of the soul, so that we could each ideally only evolve as a result. But of course it takes guts and it takes heart; it means you

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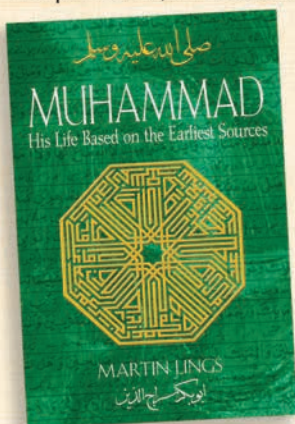
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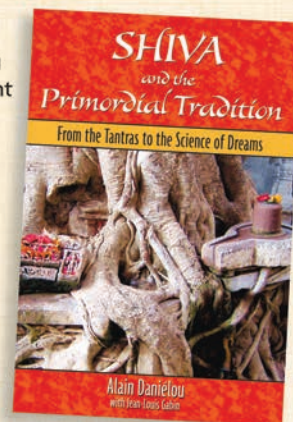
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have to be willing to stay in the ring, so to speak. And if you're not afraid, if you have crossed that fifty-one percent point, then you'll experience that as an ecstatic engagement with life itself. You'll experience it as ecstasy, not as conflict.

WILBER: Yes. There's a metaphor I've always liked. We've all heard about the ocean and the waves. The ocean is supposed to represent the One, nirvana, the absolute, the ultimate, the infinite, and so on; the waves are samsara, the manifest, form, and so on. And in terms of these two different views of happiness, the question is: What do you do with the waves of life that are crashing ashore all the time? The *arhat* gets an iron and tries to iron out all the waves, in order to just have a nice flat calm ocean. The *siddha* gets a surfboard and rides the waves. It's a corny metaphor, but it's a very good one because a wave, after all, is a combination of

the ocean and the wave; it's the entire ocean expressing itself. And so instead of trying to get rid of that wave, you're riding the evolutionary impulse. And surfing is exhilarating, even though it can also be painful and difficult and frightening. Surfers say it's the most exhilarating thrill you can imagine.

COHEN: It's the only thing there is to do.

WILBER: And that's what being an integral evolutionary *siddha*, a self-realized authentic self, is all about. ■



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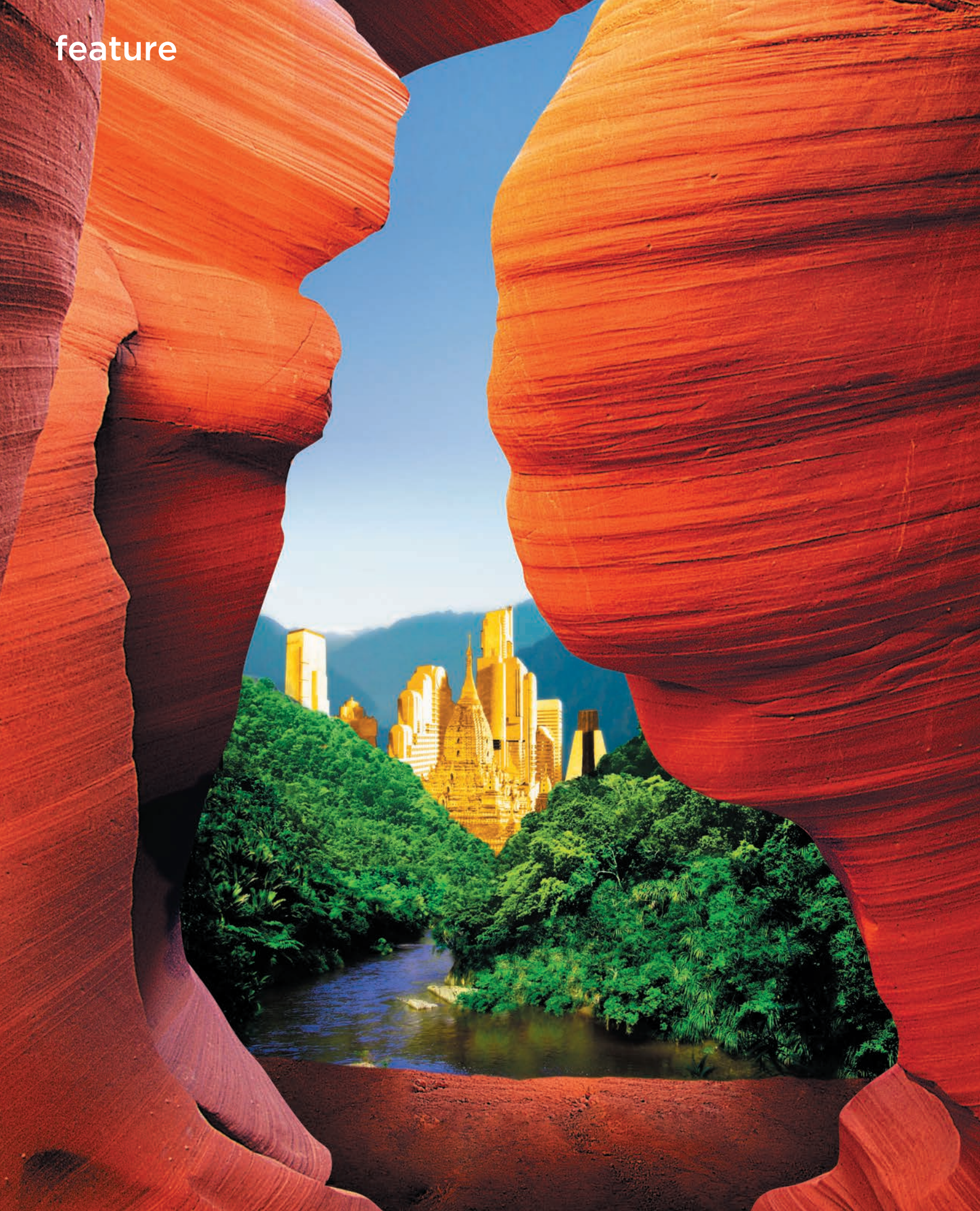
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feature



The Utopian Propensity

An interview with historian **Fritzie P. Manuel** on the human impulse to create new and better worlds

by Jessica Roemischer

HUMAN BEINGS, BY NATURE, ARE UTOPIAN. We dream and we hope, and since the dawn of civilization, we have conjured notions of an ideal and perfect existence. From the bucolic realms of the Garden of Eden to Plato's republic of philosopher-kings, from the island paradise of Thomas More's Utopia to the libertarian collectives of nineteenth-century America to the counterculture communes of the 1960s, the ways in which utopia has been envisioned have changed dramatically over time. But whatever forms they have taken, utopian ideals have helped drive forward an unfolding process of reinvention, a process whereby humankind has sought, through vision and experimentation, a new and better life. Indeed, utopian visions, and the social experiments they inspired, are a product of our most freely creative faculty, the human imagination. They are an expression of the



Paradise, Golden Age, and the Garden of Eden

Sumerian (c. 2000 BCE), Hindu (c. 1500 BCE), and Greek (c. 800 BCE–200 CE) mythology; Old Testament (c. 800 BCE)

Humanity's earliest writings are filled with evocative and otherworldly images of a sublime existence. These first recorded utopias depict a long-lost paradise where people live in safety and peace—sustained by the earth's bounty and free from fear, disease, and death—in harmony with one other and in communion with the gods.

“Man is an animal that

universal impulse to create the new—to reshape culture and even consciousness itself.

In researching the phenomenon of utopia for this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* we consulted surveys, compendia, essays, critiques, and commentaries, and in the process, we discovered the extent to which this perennial human impulse has captured the attention of historians, artists, philosophers, and cultural critics alike. But one particular example of utopian scholarship stood out. Arguably the definitive study of the subject to date, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* is the product of years of research by an erudite husband-and-wife team, Fritzie P. Manuel and the late Professor Frank E. Manuel. This massive volume traverses five millennia, from the earliest Sumerian myths of a paradise on earth to Teilhard de Chardin's luminous vision of universal human consciousness. One Amazon.com reviewer deemed it a national treasure. Indeed, it's rare to encounter a historical work of such breadth and depth, let alone one that illuminates, with such striking nuance and insight, one of the most quintessential and enduring of human proclivities.

When I called Fritzie Manuel to ask if I could interview her, she cautioned me that she had not kept up with the latest innovations in utopian thinking since the 1979 publication of her nine-hundred-page study. She was probably one of the few people, she confessed, who still did not own a computer. And yet a week later as we talked in person, she succeeded in powerfully evoking the utopian impulse as it has shifted and changed over time, and in the process, she brought human history to life. Sitting at her antique dining room table, where she and her husband had traded drafts, edited passages, and haggled over the punctuation of their book, Mrs. Manuel spoke about the historical and human significance of utopia, arcing back and forth across the centuries with remarkable ease and expressing an uncanny connection to the lives and historical realities she was describing.

As we overlooked the wintry Boston cityscape, I learned that a true historian is very much like a true utopian. Both are, as Fritzie Manuel has written, simultaneously “time-bound and free of time, place-bound and free of place.” Indeed, in her hands, five thousand years of history, seen through the lens of utopian thought, become the story of our unfolding humanity—our hopes, our dreams, and the evolution of our very consciousness. Ultimately, the interview with her left me pondering both the past and the future: What new and better existence can and really must emerge as a way to navigate the twenty-first century? Aware of the global-scale challenges we face, it became clear to me why, as the Manuels write, envisioning the next utopia may in fact be our greatest obligation and mission, and nothing less than the “moral need of the age.”

makes utopias.”

Will Durant

INTERVIEW

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT: *What is the nature and significance of what you call the “utopian propensity”?*

FRITZIE MANUEL: It's very difficult for me to imagine a world without people who dream, who have a vision of what they would like to see. I can't think of anyone who would say, “We've arrived at a perfect existence, so let's retain it.” There are always things that are distressing and that we think could be bettered, so we imagine improvements. That impulse has not died out, and if it ever does, I don't think we'll have human beings on earth any longer. We'll have some other form of life, which I can't imagine.

The utopian propensity is a universal impulse. It's like thinking or breathing. If we lost our minds and totally stopped thinking, then we would stop dreaming. But as long as we're conscious, we think, and as long as we think, we're not totally swallowed up by what's happening in our everyday lives. We have to think ahead. We have to think of tomorrow. And we not only think about things we hope for ourselves but we also think in terms of society. If we think at all, we think that way. Sometimes we go through periods of discouragement where we don't see the possibility of evolving to a better society. But those are very black moods and they are not sustained for long. Inevitably, we dream again.

WIE: *Where did the term “utopia” come from, and what does it mean?*

MANUEL: Utopia is a curious word. It's elastic; it's not fixed, and you can use it in any way you like. It's a shifting-sand name. It means something different today than it did two hundred years ago. And what it meant two hundred years ago is different from what Thomas More meant when he coined the term in the sixteenth century as the title for his famous work *Utopia*, a literary fantasy about an island paradise. The meaning of utopia changes as we change. You can't define utopian



The World to Come

Christianity (New Testament, c. 96 CE), Judaism (Talmud, c. 200–500 CE)

In spiritual texts from across the traditions, the possibility of a future heaven on earth fuels the utopian impulse. Heralded by the arrival of Christ or the Messiah, the world is transfigured by a luminous, blessed explosion of redemption and bliss. The righteous are seamlessly united with their Maker as history comes to an end and life on earth becomes one grand utopia.

thinking because it's transitory. As society changes, people begin to think in different terms.

It's likely that utopian thinking enters so early on in our evolution that human beings never existed without it. The minute *Homo erectus* stepped out of the cave, perhaps he was thinking about how nice it would be if there was a cave lady nearby and he didn't have to go hunt the mammoth down the road. He may have had his paradise ready at his first emergence. He may have had a dream. But it was a different world then, and dreams take on a different quality and a different character as the world goes along. They evolve over time.

In all cases, dreams have to emerge from the way we're living; they have to have some basis in reality. They can be strange and colorful and exotic, but they still have to link to what exists. We can't dream the way an ape would dream, if an ape dreams at all. That's obvious. If you were an Early American colonist, you wouldn't dream about the same heaven on earth that a Native American, whose life was very different from yours, would imagine. Your utopian image is tethered to what you have lived. It doesn't really take flight



Utopia

Thomas More, 1516

Thomas More coins the term “utopia” for his literary fantasy of an imaginary island paradise that is his own creation, not God’s. More’s optimum society—egalitarian, communistic, and religiously tolerant—was his antidote to the bleak social realities of Tudor England. For centuries to come, this one man’s musings would inspire the utopian inclination to creatively synthesize new worlds.

completely, even though it might involve a flight to the moon! But even that arises out of being able to see the moon, which is something you know exists. And the life that you imagine there will have some linkage to what you know on earth. I imagine that the utopian dream of a youngster today would be technologically mad and wild and would take off from what he knows. I’m sure that utopian dreams today are very different from those of my own generation because things are changing so quickly.

VISIONS OF PARADISE

WIE: *Utopian visions must provide a fascinating window into the nature of human thought and its evolution over time. What did the first recorded utopias depict?*

MANUEL: The earliest mythological visions are of a paradise that does not exist on earth. It’s a paradise after death. And they don’t just depict a single person. It’s a vision of a whole lot of people wandering through this beautiful garden and talking to one another. It’s not a solitary paradise; it’s a community. But there’s no connection to reality—immortality was a given, for example. These visions are ethereal. The early utopian thinkers were not social revolutionaries or social activists; they were pure dreamers.

WIE: *So the otherworldly quality of these visions suggests that humans are compelled to imagine something other than their actual existence.*

MANUEL: Yes, from the very beginning, people thought in terms of realities other than those of everyday life. And that’s apparent in the evolving nature of paradisiacal utopias over time. You have the Garden of Eden, with the earth’s “earliest inhabitants,” Adam and Eve, and there is a sharp difference between the paradise of Eden and what happens after the serpent enters the garden. Then you have the future paradise, the days when the Messiah arrives. There is the “world to come” as compared with the world as it is.

The visions of paradise found in the paintings of fifteenth-century Italian artist Giovanni di Paolo were of literate people—nuns, priests, monks—who were meeting and talking together in a beautiful garden. There was natural beauty, but there was also lofty discourse. You then have the Age of Exploration. What vision of paradise pushed Columbus, for example, to venture out to the New World, and did he think he had come upon it when he reached South America? Because whole new lands and new societies opened up, as compared with the old lands of Europe. What pushes us? Fame? Money? We cannot create any generalities about notions of paradise. But one thing remains: There is a division or a distinction between paradise and what people are facing in everyday living.

WIE: *Particularly for our earliest ancestors who were struggling with the hardships of existence, visions of paradise must have provided comfort, relief, and security in a very uncertain world.*

MANUEL: I don't think that's unique to the early period—paradisiacal myths are meaningful for people today. People can put up with extraordinary miseries if they're thinking about the rewards they'll have in the future. You could say that that kind of relationship to paradise is, in a way, anti-utopian or counter-utopian, because it can lead to a very lethargic state, a state so lethargic that you don't even think about what could constitute a better world here and now. You're totally involved in dreaming of another world.

BRINGING HEAVEN TO EARTH

WIE: *Is there a point at which the nature of utopia shifts and is no longer primarily about escaping to another world?*

MANUEL: The sense that you could create utopia here in *this* world starts with the work of Thomas More in the early sixteenth century. You don't get that earlier on. Even a hundred years earlier, utopia was much more otherworldly. But with Thomas More, man rather than God is now conjuring life on earth. The idea of utopia is More's invention, and it's very much linked to the life he's actually living in the sixteenth century. It takes off from there. He doesn't think that his utopia will take place after you die and get resurrected. It becomes concentrated on this world.

More thinks in terms of a whole society with nice proper gardens and decent relationships, which he describes in detail. He thinks it through. And he's laughing; he's enjoying it, but he's serious, too, because he is well aware of the faults of the society in which he lives. He is critiquing the Tudor monarchy of King Henry VIII, and it is a very shaky monarchy. All sorts of things are happening, and More is very much a man of ideals, principles, and faith. After all, he gets beheaded because he upholds his allegiance to the Catholic Church and breaks with the king, which is ultimately recognized; and eventually he is canonized as a saint. He was a brilliant man, a very well educated man, a man who not only thinks ahead but acts on it. For example, he has his daughters educated. He stands out in his world. Thomas More was a different kind of dreamer.

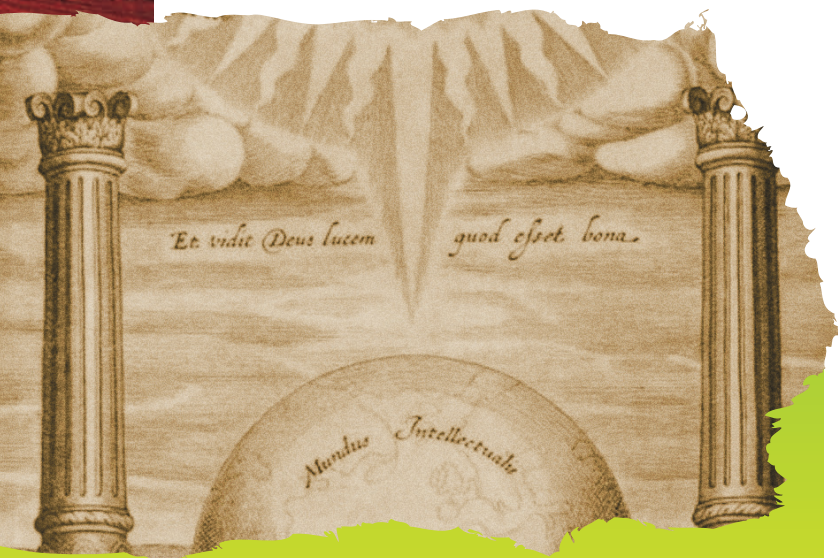
WIE: *You said earlier that the nature of utopia changes as culture changes. What was it about More's time and culture that gave rise to such a dramatic change in utopian thinking?*

MANUEL: People were beginning to explore the life of the mind and the riches that were around them, not in terms of gold and jewelry but the riches of scholarship, of thought. They were interested in whatever they could find in history, and this went along with opening up the New World, with finding out about other races. They were finding civilizations in both North and South America that they didn't know existed. Columbus discovers the New World at the end of the fifteenth century, and very shortly after that, Thomas More writes *Utopia*. So there's a confluence of a lot of things—the artistic world, the literary world, the geographic world. An enrichment takes place, and that gives birth to a new thinking, a new dreaming. This is the birth of humanism, and of course, the religious world starts getting hacked away.

Utopia is a curious word. It's elastic; it's not fixed. The meaning of utopia changes as we change.

WIE: *From what you're describing, it's clear why the sixteenth century set the stage for the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment periods that follow—a pivotal time when science, human reason, and discovery overshadowed institutionalized religion. Did the notion of utopia change during this next period, and if so, how?*

MANUEL: The seventeenth-century utopians, such as Sir Francis Bacon, were imbued with a different spirit. Virtually all of them were men of action who believed that their plans could and would be crowned with success within a foreseeable, not a distant, future. *The New Atlantis*, which Francis Bacon wrote in 1626, is hardly a popular utopia of social regeneration, as was Thomas More's. Its purpose lies elsewhere. In *The New Atlantis*, Bacon introduced science into human thinking, and he



The New Atlantis

Francis Bacon, 1626

Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* comes almost a century after Copernicus upends geocentrism, igniting the Scientific Revolution. Depicting a technological paradise overseen by scientist-priests, Bacon glorifies the essence of the Enlightenment period—and the scientific method, which he was instrumental in developing. Through innovation and experimentation, he says, we can discern the secret laws of nature, “enlarging . . . the bounds of human empire to the effecting of all things possible.”

had a very clear and interesting conception of how science should be employed. Of course, you had scientists before Bacon—Copernicus, for example. But Francis Bacon is the father of scientific thinking. He was setting things forth, using his imagination and then checking on that imagination, measuring, changing, and testing. Bacon wasn't just dreaming; he was working things out scientifically. He was developing a practical way to arrive at conclusions, so he used *The New Atlantis* to help introduce the scientific method into society, to alter the thinking of the time. And he was obviously an imaginative, brilliant man.

CREATING A NEW SOCIETY

WIE: *Were the imaginary utopian worlds of Thomas More and Francis Bacon actually enacted by people? And were they even intended to be?*

MANUEL: For utopian visions to take root and influence the course of history, you had to have a population—more than a few *philosophes*—that could enact them. Utopia had to be more than someone's reverie. A utopian thinker in the seventeenth century, for example, had nobody on whom to pin his thinking. He was isolated, not from his fellow *philosophes* but from the great masses of people who were barely making a living and were thus unaware of what he was envisioning.

That begins to change with the Industrial Revolution and the shifting economic and world systems. You begin to have a population that *can* think. People begin to find their voices. They begin to become aware of themselves, to know who they are. Working people of the period come closer to philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who was articulating utopian visions. As a result, these thinkers begin to stir things up in a way that hadn't happened before. The French Revolution led to emancipation and the rise of a middle class. And it was happening in the American colonies as well—the Declaration of Independence is a utopian document. It wasn't just somebody's dream—you have a mass uprising and different classes of people begin to have authority. These people become part of a utopian vision of the future, and utopian ideals actually begin to take flesh. That's when you see a change in the thinking, the wishing, and ultimately the working of utopian thinkers.

WIE: *If large numbers of people can now engage directly with utopian thinking and act upon these visions, how does that change the nature of utopianism?*

MANUEL: In the nineteenth century, a much broader utopian thinking emerges that concentrates on creating a whole new society. Important utopian thinkers from the period included Charles Fourier and Henri Saint-Simon in France and Robert Owen in England. Their visions were not merely dreams of the future. They were meant to be adopted by groups, by cells, by societies—and they were.

Fourier and Owen were the two major early-nineteenth-century apostles of the small-community movement. They had confidence that a single successful experiment based on their principles of organization would provide an example so compelling that it would persuade the rest of humankind to adopt their systems.



Nineteenth-Century Intentional Communities

Henri Saint-Simon, Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and others emancipated from the old regimes, a new middle class gives individuals the freedom to bring utopian visions to life. Progressive social experiments—small scale and large—materialize throughout the United States and Europe during the nineteenth century and herald the rise of intentional communities. Often boldly progressive—embracing racial and religious tolerance, sexual freedom, communalism, and social equity—each in its own way is dedicated to modeling a new world.

On the other hand, the main thrust of the Saint-Simon movement was not directed toward establishing small communities but was rather a total reorganization of the whole scientific-technological society. He began to think in much bigger terms and also in very specific terms, down to the kind of roadways he wanted to see. To join the Saint-Simon movement was an act of commitment to the future progress of man—a world of order and limitless progress in the flowering of all capacities, a world virtually without pain, a world of love and cohesiveness. The movement, the religion, was the new world in miniature.

WIE: *We often believe that gender equality and civil rights emerged largely in Western culture during the 1960s. But I was surprised to discover how progressive the nineteenth-*

century utopian thinkers were. They really were pioneers in terms of human rights, sexual freedom, and equal opportunity.

MANUEL: Oh yes. They concerned themselves with work and labor arrangements and with love too. Even prior to the nineteenth century, utopians wanted to see changes in sexual mores. It's also true for the rights of women; the early feminists had to be utopians in the dreamiest sense because it was really, really tough for women back then.

WIE: *We think of the "radical sixties" as a time of cultural upheaval and change, with many younger people pursuing alternative lifestyles. However, you point out in your book that these counterculture experiments were often not as novel or "utopian" as the communities that emerged over a century earlier.*

MANUEL: Yes, I think that's true. There were many groups that got together in the sixties, but I didn't think of them as utopian. We were living in New York in Greenwich Village at the time, and they were protesting against the Vietnam War. But from what I could tell, they didn't seem interested in truly creating a better world. Some of them got on relief rolls in New York, and I thought, "This is wrong. Those relief rolls should be serving the poor people who need help." And very often these kids came from wealthy families and took money

from their parents as well, so I was suspicious of them.

In one respect, these groups were similar to the communities of the mid-nineteenth century—they tried to live lives that were very different from the society around them. But I think the nineteenth-century communities had different ideals. They wanted freedom, but not drug-induced freedom or freedom derived from being irresponsible. And they didn't place themselves in direct opposition to the society at large. There was isolation and separation, but not attack, as there was in the 1960s. The nineteenth-century groups were trying to *reform* society, not reject it. That's a generalization, but I think there's some validity to it. I don't remember any reforming zeal in the 1960s. They were thumbing their noses at society at the same time that they were using the luxuries of the world they were criticizing. That doesn't go for everyone, but it goes for many. The flower kids were also organizing communities on the West Coast, and they obviously wanted individual freedoms that my generation didn't have. I suspect they were thinking about society as a whole, but I was curious to know if these groups were merely seeking refuge from a society that seemed cold and headed in the wrong direction or if they really wanted to change this world.

THE UTOPIAN PROSPECT

WIE: Reflecting back on the twentieth century, humanity chose catastrophic and ruinous directions. The Holocaust is a prime example. Hitler's popularity, it seems, was due to the fact that he appealed to the utopian impulse in Germans to create an ideal society of the Master Race. Would you consider Nazism to be a utopian vision?

MANUEL: It wasn't a utopia because it was based only on destruction. The same is true with Fascism. It was a question of cleaning up the old society by killing off a whole lot of people. I did at one point read *Mein Kampf*, but I didn't learn anything from it, and I don't consider Hitler a thinker. He talked about some of the German philosophers such as Schlegel, but I don't think they were meaningful to him. He was just grasping at something. I don't think he was utopian in his thinking at all, because he was not interested in building a new society.

WIE: These days you hear a lot about "dystopia" rather than utopia.



Counterculture Communities

Mid- to late-twentieth-century Western societies

As Timothy Leary said, "Turn on, tune in, drop out." Compelled to do just that, sixties youth reject "the Establishment" and inaugurate the next chapter of intentional communities. Pursuing back-to-the-land self-sufficiency, hallucinogenic experiences, and Eastern enlightenment, some 750,000 people lived in as many as 10,000 communes during the early 1970s. With this unprecedented growth, counterculture utopias—as "nonconformist" as they were—became a visible and undeniable aspect of the culture at large.

MANUEL: Immediately after World War II, dystopian novels sold more copies than any literary utopian works in memory. Dystopia portrays the future as a living hell. You have apocalyptic visions of human beings overpopulating the earth and clawing one another for survival, of nuclear disaster, of escaped pathogenic bodies heedlessly being created by experimental scientists. Yet out of these visions, the utopian propensity shows signs of stirring again, because at the heart of a dystopia has to be a utopia. You say, "This is awful. This is terrible. We're going in the wrong direction." But you're saying

that because you think there's the possibility that it can change. If you didn't think there was that possibility, you wouldn't bother. Aldous Huxley, author of the ironic dystopian *Brave New World*, lived to write the utopian *Island*. The impulse behind a dystopia is really utopian.

WIE: *You have written that utopians are actually the true realists.*

MANUEL: Yes. For one thing, they know what would be good for the world. And they know that you have to have an ideal before you can move toward it. So they're realists in that sense. Those who merely accept what is are really the *non*realists because they're denying that the world is going to change, that the world moves. But what *direction* the world moves in is another story. And if you have no goal toward which you hope it *will* move, no goal you're pushing toward, then you're accepting everything that's bad and you don't need to. The utopian thinkers of the past were often far in advance of their societies, and it's good to know about them. Of course, sometimes the societies that were founded on their ideas didn't work out that well. That's certainly true of Marx, for example. But that, too, gets corrected in time.

WIE: *By new utopias?*

MANUEL: By new utopias. Because if you're alive and you're a thinking person, then you have to hope for something, even if you're not very optimistic that it will be achieved. You still want to work for it. You want to better this world, and you have the feeling not only that it needs to be bettered but that it *can* be—that its evolutionary fate is ultimately to be better. Therefore you have to align yourself with those who think similarly and not with those who either have given up or think that the world begins and ends with them. I'm sure there are millions of people who feel as I do. Or is that just part of my utopian thinking? I don't know.

I do have days when I'm pessimistic. I have days when I want to pick up the *New York Times* and throw it across the room. But basically I think the same way that I always have—with skepticism about our capacity to change the world for the better, but not with pessimism. I have the feeling that there's something you can do to prod the forces that will lead to change. Deep down that remains. I think I'm still a utopian.

WIE: *What's next for utopia? What is the future of utopia in the twenty-first century?*



The Noosphere

Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955)

Teilhard's notion of a universal and evolving human consciousness, the "noosphere," is a utopia of an entirely new dimension. No longer relegated to the heavens or tethered to earth or lost in a paradisiacal past, utopia is human consciousness becoming aware of itself—its own inherent goodness and evolving nature. Fueled by awakened human intention, it envelops the entire universe as it moves toward a final unity—the Omega Point—a final utopia.

MANUEL: Life today is different, and the province of the utopians is changing. They're not worried about sexual freedom anymore. Economic ideals still move utopians, but they are moving other people too. Issues that were once utopian have become common objectives; they've been gobbled up by the Democrats, who are no longer called utopian! So utopians are really hard-put today, don't you think? For instance, would you call the ideal of world peace utopian thinking? I don't think so. This has almost become a *world* ideal, whether you think it's possible or not. What was once specific to utopians has now spread to entire populations, linking what used to

be utopian with the life of humanity.

You don't need a vast number of people to destroy the planet anymore, and that puts utopians in a different position altogether. There's talk of the end of humankind. In the nineteenth century, that would have been considered crazy. But people who think in those terms are not considered wild dreamers anymore. Utopian thinking now has to do with the preservation of the human race. Utopians in the twenty-first century are those who think we can preserve the world. And it's not one class or society; it's all of humanity. So utopians are no longer simply isolated in little enclaves of their own. Without the whole world to back them, their ideals can't move into a practical phase. We *all* have to become utopian because we *all* have to believe we can preserve the world. And if we don't, we should give up right now and go into a cave, or pray, or just think, or spend our time knitting. The alternative is the end. That sounds gloomy.

WIE: *No, surprisingly it doesn't. It sounds as if you're actually being a utopian—a realist. And it also speaks to the deepest part of our humanity.*

MANUEL: Yes, it really does, doesn't it? The whole world has been turned around in an odd sort of way, and so has utopianism. I don't think anything cosmic is going to happen during my lifetime, but I don't know what's going to happen during yours. I'll have to see you in the other world to find out. Can you have life after death if the world is destroyed?

WIE: *I can't even imagine the world being destroyed. It's too horrendous.*

MANUEL: I can't imagine it either, just as I can't imagine what existed before the universe was born. How do you conceive of a non-future? I can't, really.

WIE: *That's the utopian propensity itself, isn't it?*

MANUEL: Yes. It is! ■

SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE is...



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feature

Prototyping

Four radical communities dream of a



the Future

better world

It has been almost four decades since hundreds of thousands of idealistic young Americans went back to the land in one of the greatest mass communal experiments in history. But today, the utopian impulse continues to survive and thrive in ever new forms. In the pages that follow, *WIE* presents four unique contemporary communities, each inspired by radically different visions, all focused on one thing: the dream of a better world.

→ The Vistar Foundation

Location: Stamford, Connecticut

Began: 1994

Founders: Ron and Victoria Friedman

Philosophy/Mission Statement: To educate the public about the great spiritual teachings, to provide and promote the Vistar System, to invite and manifest the creative force of collective consciousness in the dramatic arts, and to teach the Vortex Method as a tool for accessing group creative intelligence.

“We are creating something with and as the creative force.”

Victoria Friedman

SCATTERED AMONG THE UPPER-MIDDLE-CLASS HOMES and manicured lawns of suburban Stamford, Connecticut, one of New York City’s more desirable commuter towns, are seventeen individuals who have been meeting regularly in an endeavor that is transforming their lives and opening them to new vistas of consciousness. Following a process that is evolving as they work with it, they are discovering a way of life of meaningful engagement, expanding awareness, and unlimited creativity.

The Vistar Foundation was started by Ron and Victoria Friedman as a means to spread the teachings they’d received from several significant influences in their lives as spiritual seekers. The ideas and example of two teachers, in particular, played a pivotal role in developing the principles on which Vistar is based. One, Charles Ahart, working in upstate New York, elaborated the twelve-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous and combined it with the esoteric work of G.I. Gurdjieff and the anthroposophical ideas of Rudolf Steiner. The other, Kenneth G. Mills, a classically trained musician,



multifaceted artist, and exemplar of living elegantly “for the glory of Being,” gave spontaneous philosophical lectures known as “Unfoldments.” The Friedmans also credit nondualistic teachings as a source of their inspiration as well as the ideas and insights of many contemporary spiritual teachers, all of which they readily incorporate into their work.

Originally, the couple’s goals didn’t exceed the intention to give a series of lectures, which was part of their commitment to Ahart, whose only request of those who sought his counsel was to share it with others. Quickly, the lecture series extended to another and then another as attendees wanted more. Soon a core group developed around the Friedmans, many of whom



still form part of the Vistar community today, and there are many hundreds of others who have come and gone over the years. Though the Friedmans don't claim to be spiritual teachers, their guidance and direction are felt in all aspects of the community's life. There is a hierarchy within the group, they say, and a respect for them as Vistar's founders. At the same time,



one of the group's unfolding objectives is to explore and model a form of spiritual community without a guru, accomplished master, or unified teaching at its core. In the end, the heart of Vistar is a process, a format for coming together that has become the community's real teacher.

The Vortex Method of Communication is based on a system initially formulated by Ahart more than twenty-five years ago. It is a discipline for group interaction that grounds and determines all of Vistar's activities. In the hands of the Friedmans and their colleagues, it has evolved into a finely tuned vehicle for eliciting and sustaining the vigor, mystery, and discrimination of collective intelligence.

The method is simple yet effective, a means for accessing purpose and developing the contributions of participants into ever-richer and ever-deeper insights and understanding. Its few but strict rules skillfully curb personal interventions and other input that could deflect the direction of the group. Adhered to with consistency and dedication, it has enabled the members of Vistar to transcend personal limitation and to evolve into higher levels of cooperation, creativity, and accord without loss of their individuality. The group members are male and female, multi-generational, and professionally diverse.

The rewards of their focused efforts have been many. Not the least among them is Voicepoint, a unique theatrical ensemble that emerged as a response to the approaching millennium. Inspired by poetry, sacred texts, and quotes from spiritual teachers, Vistar members channel their collective creativity into performances that combine music, voice, and movement to convey the power and beauty of universal spiritual truths. All aspects of these original dramatic presentations are produced through using the group's techniques for communication and collaboration.

There are other benefits. More and more, the group members are recognizing that they are seeing in new ways, that their perspective on the world and their understanding of the purpose of their work are changing and expanding. It's more now as if they are *in service of* the Vortex Method rather than the method being a tool useful to them. "The very process itself," says Ron, "this incredible guiding force, the collective force field, demands more." They've come to realize that, together,

they are accessing deeper, more authentic aspects of themselves, both individually and collectively. And their awareness of the larger implications of their discoveries compels them to proceed while it also bestows on them a dignity and joy that derive only from selfless occupation. They are becoming, as a Vortex session recently evoked, "a receiving apparatus for consciousness at a higher level."

If Margaret Mead is right about the capacity of a small group of people to effect change, then this dedicated community of individuals—few in number yet focused in purpose—may indeed be a harbinger for what a model of human engagement could be in the future, one in which alignment with a higher purpose is more important than an agreement made through a compromise of lesser values. If nothing else, the arts will be much richer for their efforts. But more importantly, the Vistar community's success with the Vortex Method holds the promise for a new way of achieving cooperation and discernment among individuals who share a common commitment and goal. It is as if when members of the Vistar Foundation come together in their Vortex circle, a new shape of human consciousness is being born.

Carol Ann Raphael

Or Haganuz (*"Hidden Light"*)

Location: Merom Hagalil, Galilee, Israel

Began: 1989

Founders: Students of Rabbi Mordechai Sheinberger

Philosophy/Mission Statement: To usher in a global Messianic Age through communal life guided by a unique synthesis of socialist and kabbalistic principles, according to the revolutionary teaching of the visionary Rabbi Yehudah Leib Ashlag (1885-1954) and through dissemination of Ashlag's teachings around the world.



"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"
Psalm 133:1

ואהבת



A CASUAL VISITOR TO OR HAGANUZ would not, at first glance, find the community all that extraordinary. In Israel, it is not uncommon to find a community in which all the members are Orthodox Jews, with men donning long beards and sideburns and women covered from neck to toe. You might first suspect something different, however, when you spot a bearded, skullcapped man doing tai chi or another sitting alone in the woods in deep contemplation. Or perhaps you wander into a classroom and see a rabbi in black Hassidic garb, hat and all, discoursing on acupuncture and Chinese medicine to a class divided by a partition that separates the men from the women.

And yet Or Haganuz is much more than a community of Orthodox Jews with New Age interests. Here in this small pastoral community of sixty-eight families (some four hundred inhabitants) in northern Israel, a high-stakes experiment in human potential is taking place. It is the first serious attempt to apply the revolutionary communal teachings of Rabbi Ashlag, a spiritual visionary whose work is responsible for the fact that Kabbalah is a household word all over the world.

"Rabbi Ashlag was interested in the transformation of humanity," explains Rabbi Uval Asherov, one of Or Haganuz's founders. "He felt that we are on the brink of the Messianic Age, which would be characterized by a fundamental shift in



human motivation—from a desire to get and to have, which originates from the ego, to a desire to give and to share, which originates from God.” Ashlag taught that such a shift in motivation, which was way beyond what humanity has been capable of so far, has only been glimpsed twice in human history—once on the occasion of the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai and another time during the reign of King Solomon.

Surprisingly, what convinced Ashlag that we are approaching the Messianic Age was the advent of communist ideas and their increasing popularity about a century ago. “Ashlag saw this as an indication that there was global hunger for life that holds giving and sharing in higher regard than having and getting,” says Rabbi Asherov. “It indicated to him that something new was now possible.”

But Ashlag was well aware of the limitations of Communism, as it denied the vertical dimension of life and focused on matter. This lack of a spiritual dimension, he taught, was the reason why Communism had to resort to force and brutality in order to impose its ideals. What would a communist lifestyle look like, he asked, if it were not motivated by a desire for material equality, or even social

justice, but rather was seen as a way of living according to the will of God—a life of endless giving? What if communist ideals were married to and practiced in the context of the teaching of the Kabbalah? Ashlag predicted that if such a lifestyle would be widespread, this would usher in an age of collective enlightenment, not just for Jews but for humanity as a whole.

It was only in 1989, thirty-five years after Ashlag’s death, that one of his spiritual heirs, Rabbi Mordechai Sheinberger, inspired a group of his students to live according to Ashlag’s communal ideals, and Or Haganuz was born. The initial group was made up exclusively of *baalei teshuva* (“possessors of repentance”)—formerly secular Jews who have adopted Orthodox Judaism in adulthood. Sheinberger, it seems, wanted Or Haganuz to be free from many of the habits that have accompanied Orthodox Jewish life for millennia.

One such habit is the relationship to work. Traditionally, many Orthodox Jewish communities encourage males to devote themselves full time to the study of the Torah, supporting them with donations. At Or Haganuz, only a handful of select gifted scholars engage in full-time study; for most, the main spiritual practice is work. “Our life here is guided by the principle of ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’” explains Rabbi

Asherov. “And ‘love’ for us is a very practical commandment: Your primary concern should not be *your* welfare but your neighbor’s. Love of neighbor means that your motivation for work is securing your neighbor’s needs.”

This aspect of Judaism, says Asherov, has been neglected by Orthodox Judaism. Little wonder. By his own admission, transforming someone’s motivation to such a degree is the hardest thing there is to do. Yet he claims that through the study of the Kabbalah, as well as through the constant guidance of their teacher, Rabbi Sheinberger, people change.

The way resources are allocated at Or Haganuz may be an

indication of this change. In true communist fashion, everyone works according to their ability and receives according to their needs, and all the income is collected into a common kitty. “And who decides,” we ask, “how much you should get?”

“You decide,” says Asherov. “When members need some money, they withdraw as much as they need from the kitty. In the log book, they only write down the amount they took out, not their names.”

Life at Or Haganuz is no summer camp. A typical day starts at 4:00 AM (though some start as early as 2:00 AM) with a few hours of Kabbalah study. At

6:00 AM, morning prayers are held. At 8:00 AM, kids go to the local schools and parents to work, mostly in one of the Or Haganuz-owned businesses, which include a printing press and publishing house, two regional supermarkets, and a large Chinese medicine school and treatment center. There are two more scheduled communal prayer times, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. However, meals—including the Shabbat meals—are taken at home, preserving the traditional structure of the Jewish family.

Commitment is measured at times of adversity. While living at Or Haganuz is never without challenges, the recent conflict between Israel and Lebanon raised the stakes considerably. Although well within the range of Hezbollah Katyusha rockets, none of the residents agreed to be evacuated, even after the village was directly hit. It was a statement of their commitment to a lifestyle that they see as both characteristic of the Messianic Age and the means of bringing this age about. And while their numbers are increasing steadily, they hope that through personal example and their effort to spread the teachings of the Kabbalah many more will be inspired to adopt their lifestyle, both in Israel and abroad.

Igal Moria



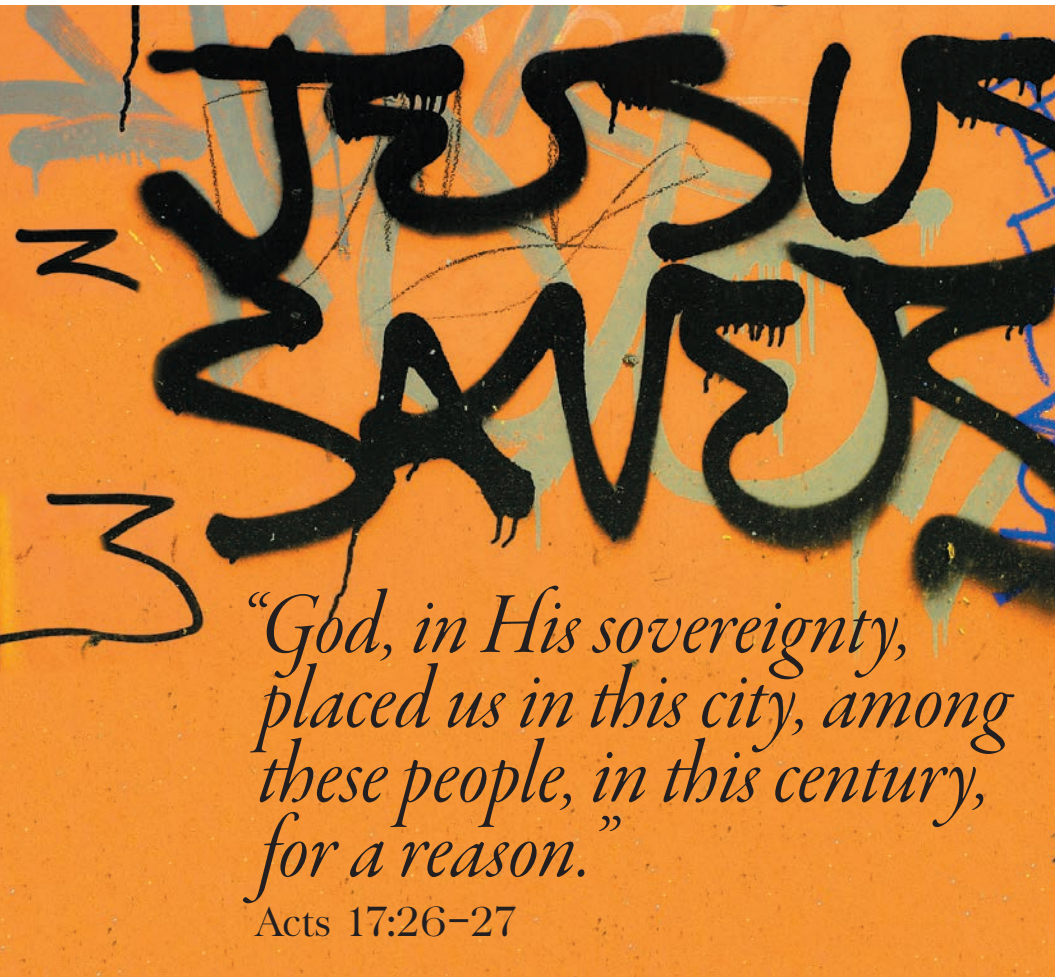
Mars Hill Church

Location: Seattle, Washington

Began: October 1, 1996

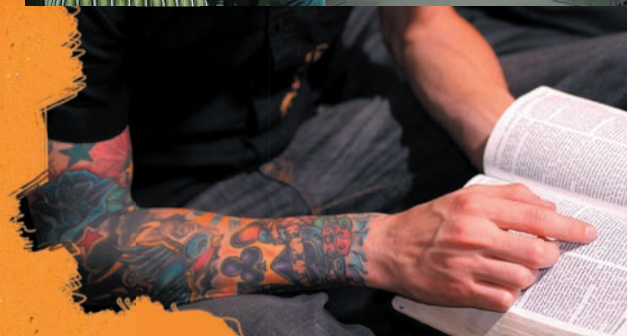
Founder: Mark Driscoll

Philosophy/Mission Statement: To spread the word of God to the city of Seattle and beyond. They believe "the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the verbally inspired word of God, the final authority for faith and life, inerrant in the original writings, infallible, and God-breathed."



*"God, in His sovereignty,
placed us in this city, among
these people, in this century,
for a reason."*

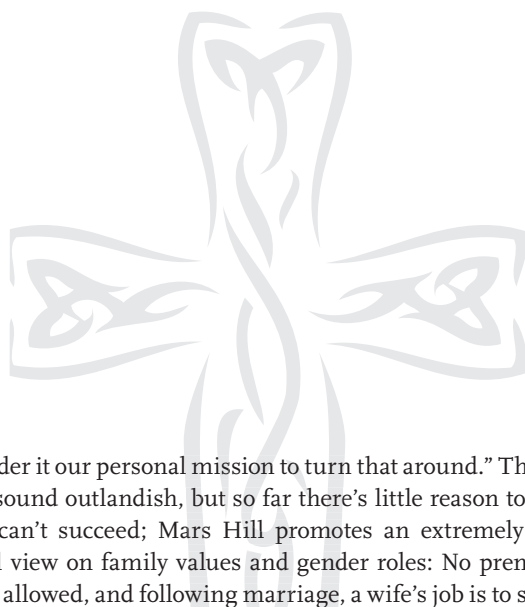
Acts 17:26-27



WASHINGTON IS ONE OF THE MOST SECULAR states in America and ranks second to lowest for the number of people belonging to religious organizations. Seattle, the state's largest city, is the most educated in the United States, with over fifty percent of its adult population holding bachelor's degrees. The city is also home to oodles of alternative Gen-X'ers, trendy bohemians, and hipster technorati, an ultraliberal demographic that, so far, has demonstrated close to zero interest in organized religion.

It's for all of these reasons that the strict, theologically orthodox church called Mars Hill should not have succeeded in getting off the ground when founder Mark Driscoll led the first Bible study group back in 1996.

That was a mere year or two after the pinnacle of grunge, and Driscoll was in the movement's very birthplace—the epicenter of anti-establishment, punk-inspired angst and spiritual ennui. Yet within one year, Mars Hill had grown from ten



people to fifteen hundred, and Driscoll had gained a reputation among Seattle urbanites as an honest, straight-talking guy. He listened to the same music as you and didn't care if you were covered in tattoos, had a septum piercing, and were working in a coffee shop all day, so long as you had committed your life completely to Jesus Christ.

Today Mars Hill Church, whose slogan is "Truth, Meaning, Beauty, Community," has a congregation of over five thousand people, fifty-five percent of whom are thirty or younger. Mars Hill is expanding at such a rapid rate, at times as much as sixty percent per year, that the staff of seventy-five has difficulty managing the growth. As the now thirty-six-year-old Driscoll wrote on his blog recently, "Over one hundred couples are getting married every year and hundreds of babies are being born. Just baptizing the new Christians is getting complicated, and we recently did more than sixty in one day."

The church's main meeting space is a forty-thousand-square-foot warehouse in the trendy Ballard section of Seattle, decked out with an art gallery, café, and sixty thousand dollars worth of sound equipment for visiting rock bands. Recently, however, even that enormous space became cramped for their rapidly expanding operation, so Mars Hill is now renovating another fifty-thousand-square-foot church in West Seattle. Their other "campus," in Shoreline, shows live video casts of Driscoll's sermons on Sunday mornings to hundreds of people.

But Mars Hill isn't just a place where people go on Sunday—it's a thriving community that spans the entire city of Seattle through fifty neighborhood "hubs." Made up of Mars Hill congregants who buy real estate close to one another, these hubs are like mini-parishes whose members eat, study, and pray together. In this way Mars Hill intends to create an ever more powerful collective that can exert a Christian influence on Seattle politics, culture, economics, and education.

In addition to buying swaths of real estate, members intend to accomplish this by literally repopulating Seattle with Christian-born babies. "We are in a city with less children per capita than any city but San Francisco," Driscoll says, "and we

consider it our personal mission to turn that around." The plan may sound outlandish, but so far there's little reason to think they can't succeed; Mars Hill promotes an extremely traditional view on family values and gender roles: No premarital sex is allowed, and following marriage, a wife's job is to submit to her husband and to have as many children as possible.

Amazingly, it's a role that the women of Mars Hill welcome, despite many of their liberal backgrounds. "Just look at [the Bible]. Eve . . . was deceived even though she thought she was doing the right thing," one congregant, previously a tour organizer for rock bands and now a mother of two, is quoted as saying. "You know what happened? Her husband didn't step in and tell her what to do. And now we're all screwed because of it."

How does Driscoll inspire young, educated postmodern women to subscribe to a view so retrograde that even their mothers would never subject themselves to it? The answer is the same as why the orthodox Mars Hill Church has succeeded in a place

like Seattle at all. What these young people want spiritually, as journalist Lauren Sandler points out in her recent book *Righteous*, is "liberation from liberation." They're looking for a principled lifestyle, one that's the exact opposite of the slacker culture that helped define Gen-X.

What makes Mars Hill remarkable is not just that it's attracting thousands of young people with its traditional worldview but that, in doing so, it is highlighting those values that these young people haven't been able to find in contemporary culture. Morality, faith, direction, clear-cut rules—these are things that sex, rock and roll, college degrees, and even parents didn't provide them. And as Driscoll says, "What I give them is from the Bible: I say, let me give you some rules, not to be a jerk but to help you out. And when was the last time that anyone in their busted-up family did that?" Surely it's a good thing that young people are craving greater morality and principles, though to many, Mars Hill will seem more regressive than progressive. Nevertheless, it is meeting an authentic need, and as long as this need exists in the culture, communities like Mars Hill are bound to become increasingly popular.

Maura R. O'Connor



Sekem (“*Vitality*”)

Location: Belbeis, forty miles northeast of Cairo, Egypt

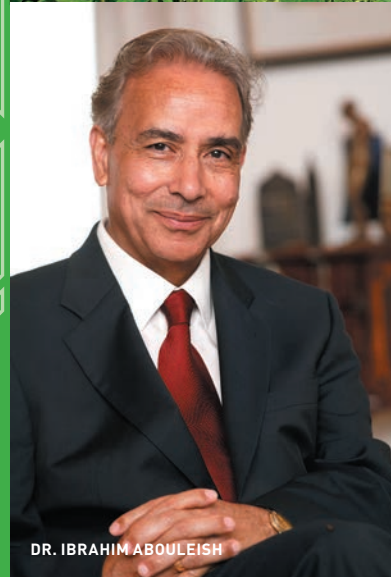
Began: 1977

Founder: Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish

Philosophy/Mission Statement: To create a model sustainable community in the Egyptian desert, based on a unique integration of Islamic principles with the teachings of Rudolf Steiner, that caters to all the needs—financial, health, educational, cultural, religious, and environmental—of its members.

“A living, ever regenerating community maintaining its dynamism by reaching towards the science of the spirit, the Ightihad; a community pursuing truth and tolerance, generously offering its understanding in service of earth and man.”

—Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish



“A MIRACLE IN THE DESERT”—THAT’S HOW people in Egypt refer to Sekem, the internationally acclaimed self-sustaining farm complex in Belbeis. Using a unique blend of Islam and the teachings of Rudolf Steiner, this 750-acre farm grows biodynamic produce, medicinal plants, and cotton; produces food and herbal food supplements; manufactures organic cotton clothes for babies; and much more. At the same time, it supports the cultural development and health of its employees and their families while raising consciousness in the entire region. It owes its success to the deep care, fearless courage, and tenacious perseverance of one inspired individual, its founder, Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish.

In 1975, Abouleish, a successful Egyptian scientist living in Austria, took his Austrian-raised children on an extensive tour of his homeland. It was an unexpected shocker. He found this once-prospering country to be a wasteland beset with problems, after years of armed conflict and failed socialist economic experimentation.

Back in the Austrian Alps, Abouleish was haunted by an inner calling to respond. After two years of investigation and research, he had a plan: establish a model sustainable farming community in the desert that, besides providing employment, would care for its members’ overall development

in education, health, religion, environment, the economy, and human rights.

As a practicing Muslim, Abouleish based his farm on the three pillars of worship mentioned in the Qur'an: working, learning, and dealing with one another. And as an avid student of anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science, he weaved its principles into the farm's design—especially the principles of biodynamic agriculture.

Islam and anthroposophy may seem like strange bedfellows. Not so, claims Abouleish. "Even though anthroposophy arose in a Christian European context, it is basically a way of thinking, a perspective that helps you discover the deeper meaning in everything," he explains. He did, however, have to adapt many of the principles of, for example, biodynamic agriculture to the specific conditions of the desert. "But this is exactly what the Muslims did in their golden age," he explains. "They took what was best from other cultures and philosophies and developed it."

In 1977, Abouleish moved to Egypt, his family in tow. Within days of arriving, he bought an arid piece of land, one that all experts recommended against. Yet Abouleish trusted the inner vision that this plot of desert land inspired in him—wells

flowing with water, green grass covering the landscape, flower beds and healing plants growing under trees, and people flocking from all directions to quench their thirst, physically and spiritually. He called the farm Sekem, an ancient Egyptian word meaning "vitality."

Sekem has become every bit the vital center that Abouleish envisioned, and then some. Each morning, sixteen hundred people from nearby towns and villages (one thousand employees, four hundred schoolchildren, and two hundred vocational trainees) enter its gates. In their respective work units—agriculture, business companies, medical services, etc.—they start the day with a ritual conceived by Abouleish. Standing in a circle, each person says a few words about what they plan to accomplish for that day and what they accomplished on the previous day. There's also a larger company-wide circle at the end of the workweek, where leaders of each of Sekem's divisions summarize the week's accomplishments. In addition to working, employees take part in enrichment programs, which range from literacy to English to job training to painting to eurhythm. Weekly question-and-answer sessions with Abouleish also occur, where Islamic topics are often raised.

Sekem also holds regular cultural events for employees and their families at its fifteen-hundred-seat amphitheater.

Sekem has also taken responsibility for raising the health and hygiene standards of the thirty thousand people who live in its vicinity. Every home has been equipped with flowing clean water and a toilet and is visited regularly by social and public health workers who give hygiene and health training. They also keep medical files on each person, offer basic treatments, and refer acute cases to the farm's medical center.

Financially, Sekem is thriving. Demand for its organically grown medicinal herbs, cotton, fruit, and vegetables, both in local markets and abroad, is so high that to meet it, Sekem had to create a network of eight hundred farms throughout Egypt,

as well as in Sudan and Iran, and train them in biodynamic agriculture. With Sekem at the helm, the Egyptian authorities converted the country's entire cotton industry to pesticide- and herbicide-free methods of cultivation.

Like genius, miracles are one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration. During the first few years, Abouleish had to fight an uphill battle against the elements, the lack of infrastructure, and the absence of educated staff, not to mention suspicion from Islamic fundamentalists and clandestine opposition from chemical companies, whose revenues from pesticides and herbicides in Egypt were drastically

reduced.

Much water has flowed in the Nile since those hard beginnings, and nowadays Sekem is being showered with accolades. In 2003, Dr. Abouleish received the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the "Alternative Nobel Prize"; and the Schwab Foundation has selected him as a distinguished Social Entrepreneur, earning him a place in their yearly prestigious forum in Davos, Switzerland.

In spite of the influence of the European culture, including anthroposophy, Abouleish insists that all the different aspects of economic, social, and cultural developments of Sekem can be derived from Islam. He devotes much effort and many resources to sponsor and participate in research into Islamic texts and history, to bring out principles of Muslim business, education, and culture for the twenty-first century. If successful and accepted, this may make Sekem's example even more palatable to countries in the Muslim world, helping them become creative and constructive forces in the building of the global economy without compromising their religious ideals and traditions.

Igal Moria



feature

Atlantis

IN THE MOUNTAINS OF ITALY

WIE visits one of the world's most successful communal experiments—the Federation of Damanhur—and explores the ins and outs of esoteric spirituality, the secrets of time travel, and what the utopias of tomorrow have to do with yesterday's golden age.

by Ross Robertson



What would you say if I told you there was a place nestled in the foothills of the Italian Alps, by the wild gray waters of the Torrente Chiusella, where dreams are not just for children, and magic has not yet gone from the world? A place where men and women live together in harmony with the land and in tune with the cosmos, working and building, playing and cooking, ringing out the evening's greeting on conch shells that echo from village to village across the forested valleys, gathering at night to revive the lost rites of history's great kaleidoscope of sacred traditions in underground halls and temples under the moon? It is a place washed by mysterious energies, where people seem to age more slowly and latent creative abilities bubble up spontaneously in young and old alike. A place where artists and artisans, merchants and councilmen, poets and architects all walk the paths of a university dedicated to the quest for esoteric knowledge and the spiritual advancement of humankind. You might even hear stories of quantum physicians plying the borders of matter and energy who claim to have penetrated the information codes underlying human DNA; or psychic technicians who speak of traveling the earth's planetary energy lines, slipping backward in time to set events in motion that may be destined to change the course of the distant future . . .

What would you say if I told you the story of a people, a vision, a whole *society* that sounded less like anything you've

ever heard of in this world and more like something Gene Roddenberry dreamed up for an episode of *Star Trek*—one of those classic undisturbed planets, idyllically isolated from the rest of the galaxy, where people wear colorful flowing robes, the kids run right up to the crew of the *Enterprise* because they never learned to be suspicious of strangers, and the atmosphere is perfumed by a sort of quaintness and real dignity and also by a certain feeling of doomed innocence? Would you even believe me if I told you this was no science fiction utopia at all but was every bit as real as the stone farmhouses and stone-covered hills of the Italian countryside that surrounds it, just fifty kilometers north of the city of Torino?

THE FIRST SPIRITUAL AUTONOMOUS REGION OF THE NEW WORLD

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.

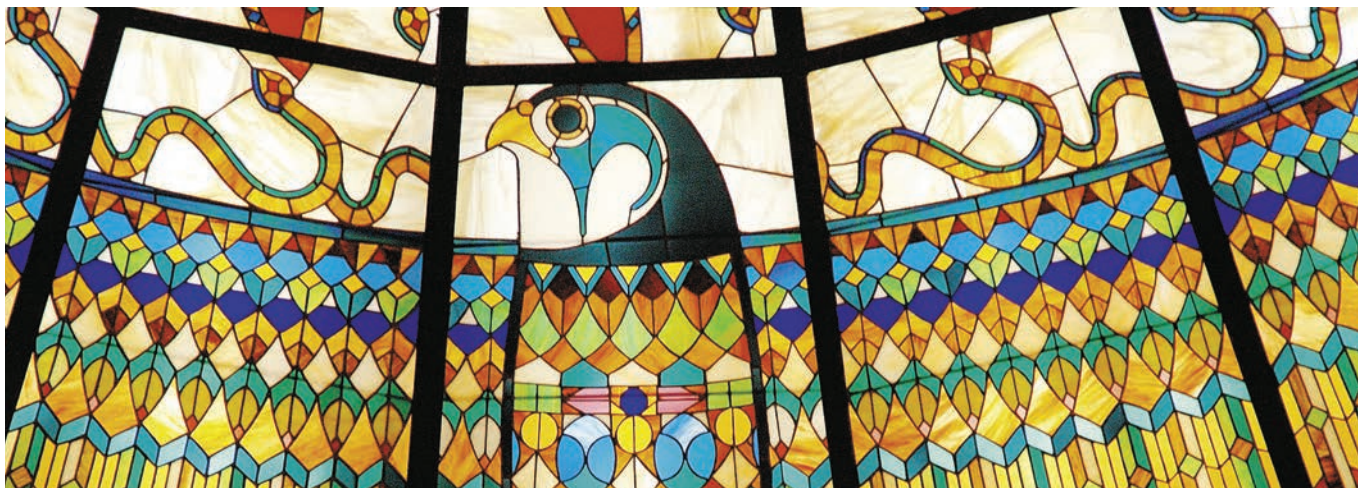
Oscar Wilde



Here at WIE, we're lovers of innovation, fans of the unusual, and suckers for the radical. So when we heard about an intentional community in northern Italy's Piedmont Alps so bold as to call itself "the first spiritual autonomous region of the new world," suffice it to say it piqued our curiosity.

The more we learned about this place, the more intrigued we became. For one thing, it's no small-time operation: More than a thousand people live there, spread across an entire subalpine valley and deeply incorporated in the local community, culture, and economy. Two, their society is based on something that is all too rare in this cynical world—unrestrained, unabashed optimism—and they have

consciously dedicated their lives to what they see as the reawakening of the divine within both the individual and the larger collective. Three, perhaps more successfully than hundreds if not thousands of other communal experiments founded on utopian ideals over the last fifty years, they have not only stood the test of time but prospered. Established in 1975, they seem to have remained in a state of dynamic growth for more than three decades now, boasting dozens of thriving businesses; their own daily newspaper; their own currency, constitution, and government; their own schools, political movement, and fire department; and, most of all, a spirit of passionate self-reinvention that consistently refuses to be quenched.



The Hall of Mirrors: Detail of Horus, falcon-headed Egyptian sky god and patron deity of Damanhur, from the world's largest underground stained-glass dome.

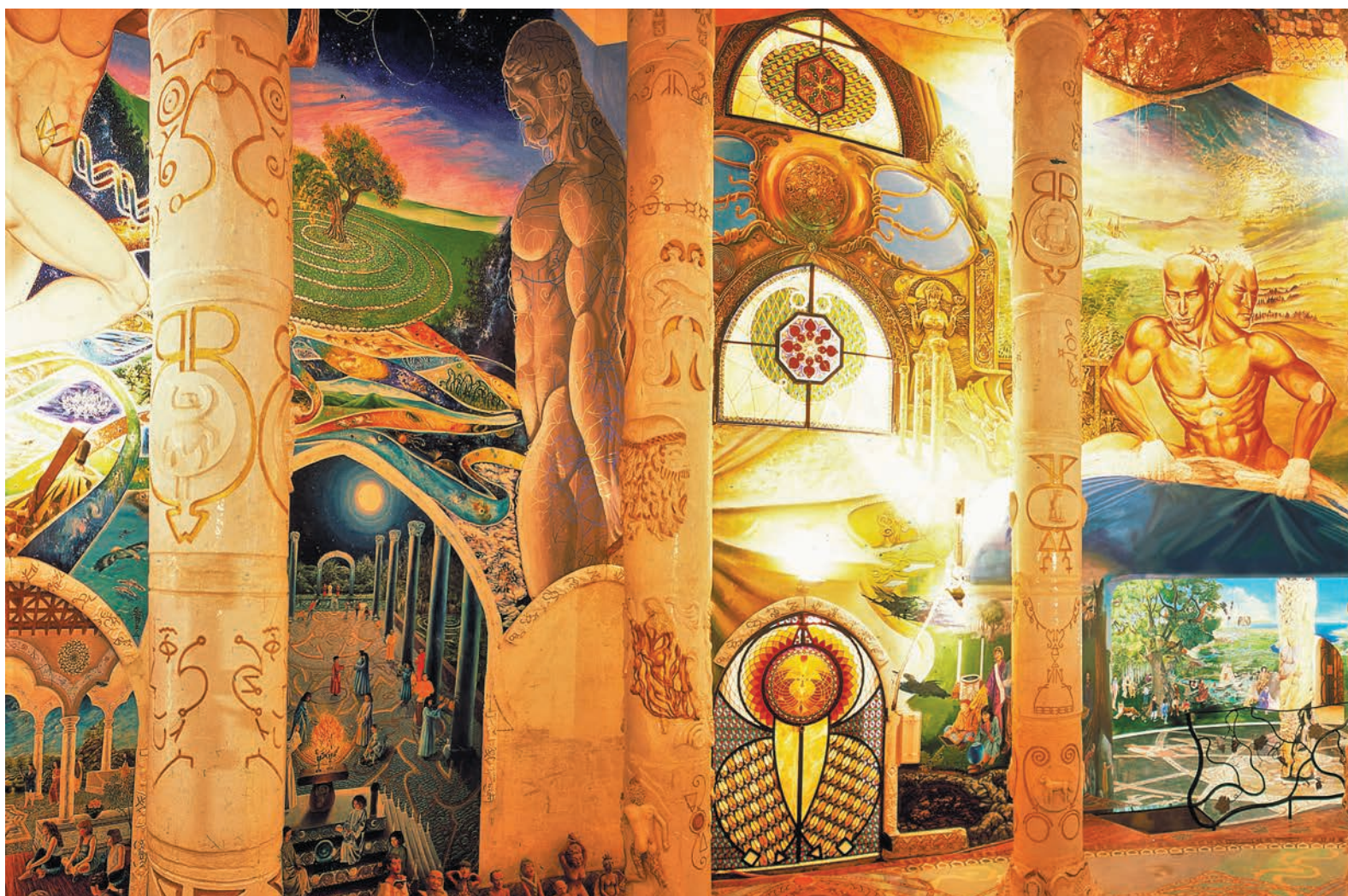
And there's more. For all you esotericists out there, the citizens of the first spiritual autonomous region of the new world also claim to be inheritors of the mystical legacy of Egypt and Atlantis, guardians of a lost and ancient knowledge they fervently believe is going to help awaken and evolve human consciousness. All that *Star Trek* stuff I said before about quantum technology and time travel and DNA codes and such? It barely scratches the surface of their belief system. They've even codified and immortalized their entire esoteric scheme into sacred architecture, in the form of a gigantic chain of underground temples that looks like it came straight out of the pages of Tolkien. But these adherents of a philosophy so heady and complex it would take me every page of this magazine to explain it are somehow, at the very same time, unusually down-to-earth and refreshingly action-oriented. After all, they excavated every last square inch of these "Temples of Humankind" by hand, with no help at all from professional engineers. "The search for the inner self and God," they explain on their website, "is founded on . . . a harmonious and continuous inner transformation, the overcoming of personal limits, the capacity to measure ourselves through action and practical work, [and] the respect for all forms of life, be they subtle or physical."

For all that, you probably haven't heard of them before. They kept a low profile over the years for several reasons, not least of which is that they lacked permission to be digging out a seventy-meter-deep, six-thousand-cubic-meter series of tunnels and caverns underneath a local mountain. And they haven't exactly gotten a lot of good press for the whole time-travel thing. Italy is a conservative country, nearly ninety percent Catholic, and this curiously inspired group of occultist communitarians was probably wise to play it conservative themselves. But you can't keep a secret forever, and in recent years they've opened their doors to the world and are beginning to travel more and more

to share their ideas and the lessons of thirty years of hard work. Visionary artist Alex Grey has taken an interest in the extraordinary painting, sculpture, and glasswork of the Temples of Humankind, now recognized as an Italian national treasure and featured in a new coffee table book out last fall from Grey's Chapel of Sacred Mirrors Press. They've got twenty affiliated centers now in Italy, with twenty more in Europe, Japan, and the United States. They're stepping up their involvement on the international stage, taking a leadership role in the Global Ecovillage Network and hosting a major conference next summer for the International Communal Studies Association called "Communities: Yesterday's Utopia, Today's Reality." And they're hard at work on their next temple project, a massive thousand-seat underground amphitheater they plan to offer to the United Nations.

Our interest was piqued all right. Remember, we're talking about more than *one thousand* people here. From everything we could tell, they seemed to have tapped directly into something remarkable, some deep creative drive that has kept them growing and evolving all these years, aligned under the unifying banner of a shared commitment to higher ideals. They also seemed to have devoted incredible amounts of energy and attention to arcane philosophies and sci-fi mythologies, not just one or two but whole grandiose hosts of them, and although I'm as big a fan of a good sci-fi mythology as the next guy, it wasn't yet clear how it all fit together. In short, from the communities of Auroville in South India to Findhorn in Scotland to the Farm in Tennessee, you'd be hard-pressed to find a more fascinating—or more enigmatic—example of the age-old utopian impulse manifesting itself in modern times.

They call it the Federation of Damanhur, and when the opportunity presented itself last summer to spend a few days there, we simply could not pass it up.



FRANCIS BACON, MODEL DAMANHURIAN?

It would be an unsound fancy and self-contradictory to expect that things which have never yet been done can be done except by means which have never yet been tried.

Francis Bacon

I love this quote by Francis Bacon because it captures what I love the most about Damanhur. It's the spirit of the place. It's the adventurousness, the frontier mentality, that certain *je ne sais quoi* of creative exuberance and curiosity and seemingly endless goodwill, that in the end, I think, defines them better than anything else. Truth be told, their lives are so wildly multifaceted—and in many ways, so ambiguous and so hidden—they're a bit hard to define otherwise. That's not going to stop me from trying, but I thought I should at least warn you: When I first drove up that twisty little road from the Piedmontese village of Castellamonte on a muggy afternoon in July, past dark-

canopied forests and skinny lanes and fields the colors of an impressionist painting, I scarcely appreciated how big a whirlwind of wonder and confusion I was getting myself into.

That being said, *whatever* it was that I was getting myself into, I think Francis Bacon would have approved. He's the type of guy who seemed wildly multifaceted himself, especially if you believe the stories that say that in addition to being a trendsetting seventeenth-century philosopher, ethicist, lawyer, statesman, scholar, and astrologer, he was also the enlightened founder of the esoteric Order of Rosicrucians *and* the true author of the plays published under the pseudonym "William Shakespeare." Bacon had a curious and adventuresome spirit,



The Hall of the Earth: Portraits of Damanhur's local history in the context of a cosmic evolutionary story

too, as befits the man who invented the revolutionary theory of observation and experimentation we know today as the modern scientific method. What's more, he was a dyed-in-the-wool utopian idealist who penned one of the great classics of the genre, *The New Atlantis* (1627). In a nutshell, he was inventive, industrious, artistic, determined, and spiritually conscious—all in all, a pretty good model of the perfect Damanhurian. And this statement of his could be their motto: "By far the greatest obstacle to the progress of science and to the undertaking of new tasks and provinces therein is found in this—that men despair and think things impossible."

When I arrived at the broad marble steps of the Olami welcome center, I was met by a keen-eyed woman named Gufo (Italian for "owl") who took me for a walk around the capital of Damanhur. There, the Federation's earliest inhabitants had built an open-air temple with statues of sylvan gods in red clay and pillars of white marble from Tuscany and ornate iron gates shaped in the symbols of a sacred language purportedly from Atlantis. I saw shops and homes and offices, solar arrays and old bits of Greek-looking statuary, chic electric cars in the parking

lots, jungle gyms and eco-friendly water systems and spiral labyrinths of painted stone, and everywhere, signs of construction and work in progress. They seemed to be building and growing so fast, I felt like I was on an archaeological site, with different eras of Damanhur's history visible in the different planes and angles of the landscape. "It has been difficult to write a book about Damanhur," Gufo admitted, "because by the time the book is finished, Damanhur is different."

The people we passed were casually dressed, more or less, perhaps with a preference for vibrant colors and flowing lines, and a few wore sashes of bright fabric at their waists. Their smiles were warm, their manner relaxed yet purposeful. We came to a building and entered a room probably twenty feet square that was dominated by a kingly central table covered in white cloth. Gufo peeled it back with a flourish, surprising me with what had to be the world's most colossal board game, a lavish homemade version of Risk. She told me a group of thirty people had been playing at least three nights a week for—no joke—fifteen years running! It was a long-term political, social, economic, and historical case study, she said, an

in-depth exploration of the mechanisms of population growth, migration, crisis, and war. And the esoteric twist—there is always an esoteric twist at Damanhur—is that supposedly everything the gamers were learning about human relationship and human conflict was being “transmitted” psychically into the collective knowledge banks of the race as a whole.

I’ll try to explain more about the psychic transmission thing a little later on. For now, what’s important is that Gufo was showing me an example of what the Damanhurians call spiritual “research,” a word I heard a *lot* while I was there. Research is the key to their spiritual lives, she said. It is the practice of ongoing study, experimentation, and transformation they apply to themselves and, more importantly, share with each other every single day. They have research groups in the School of Meditation, she explained to me, Damanhur’s very own esoteric mystery school; there are the seven so-called Spiritual Ways, different paths for integrating their research with their daily lives and livelihoods; then there are the temples themselves, which I soon found out were chock

As a toddler, Falco allegedly rolled eggs across the kitchen floor using only the power of his thoughts.

full of spiritual research laboratories of their own. And so on. It was all a bit complicated, but Gufo—perhaps noting the slight glaze in my eyes—said not to worry about it. In order to help me understand just how central the spirit of research really is to the spirit of Damanhur, she said, she was going to tell me the story of their founder—a man named Oberto Airaudi, aka Falco (falcon), an esotericist and philosopher-poet and multidimensional Renaissance man who reminded me, it just so happened, of that other esotericist, philosopher-poet, and multidimensional Renaissance man I’d been thinking about . . . a man named Francis Bacon.

Gufo’s tale, as recorded that day in my notebook, slightly embellished:

Oberto Airaudi was born in 1950 in Torino. An unusual city. Home of the shroud Jesus is said to have worn at the time of the resurrection. Onetime residence of the world’s most famous soothsayer, Nostradamus. One of three cities (with San Francisco and London) known to occultist lore as the corners of an infamous triangle of black magic and paranormal energies.

Whether or not Torino was the reason for it, Falco was definitely not your average kid. Allegedly rolled eggs across the kitchen floor as a toddler using only the power of his thoughts. Remembers conjuring up ghostly apparitions to frighten his opponents on the soccer field and attaching rockets to the sides of his bicycle to see if he could fly. As the years went by, started having visions of large subterranean cathedral dedicated to evolution of cosmos and spiritual rebirth of human race. Tried (unsuccessfully) to build one by himself out back in the family garden.

Key point: Over time, began to funnel his interests in the further reaches of human potential in more and more practical directions, incorporating the language and attitudes of science into his investigations of psychic and spiritual phenomena.

By age fourteen, experimenting with hypnosis, levitation, and out-of-body travel; giving lectures on physics, math, music, and esoteric philosophy to crowds of eighty or a hundred people; and laying out the first rough principles used later to guide development of Damanhur. Knew he was on to something when able to convince two of his Jesuit teachers at school to quit in order to come study with him. Opened center in Torino named after Horus, falcon-headed Egyptian sky god whose name he also took for his own, where he managed as many as thirty-six different esoteric research groups at once, all of them pursuing independent projects simultaneously.

Ran successful insurance business and developed pranatherapy clinics and psychic healing courses all over Italy. Made a rule for himself that he would 1) invent at least one new thing per day and 2) read at least one book per day—a rule he has kept ever since. Established Damanhur, naming it after an Egyptian city that was the site of a temple to Horus. Has now written over three hundred books and countless articles, stories, and plays; sold in excess of fourteen thousand of his own paintings; still gives at least two lectures a week.

I think Francis Bacon would definitely have liked the guy. In his own time, Bacon’s innovative methods of research and experimentation had yet to become the foundation for science as we think of it today but were instead associated with hermeticism, alchemy, and the occult—a connection echoed by Falco’s own empirical approach to esoteric philosophy. Bacon’s *New Atlantis* even tells the story of a utopian society ruled by a group of enlightened inventors who study alchemy, healing, and life extension in caverns deep underground and whose ultimate goal is “the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible.”

Bacon wrote about it. But by all appearances at least, Falco has actually tried to build the place.

THE SECRET CORRIDORS OF TIME

There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call the Twilight Zone.

Rod Serling

No, this was not the early 1960s and I was not trapped inside an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, but there were times at Damanhur when it seemed like I should be. Times when things just slipped a little bit *sideways*, and the parameters of the everyday gave way to the territory of the unexpected.

This was one of them. I was standing in the central control room of the Temples of Humankind when I suddenly got the feeling I had somehow landed on the set of a sci-fi adventure serial in the early days of color television. Flasks and tubes for distilling alchemical liquids huddled on a workbench. Beakers and bottles of ingredients crowded the shelves on two walls. The room was lit only by black light, the contents of said beakers and bottles being susceptible to breakdown from regular incandescent light. Just outside

Across the Hall of Spheres was Damanhur's infamous time cabin, where some twenty or thirty Damanhurians claim to have traveled back to visit the Stone Age.

the door was the Hall of Spheres, where nine crystal globes filled with said alchemical liquids stood on pedestals under a ceiling covered in twenty-three-karat hammered gold leaf. Perfume-filled chalices rested between them, a gallery of grails my tour guide went so far as to suggest included the honest-to-goodness *holy* one. Across the Hall of Spheres was Damanhur's infamous time cabin, where some twenty or thirty Damanhurians claim to have traveled back to visit the Stone Age. And on the wall of the control room right in front of me, there was what you might call, for lack of

a better word, the master computer. Made up of countless circuits of spiral wire, arcane symbols and schematics, a tenth liquid-filled crystal globe, and one nine-key crystal keypad, this command panel extraordinaire purportedly offered its operator full control over the cosmic flows of energy and information passing through the entire complex of the temples.

Standing there at the nexus of what I was told were numerous kilometers of specialized copper circuitry, I was actually standing at the center of Damanhur itself—not just at the physical heart of their temple structure but also at the heart of all their myriad forms of esoteric research, and even at the heart of the overarching utopian mission that brought them to build the temples here in the first place. You see, these subterranean chambers were located in *this* particular place on *this* particular mountain in *this* particular valley for a very particular reason. It all dates back to the days when Falco was a teenage occultist wunderkind living in Torino . . .

Of all young Oberto Airaudi's many research projects, perhaps his most important involved what he called the "synchronic lines," which he described as a planetwide system of subtle energy and information currents that encircles the globe and links it to the universe. "Synchronic lines are like rivers in which an infinite amount of knowledge is stored," he says, "as if they were a library containing all that humankind has ever thought." He actually spent his late teens and early twenties mapping this global akashic network, first by "projecting" his mind along the length of its astral highways, then by blazing the trail physically on an extended seven-continent-wide adventure. By the time he was finished, he'd found but two places on earth where four major synchronic lines intersected one another—supercharged regions he called "shining knots," which allegedly served as access points for the entire system. The first was high in the Tibetan Himalayas, and the second, to his apparent surprise, was in a little valley in the Piedmont Alps just fifty kilometers north of home. Its name was Valchiusella.



The people of Damanhur, 2005

The Birth of an Eco-Society

Back in the early days of Damanhur, many of the habits and traditions formed that continue to shape the way the community looks today. Their first small village of twenty or so people (called a “nucleo”) has given way to about *forty* villages these days, yet these extended-family homesteads scattered through the valley are still the bedrock of Damanhurian society. They are the basis of Damanhur’s democratic government as well, made up of one representative from each nucleo and overseen by two elected “King Guides.” As for the thousand-plus adults who live there, eighty-five percent are Italian, fifty-seven percent are women, seventy percent work for Damanhurian businesses, and thirty percent hold jobs outside the community. From day one, they

consciously worked to develop a sustainable eco-society, and they won an award recognizing their achievements in this area from the United Nations Global Human Settlement Forum in 2005. They produce half their own food—organic vegetables, olives, grains, fruit, wine, oil, honey, milk, and cheese. And they pride themselves on energy self-sufficiency, generating fifty-four percent of their heated water (from solar panels), twenty-five percent of their electricity (photo-voltaic installations and small water turbines), and ninety percent of their fuel for heating (wood harvested from their own forests). Thirty-five percent of their vehicles run on biodiesel, with another forty percent powered by methane gas.



Oberto Airaudi, Damanhur’s founder and spiritual guide

“By carefully studying the flow of these energy channels,” Falco writes, “one can foresee what will happen in the future and thus modify the present.” By carefully studying the flow of these energy channels, the Damanhurians seem to believe they can do just about anything. The synchronic lines are the linchpin of their esoteric philosophy and the lifeblood of their esoteric research. If you ever ask them where the “information” they’re working with comes from—where they got their sacred language, for instance, or their knowledge of alchemy,

or lost Atlantean technologies, or healing, or divination, or any of the rest of it—they’ll say it came from the synchronic lines. And it is the synchronic lines, in turn, which they believe allow them to transmit all the fruits of their spiritual experiments and all the insights they gain from research projects like the Risk game *back out* into society, the world, the galaxy, and the universe at large. As Falco’s theory has it, these akashic superconductors are attracted to natural features like mountains, rivers, and caves, both natural and *manmade*.

That, in a nutshell, is why he came to Valchiusella to build the Temples of Humankind. Essentially, the chambers are like hollow synchronic antennae, deliberately excavated *spaces* within the mountain that ostensibly pick up and draw in these rivers of infinite knowledge and infinite potential, forming a living gateway through which the Damanhurians can directly manipulate this cosmic power and by which their efforts to evolve consciousness and transform the world can be magnified a millionfold. Or something like that.

But that's not all. They say the synchronic lines are also gateways through time. And at that very moment, I was essentially standing *right on top* of their main junction box. No wonder I felt like I was phase-shifting back to the sixties and hearing Rod Serling's voice in my head.

Falco moved to Valchiusella with a dozen or so of his closest students in 1977, and they broke ground on the temples in 1978. The workers proceeded in secret and often in silence—camouflaging the entrance to the main passageway, masking the sounds of their hammers, removing dirt and rock one small bucket at a time, and scattering it carefully and inconspicuously about the forest floor so

Just ten minutes into his talk, Falco abruptly stood up, threw his microphone down on the table, and walked out of the room.

the neighbors wouldn't notice. The labor was intense, yet they saw it as a meditative pilgrimage, an active metaphor for the journey deep within themselves. The seventy or eighty Damanhurians who took part in this work over the thirteen years their secret lasted speak convincingly of the power it had in their lives. But then came the day in the fall of 1991 when the authorities descended on them, with soldiers in helicopters, threatening to dynamite the mountain unless they divulged the hidden location of the temples. A disgruntled former community member had turned them in.

Falco was unfazed. He simply showed the state prosecutor in through the front door, and when the man emerged an hour later, he had tears in his eyes and vowed to do whatever he could do to help them stave off further trouble. It took them four years, but eventually they got the Italian government's seal of approval, and the temples were legalized and opened to the public in 1996.

Inside the Temples of Humankind, it was abundantly clear how proud the Damanhurians were of their rich collective history, because it had been recorded *everywhere*. The walls were like history books adorned with paintings of many of the same people I met while I was there and many of the same stories I just told you. These walls bore cosmic histories also, panoramic visions of the birth and evolution of the universe and allegorical scenes of war between good and evil in the hearts of men. There were mosaics and statues of the gods and goddesses of Greece and Rome, Sumer and Babylon, Hindu and Zulu, Aztec and Algonquin. And of course, the omnipresent motifs of Egypt and Atlantis—shifting sands and swimming dolphins, warriors and dragons, scarabs and hieroglyphs, Osiris, Anubis, and the falcons of Horus. These artists' marvels were not just mythological but technological as well. They had eight-meter-wide domed ceilings of stained glass, backlit by neon. They had secret doors like those in the pyramids of the pharaohs, except these were *motorized*. Secret motorized drawbridges dropped from walls and hidden motorized stairs dropped from the floor at the touch of unseen remote controls. They even had strange subtle-energy healing beds that looked like a cross between a CAT scan machine and the bench Dr. Frankenstein used to bring his monster to life.

According to my tour guide, these particular beds had brought countless cancer patients into remission, but if there was actual evidence for it—evidence, for that matter, for any of Damanhur's esoteric claims—the Damanhurians weren't telling. A few bits and pieces of information had slipped out about purported archaeological finds allegedly verifying traces of their visits to ancient times. A fellow named Gorilla is even said to have returned from a foray through the secret corridors of time with a large clump of prehistoric grass in his hand, understandably one of their more celebrated bits of evidence. But the evidence I found most convincing was the evidence that was literally all around me, writ large across the temple floors, columns, stairs, and walls in mortar and glass, metal and stone. According to Falco, most of what he needed to know to build these underground halls came to him via esoteric insight, through the quiet whispers of his intuition. And to my eyes, the miracle was really that a group of laypeople—none of them architects, none of them engineers, none of them even professional artists—had built the temples in the first place. “I had a very big head, so I thought I could do it,” Falco remembers. “In the Middle Ages, they built cathedrals without being engineers or architects. So if they made such things, why not us?”



The Hall of the Earth: A depiction of the battle between each Damanhurian and the “enemy of mankind” in themselves

KICKING ASS AND TAKING NAMES

Damanhur works as a human body. If there are parts that don't work, the body rejects them. This is a society of warriors, not peacemakers. Because the Enemy is inside. It's there, what we have to fight.

Oberto Airaudi, aka Falco

My favorite mural in the temples depicts what Falco calls the Enemy of Mankind, an impersonal force of stasis, inertia, and conditioning represented by an evil horde of faceless warriors pouring over the plains like a dark tide. These gray soldiers of the Enemy are locked in combat with the colorful citizens of Damanhur, whose own faces are filled not with hatred or anger but with laughter, determination, and a certain steely-eyed joy. “As the Enemy can be identified with an absolutely negative force with a lot of power but very little intelligence,” Falco explains, “the way to oppose it is to use fantasy, invention, and creativity. You can consider the Enemy a rigid and unavoidable opposition that can be contrasted only with elasticity and fantasy.”

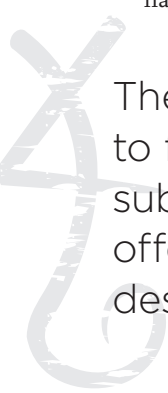
Just don't confuse his emphasis on the power of lightheartedness and imagination with being soft. On the contrary, over and over again throughout Damanhur's history, Falco has not hesitated to shake things up when necessary in order to break

through the structures of habit and complacency that tended to form between people over time. It first happened in 1983. Work on the temples was hopping, and life at Damanhur had gotten comfortable. Too comfortable. So Falco left. By the time he came back three months later, he had a whole bevy of new recruits with him, and soon the original group was vying with the younger one for his attention. His response? Deliberately sowing dissension between them, he eventually set up a no-holds-barred multiday version of the children's war game “capture the flag.” Predictably, the mock fighting heated up till it hit fever pitch, but just as it threatened to come to actual blows, Falco called a halt and made the two sides sit down with each other to talk about their experience, and the rift between them finally unraveled.

That's how the Damanhurian tradition called the Game of Life was born. It would become a central factor in the ongoing evolution of their communal society, a way to optimize the development of interpersonal relationships by

playfully pushing against people's natural leanings toward rigidity, security, and isolation. Since then, there have been many of these developmental exercises—artistic battles, traveling quests and journeys, wilderness survival challenges, the fifteen-year-long Risk game, and more—all emphasizing the confrontation with and the breaking down of boundaries between people. And the Damanhurians see the task of incorporating what they learn through the Game of Life into the constantly shifting structures of their community as a way for them to put their spiritual principles into practice, principles that call them to seek change, embrace uncertainty, and take personal responsibility for their own transformation.

The more I learned about the Damanhurians' willingness to consistently reinvent themselves as the community has evolved over time, the more I got a sense of how they've



They're so confident of their ability to foster healthy communities, they submitted a proposal to NASA offering to help the space program design future orbital colonies.

been able not just to survive but to thrive through the years while so many utopian experiments before them have folded up shop or simply faded into the history books. I've lived in several communities myself—first on an egalitarian farm in rural Missouri and now as a member of the dedicated spiritual collective that is home to WIE—and I know from experience that getting people to come together, work together, and most of all *stay* together for the sake of a larger common mission is not always easy. For starters, one tends to have to work against the culture of extreme individualism and narcissism that most of us are automatically a part of simply by virtue of the times we're living in, and that's no small thing, to say the least. But in the battle against all the obstacles that inevitably confront those who try to forge extraordinary societies out of ordinary individuals, with all our many human foibles, frailties, and less-than-wholesome motivations, Damanhur has at least one big advantage going for it: Falco himself.

I first met him at a public lecture he gave to a crowd of about two hundred Damanhurians while I was there, a lecture I expected would finally give me the chance to see members of the community engaging with him directly about some

aspect or another of community life, maybe even about their esoteric research if I was lucky. But what happened that night was a good deal more radical than that—and by the number of mouths I saw dropping open in astonishment, not something that happened very often. You see, just ten minutes into his talk, Falco abruptly stood up, threw his microphone down on the table, and walked out of the room. He was upset about the community's reticence to make some long overdue changes at one of their projects, changes having explicitly to do with honoring their spiritual commitments. So upset, in fact, that he issued an ultimatum promising to dump the whole venture or even kick out the people who were dragging their heels if that's what it took to get things back on track.

"I can't believe that people who are making a spiritual journey decide to stop and don't move from where they are," Falco said to me the next day when we sat down to talk about his role as Damanhur's spiritual teacher. "To stop for me means to go backwards. This is what happened last night. So we will see what people will be able to do in a very short time. Otherwise, I will have to select a smaller group who will move forward very quickly and let the others stay behind. But we still always try to push a certain edge that will keep the others above a particular level. Unfortunately, this has already happened many times in the past. We've had many moments in our history when we had to increase the level, to make it higher. If we hadn't, everything would be superficial. So our system is very selective. Someone who is not involved enough in the main things, who stays on the side, is more and more on the side until we invite them to leave."

"That's beautiful," I said, immediately regretting my choice of words.

"It's not beautiful," he corrected me, "but it's the reality."

The night before, someone had told me they felt Falco was being too harsh, more like a father scolding his kids than the leader of a community of mature adults. But when I mentioned this to him, he said, "That's the last thing I'm interested in. Many people who want a teacher are only looking for a substitute for their parents. They only want reassurance, but the goal is to become *divinity*. To grow, and not to look outside yourself for what can only be found inside."

"So would you say that your goal is to help people discover real independence?" I asked.

"Yes—and in that, to become able to live together with others. When we speak about enlightenment, the idea is that people cannot be enlightened alone. Enlightenment can happen only with the help of others. In this way, we bypass the selfishness of the single individual who only wants to be enlightened for themselves."



Labyrinthine circuits of painted stone wind their way through the forested hills of Damanhur

IN THE BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAINS

*One evening as the sun went down and the jungle fire was burning
Down the track came a hobo hiking and he said boys I'm not turning
I'm headin' for a land that's far away beside the crystal fountains
So come with me we'll go and see the Big Rock Candy Mountains*

Harry McClintock, aka Haywire Mac

Here's an old country song called "Big Rock Candy Mountain" by a Tennessee troubadour known as Haywire Mac that reminds me a little of Damanhur.

It's a classic hobo ballad from the turn of the twentieth century, the tale of a comic utopia where the lakes are made of whiskey, the cops have wooden legs, the hens lay soft-boiled eggs, and there are always plenty of boxcars to sleep in. The song is based on a famous medieval paradise called the Land of Cockaigne (cakeland), a place where the peasants get rained on by honey waffles, the fences are made of sausages, and grilled geese fly right into your mouth.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying Damanhur is anything like these farcical lands of plenty where everything is handed

down free and easy on silver platters from on high. To the contrary, the multifaceted success of this utopian community may be outshined only by the scope of the effort, daring, and dedication that built it. Yet Damanhur's fondness for forgotten civilizations and lost esoteric mythologies does imply a certain fascination with the idea of paradise all the same. On one hand, they're some of the most practical-minded people you'll ever meet; on the other, they've clothed themselves in a sort of storybook metaphysics, a great cosmic plot line that brings order and stability to their world and infuses it with a mythic sense of nobility and meaning. And perhaps the most interesting, most challenging, and most confounding aspect of my time there was trying to sort through this study in contrasts,

to make sense of a society that was down-to-earth and veiled in mystery all at the same time, working like gangbusters to build a better future while concentrating great parts of its attention on the cryptic antiquities of the past.

By the time I left, I was still struggling with the question of how it all fit together. On one side of the equation, the impressive testimony of Damanhur's accomplishments seemed virtually endless. They mint their own *coins*, for Pete's sake. They're producing hand-painted textiles for some of the top fashion houses in Milan. I got to see their new temple structure—or rather the incredible hole in the ground that will one day be their new temple structure, a megalithic glass-domed auditorium with a world-class library of esoteric books underneath, all connected to the current temples by an underground train. And although it seemed to me that it would take at least twenty years to complete it, they said they would finish it in *two*. If I were a betting man, I wouldn't bet against them. They've

“We just don't see contemporary sacred spaces that are not aligned with known world religions but that still articulate a devotional relationship to the cosmos.”

Alex Grey

triggered the economic, cultural, and political revitalization of a whole district in the Piedmont Alps. They count one local mayor and twenty-two council members from nine different towns among them, and they have townships where none of them even live asking them to run for office because of everything they've done in their own region and all the national grant money they're bringing in. They're so confident of their ability to foster healthy communities that they even submitted a proposal to NASA offering to act as consultants to the space program, to help with the design of future orbital colonies.

The Temples of Humankind are now recognized by the Italian Heritage Ministry, the regional beaux-arts authority, and *Guinness World Records*; and with Alex Grey's new book, *Damanhur: Temples of Humankind*, now on the shelves, they may soon be reaching a broader audience. “We just don't see contemporary sacred spaces that are not aligned with known world religions but that still articulate a devotional relationship

to the cosmos,” Grey told me when I got back to New York. “We've been adrift for so long, and the story of art in the twentieth century has been filled with such titanic egos. It's all about me and my new ‘ism,’ my own particular way of seeing the world. But the temples of Damanhur are more than one man's vision. This is coming from all of them. I don't know of anywhere else on the planet where artists and artisans are working communally this way to create sacred space. You'd probably have to go back hundreds of years, maybe even all the way to the medieval craft guilds that built places like St. Mark's Basilica in Venice. It took them *five hundred years* to do those mosaics. And I think it's an astonishing achievement to begin to evolve a community like this today.”

The flip side of Damanhur's undoubtedly astonishing achievements is that everything they're doing is based on the romanticized ideal of a long-gone golden age. “Through learning about Atlantis and the fabled past of our planet,” they explain, “we will have a better understanding of the ‘Great Plan’ that has been unfolding through time to bring humanity to higher levels of consciousness and harmonious living.” Damanhur's version of the Atlantis myth can be traced fairly directly to the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century exemplars of Western esoteric thought, especially Madame H.P. Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, and the great American psychic Edgar Cayce. Most of Damanhurian philosophy, in fact, seems to come straight out of this same esoteric milieu, so I was surprised when they told me it was all entirely original. Ironically unaware of their roots in a philosophical tradition without which their own ideas probably could never have existed in the first place, they seemed comfortable ignoring history. We still haven't found any credible archaeological evidence for a historical Atlantis ten or twelve or twenty thousand years ago, at least as far as I'm aware, but if it did exist somewhere, it probably would have borne a greater resemblance to the prehistoric cultures of the time than to the futuristic techno-Eden the Damanhurians make it out to be. Plus, I couldn't help but notice that the paintings the time travelers profess to have made of their visits to Atlantis showed an architecture more like that of Mussolini-era Italy (with an Art Deco twist) than, say, the world of Ancient Greece.

But perhaps the biggest drawback of golden age thinking in general is its tendency to pull you out of step not just with the past but with your very own times. I keep coming back to the disconcerting experience of slipping back through time that I had inside the temples, where intimate portraits of Damanhur's communal history were placed side by side with the sweeping frescoes of an impersonal cosmic story. It was like another world down there, another era of myth

and magic that for a moment seemed to wrap me up in its wide, enchanting arms. And that world surprised me. It was strangely comforting to what I think of as an older (perhaps even ancient) structure within my own psyche, a part of me that hungers for safety, familiarity, and, above all, certainty in the midst of a twenty-first-century life that is far too complex and far too insecure for its liking. But that longing for existential security was double-edged, because to another part of me, it felt claustrophobic, stifling, almost as though I was being drawn back into the mind of the mythic worldview of yesteryear, a state of consciousness where everything was known, fixed, sorted out, and tucked into place—including my own particular place in the overarching scheme of things. As comforting as it initially seemed, when my fascinating excursion through this subterranean wonderland came to an end, I was surprised at how relieved I was to come back out into the air and the daylight again.

Still, we do need *some* broader perspective to orient us in this age of fragmentation, some larger context of shared purpose and common value that can give us reasons for being

that transcend whatever private fears and dreams we each happen to be haunted or inspired by. And for all its downsides, Damanhur's golden age mythology is a pretty good example of why. The Damanhurians are some of the happiest and healthiest people I've ever seen. I mean, even the *teenagers* seemed happy at Damanhur. The people I met were almost uniformly passionate about a mission greater than themselves. Most of them came to Damanhur when they were young and idealistic, and ten, twenty, even twenty-five years down the road, most of them are very much idealists still. Life is full, and full of challenges. They're very busy, but they're happy to be busy because they feel themselves to be a part of something inherently meaningful. They take care of each other, and even better, they really seem to depend on one another. "It's very difficult to see yourself objectively," one of them told me. "We tend to fall into habits, to repeat the same situations and get stuck in our own ways of thinking, and that's why we need the others. You can always see yourself in the mirror of relationships. It can be intense living this way, but for us, living together is really the cauldron where the alchemy of transformation takes place."

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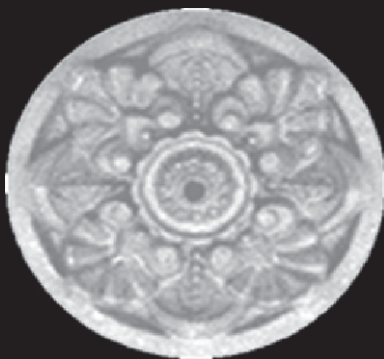
In taking up the mantle of the utopian dream with a fertile imagination and no small measure of good old-fashioned perseverance, the Damanhurians stand out against the cynical bottom line of contemporary culture—and most importantly, they’re doing it *together*. Whatever you think of their metaphysics, the fact is, they’ve found a way to consistently tap into the deep strength of soul and self that can be liberated through a sustained, committed, and creative engagement with others. That’s what stuck with me the most when I came out from the temples and onto the landing at Porta del Sole, the “Gateway to the Sun.” The Damanhurians had first started digging there on a warm August night almost thirty years ago, making their first marks on the mountain with a single shovel and a pickaxe. Falco had been waiting for the right sign to appear before he told them about their real mission there—to build a hidden temple beneath the mountain—and it had come that evening while they sat together around a fire: a shooting star that blazed up and fell down in dazzling slow motion across the summer sky.

Who can say where Damanhur’s star is leading them now? I’m every bit as amazed and perplexed as I was when I first set foot there, and I haven’t even told you the half of it. Would you believe some say that Falco doesn’t just travel backward through time but that he actually *came* from the future in the first place? Six hundred years in the future, to be exact, when the world is apparently on the verge of apocalypse and a messenger is chosen to journey back to the past and set things aright. Your guess is as good as mine on that one, but whatever light it is that ultimately guides this modern-day utopian experiment, it seems to be growing brighter all the time. “This temple you have seen has been made by less than a hundred people,” Falco told me. “Now we are over a thousand. And we like to think that if all goes well, our future achievements will be proportional to that.” ■



Listen to an interview with artist Alex Grey about Damanhur and sacred art and architecture at wieunbound.org/grey

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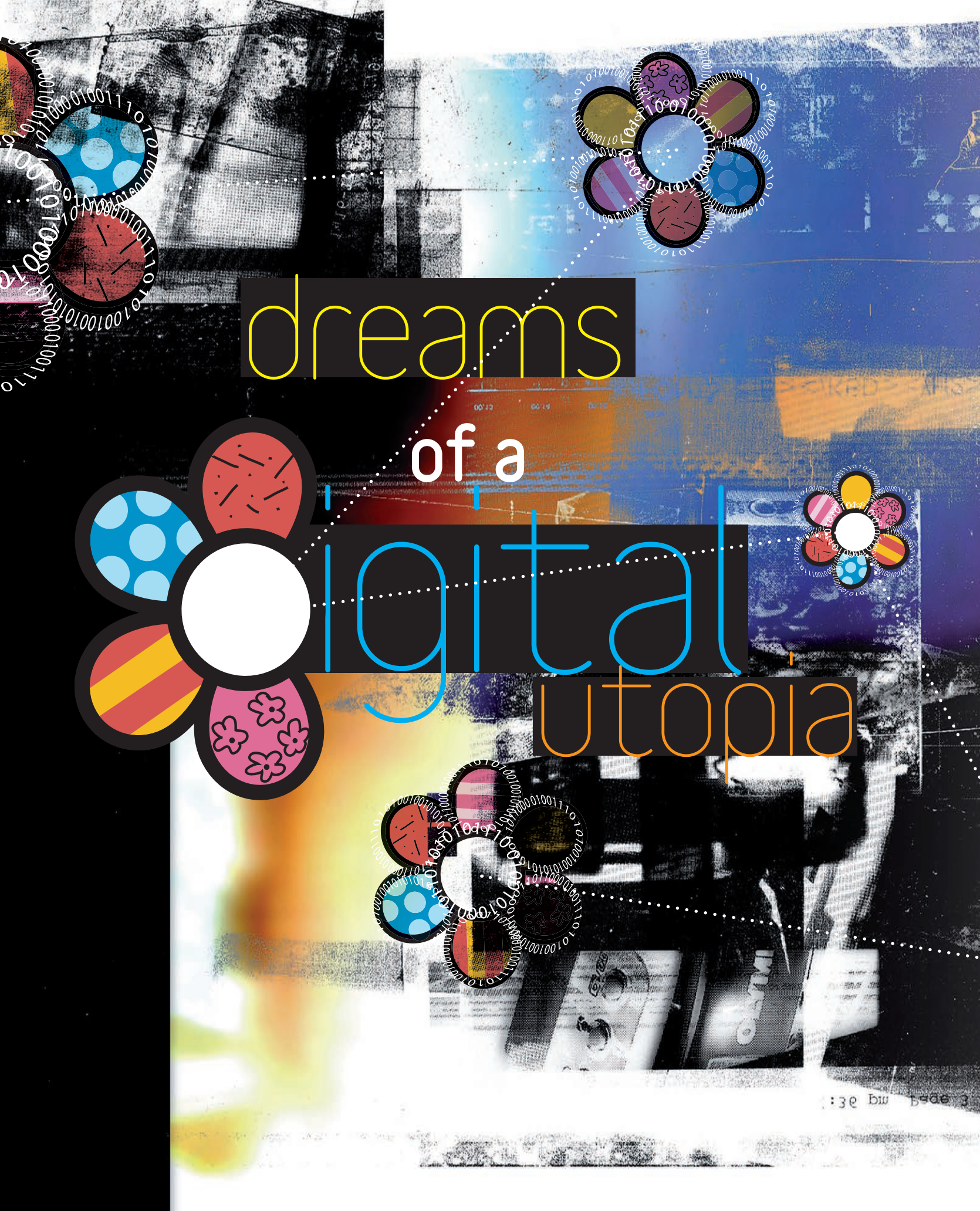
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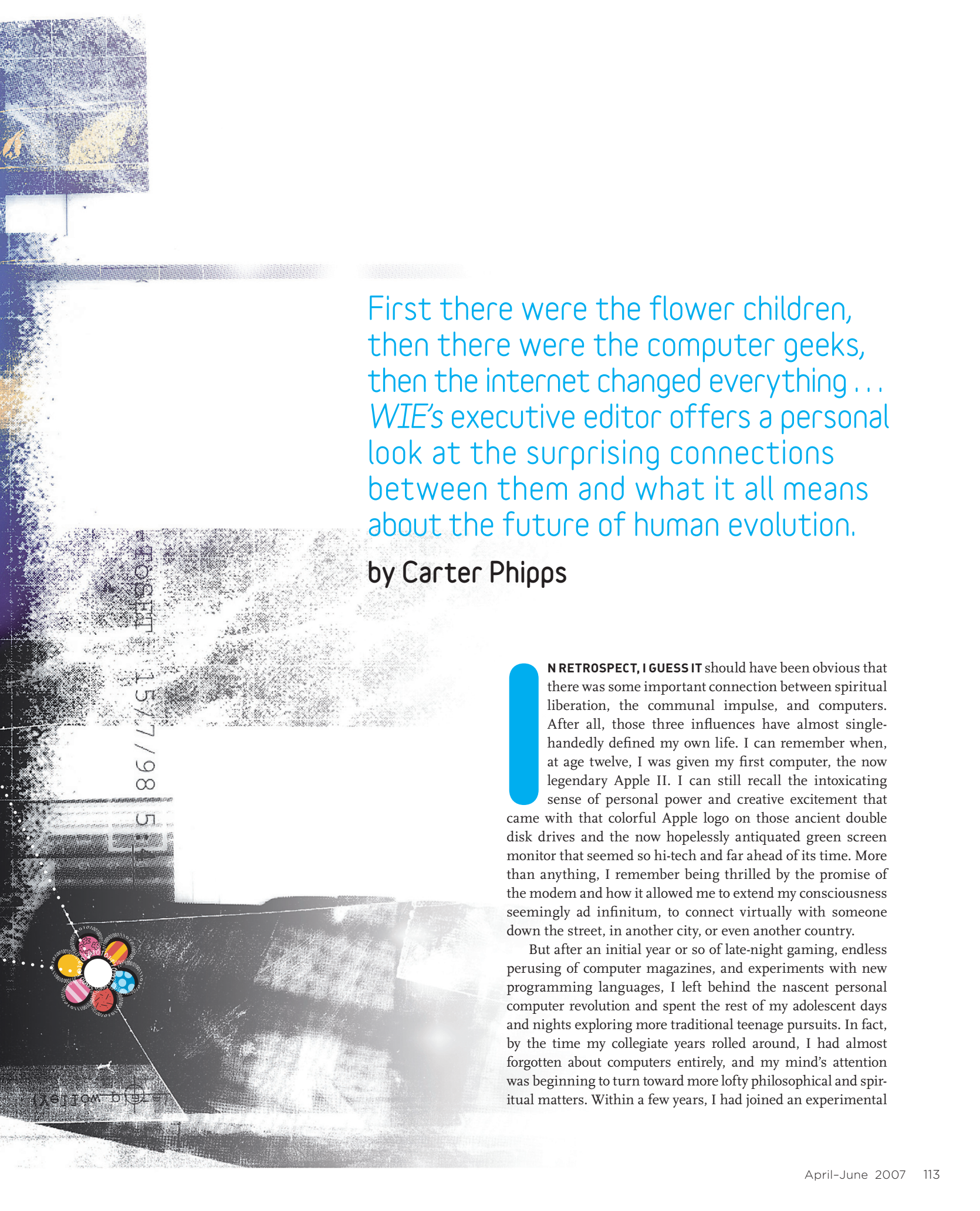
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First there were the flower children,
then there were the computer geeks,
then the internet changed everything . . .
WIE's executive editor offers a personal
look at the surprising connections
between them and what it all means
about the future of human evolution.

by Carter Phipps

IN RETROSPECT, I GUESS IT should have been obvious that there was some important connection between spiritual liberation, the communal impulse, and computers. After all, those three influences have almost single-handedly defined my own life. I can remember when, at age twelve, I was given my first computer, the now legendary Apple II. I can still recall the intoxicating sense of personal power and creative excitement that came with that colorful Apple logo on those ancient double disk drives and the now hopelessly antiquated green screen monitor that seemed so hi-tech and far ahead of its time. More than anything, I remember being thrilled by the promise of the modem and how it allowed me to extend my consciousness seemingly ad infinitum, to connect virtually with someone down the street, in another city, or even another country.

But after an initial year or so of late-night gaming, endless perusing of computer magazines, and experiments with new programming languages, I left behind the nascent personal computer revolution and spent the rest of my adolescent days and nights exploring more traditional teenage pursuits. In fact, by the time my collegiate years rolled around, I had almost forgotten about computers entirely, and my mind's attention was beginning to turn toward more lofty philosophical and spiritual matters. Within a few years, I had joined an experimental

spiritual community and was happily pursuing life in Northern California as a young spiritual idealist, committed to exploring new forms of personal freedom and interpersonal consciousness. Thoughts of computers were in the past—or so I thought. It wasn't long before the swirl of the internet revolution, then in full swing in the Bay Area, again captured my attention and reawakened my boyhood fascination, although this time the seduction was not only about computers; it was about cash. A few years later, I still lived life in a spiritual community dedicated to exploring new forms of collective intelligence, but now with a well-paid daytime job as a computer engineer. I was surfing the byways of our increasingly networked global village, connecting up the world of matter by day, connecting up the world of consciousness by night.

My career as a computer jockey was not long or distinguished, but it was enough to teach me that, for many people, the ongoing march of technology and, in particular,

society by destroying rigid hierarchies and bureaucracies the world over; transforming the slow and inhuman institutions of government and business; rendering dictatorship politically unfeasible; making business uber-responsive, efficient, and consumer driven; and remaking loose social networks into newly empowered collaborative virtual communities.

Indeed, from *Wired* magazine to Thomas Friedman's *The World Is Flat* to Ray Kurzweil's *The Age of Spiritual Machines* to the “do no evil” ethos of Google, the last decades have seen the rise of a breathless optimism in the power of technology to fulfill our dreams of a better world; to create an increasingly egalitarian, decentralized, and collaborative global community; and even, some tell us, to serve the teleological goals of cultural and biological evolution. Let's just say that if Thomas More had been born in Silicon Valley, he would have found himself among friends.

It wasn't until I came across Turner's book that I realized there was more than a geographical proximity that connected the utopian impulse of the sixties generation and their search for new forms of community with the utopian dreams of the nineties digerati and their ongoing efforts to rewire the world with packets of light to achieve much the same end. In fact, it had always struck me as strange that the first job I held as a computer technician was with a company owned by a middle-aged couple who had previously spent over a decade tuning in and dropping out on the Farm in Tennessee, one of the largest communal experiments to arise out of the sixties. Eventually they abandoned the Farm and took their countercultural ethos to the Bay Area, trading in their farming tools for hard drives and software. In 1995, their story had seemed like such an oddity. In retrospect, they were simply part of a larger philosophical and cultural transformation that, as Turner's book makes clear, took many of that generation on a long, strange trip from the commune to the computer.

From Counterculture to Cyberculture is a fascinating chronicle of how former hippie and merry prankster Stewart Brand helped shepherd that three-decade transformation, starting with the original bible of the countercultural communal movement, the *Whole Earth Catalog*, which eventually evolved into the *Co-Evolutionary Quarterly* magazine, which in turn nurtured the network of individuals who formed the first “virtual community,” the WELL, which then became the fount and forum for many of the ideas that inspired the founding of *Wired* magazine. While Brand and his colleagues didn't invent the technological revolution—far from it—Turner points out that they helped to “turn the terms of their generational search into the key frames

The last decades have seen the rise of a breathless optimism in the power of technology to fulfill our dreams of a better world.

the advent of the internet represent something much more profound and more potent than simply greater personal and social productivity. Fred Turner, author of the new book *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*, suggests that for the last several decades there has been a “countercultural dream of empowered individualism, collaborative community, and spiritual communion” that hovers around the idea of the internet and computing like a mythological halo. It is, Turner explains, the “image of an ideal society,” a utopian ideal, this one digital and networked, which has become part and parcel of the conversation around the explosion of ubiquitous global computing and the tremendous social upheaval and transformation it is causing worldwide. In the same way that Eastern philosophy, LSD, and countercultural ideas once provided the means of radically reframing the context of individuals' lives in the 1960s, Turner's book chronicles the development of the idea that the microchip and the mass adoption of increasingly sophisticated computer technology are having a similar effect today—reframing the context of life in our global

by which the American public understood the social possibilities of computers and computer networking.” In other words, they transferred the personal, communal, and even spiritual ideals of the counterculture onto the promise of new technology, and in so doing, literally influenced the entire world—including a boy with an Apple II in a small town in Oklahoma.

Now I don't know if I, or anyone, could honestly say that there is any intrinsic link between the bits and bytes of technology and the higher truths of spirituality, but for better or worse, they may very well be linked in terms of one of life's most important domains—the evolution of human culture. Whatever the historical successes and excesses of our computer culture, there is little doubt that we have embarked on a great new phase in the evolution of our global village. In that respect, Brand and the digital utopians he inspired have been unquestionably prescient. We are wiring up the world in a historical blink of an eye, turning swords into cell phones at an astounding rate (seven million new cell phones per month

in India, to name but one example), and in the process, we are performing a massive sociological experiment in the nature of human community.

Evolutionary thinkers like to tell us that the spread of information technology is closely linked to the evolution of culture, and some say that we are in the midst of the greatest leap forward in the proliferation of information since Gutenberg started his printing press in the mid-fifteenth century. Some even go as far back as the earliest writings in Egypt and Sumer and the original cuneiform tablets to find an appropriate analogy. Kevin Kelly, former executive editor of *Wired*, recently compared this age to the historical inflection point twenty-five hundred years ago known as the Axial Age, when four of the world's major religions and several other influential philosophical systems were all born in the space of a century. “There is only one time in the history of each planet when its inhabitants first wire up its innumerable parts to make one large Machine,” he writes. “Later that Machine may run faster, but there is only one time when it is born. You



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and I are alive at this moment. We should marvel, but people alive at such times usually don't."

Kelly's optimism is contagious, and perhaps we should marvel. But perhaps we also feel that the internet and the rise and spread of so many powerful new technologies are something of a wild card thrown into the middle of our evolutionary trajectory. It has transformed forever our understanding of community and has brought us closer to the lives and fates of individuals and whole societies that we will never physically interact with. It has empowered average Joes from Kabul to California to use collaborative powers and sophisticated technology unimagined by Brand when he started publishing the *Whole Earth Catalog* in 1969. And those new powers have been exploited with equal tenacity and effectiveness by communities as diverse as Wal-Mart, Al-Qaeda, and the Orange revolutionaries in the Ukraine. When cartoons in Denmark set off riots around the globe or a cell phone recording of capital punishment in Baghdad causes immediate consternation in

"Technological evolution puts people in a position where they have a choice of either developing morally or suffering grave consequences socially."

Robert Wright

the capitals of Europe, there is little doubt that we are in a new world. "Web 2.0 is a massive social experiment," wrote *Time* magazine a few months ago as they gave their person of the year award to "You" (talk about personal empowerment). "There's no road map for how an organism that's not a bacterium lives and works together on this planet in numbers in excess of 6 billion."

Given these unprecedented realities, I think we can safely say that the bar has been raised in human relations—we are facing a new moral, spiritual, and interpersonal challenge that will test and transcend everything we have ever learned about how to make a community, large or small, work. It is a morality play writ large across the screen of history. How do we negotiate the moral, spiritual, and economic lives of six billion human beings, given that many of those individuals are living with beliefs and worldviews that are incompatible with many of the others, not to mention those who have adopted

lifestyles that are incompatible with the earth itself? In a recent conversation with Robert Wright, the evolutionary thinker and author of *Nonzero* and *The Moral Animal*, he suggested that technological evolution is almost always accompanied by a new spiritual and moral imperative in the society. "Technological evolution," he explained, "puts people in a position where they have a choice of either developing morally or suffering grave consequences socially. And that's where we are now."

One of the most perceptive insights in *From Cyberculture to Counterculture* is not actually in the main body of the book—it's in the acknowledgments. "If I've learned anything in the last seven years," Turner writes, "it is that ideas live less in the minds of individuals than in the interactions of communities." Stewart Brand's genius, Turner explains, has been in placing himself at the intersection of multiple communities and then articulating and acting on the ideas that are generated in the creative friction. It is this kind of understanding of the internal dynamics of networks and communities—and the ideas and relationships that sustain them—that will be essential if we are to turn our good intentions and highest hopes about the future into reality. It is taking advantage of what some are calling collective intelligence, the capacity of a collective of individuals to think at a higher and more productive level than any of the individuals can on their own. It is perhaps the highest irony that in an age of hyper-individualism, we seem to have staked the future of our species on what truly must be the greatest experiment in community yet. Our very survival and evolution may depend on collective intelligence, on how we come together and negotiate the friction, creative or otherwise, between individuals and societies whose fates are inextricably linked across vast physical distances.

"What good is spiritual insight," I remember my spiritual teacher saying to me one day soon after I arrived in California almost sixteen years ago, "if it doesn't manifest in relationship with others?" I didn't realize then how the complex interacting narratives of interpersonal relationships, computers, and spiritual freedom would define my own future. But what was once true for me may now be true for all of us: If we want to survive, if we want to evolve, if we want to create a future that is anywhere close to the utopian dreams that have helped give birth to this ever-growing information highway crisscrossing our collective consciousness, then all of us personally empowered, digitally enhanced hyper-individuals had better get very good at something that doesn't come naturally—community. ■



Find out more about Fred Turner and his thoughts on digital utopianism at wieunbound.org/turner

feature

This Revolution



CHRISTIANA

will be



SIONA

Digitized



BRIAN

The team behind Zaadz, the internet's popular new alternative community, shares the inspiration behind their bold vision to become the first global brand of the integral revolution.

Interview by Carter Phipps
and Andrew Cohen



DAVE



Introduction

THERE IS IDEALISM and then there is *idealism*. At least that's what we realized in our conversations with Brian Johnson, founder of the hip and happening new social-networking site Zaadz.com. Johnson and his dedicated management team have spent the last year trying to uplevel the web's hottest trend by bringing together cultural creatives, integralists, artists, spiritual progressives, counterculturalists, seekers, visionaries, leaders, activists, and various others to talk, blog, share, dialogue, discuss, argue, create, connect, explore, and generally do everything else that people do on these exploding virtual communities on the internet.

Now for those who haven't yet been touched by this latest internet revolution, social networking sites are sort of mini social clubs, online communities that allow individuals to meet and connect with like-minded people from all over the world. And given that Rupert Murdoch recently purchased MySpace—the most popular of these influential websites with its more than one hundred million users—for a cool five hundred and eighty million dollars, suffice it to say that interest has skyrocketed. Zaadz is like MySpace with one important caveat: Only a certain type of person need apply. What type? Well, just check out the front page of the website, and things quickly become clear. "Let's change the world" are the first words you'll see, in bold black type. A couple of lines down comes "Our mission. We're gonna change the world," just in case you missed it the first time. And what kind of people are they looking for to accomplish this mission? You guessed it: "People CRAZY enough to think they can change the world"—just a few lines farther down.

The source of all of this optimism is Johnson himself, Zaadz's self-described "philosopher and CEO." Young, smart,

idealistic, and ambitious, Johnson named his business after the Dutch word for "seed," and he has surrounded himself with a passionate young management team that is equally dedicated to the enormous potential of Zaadz and social networking. He likes to say things like, "We're in the process of building THE most inspired community of people in the world." And truth be told, after watching Johnson and his team go from basically nothing to a heck of a business in less than two years (fifty thousand members and counting—including a significant number of *What Is Enlightenment?*'s friends and colleagues), it's hard not to believe in these take-no-prisoners, unapologetic utopians who seem to live and breathe inspiration and who actually are convinced that a bunch of individuals getting together on a website can add up to more than a hill of beans in this crazy world.

In fact, when you speak to Johnson, you can't help but notice that his eye is on a prize much bigger than creating an influential and successful website. For him, Zaadz is destined to become not just a community or a network, but a *brand*. Think Virgin if Richard Branson were a meditator and read integral philosophy. Johnson ultimately envisions the name Zaadz applying to a whole host of products and companies, from resorts to urban centers to who knows what else. And given the power of the internet and the fresh perspectives and worldcentric idealism of a new generation of technology-conscious countercultural entrepreneurs, don't be surprised if one day the name Zaadz becomes a regular part of your lexicon.

So for this issue of *WIE* on the nature of utopia and community, we spoke with the team behind Zaadz, who are performing one of the most interesting experiments in the power of the internet to cross borders, cultures, and countries and create a conscious, committed social network unlike any that the virtual world, and perhaps the real world, has ever seen.

—CP

Interview

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT: BRIAN, AS THE FOUNDER OF ZAADZ, WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE WEBSITE, AND WHAT WAS IT THAT INSPIRED YOU TO FOUND THE COMPANY IN THE FIRST PLACE?



BRIAN

I think what makes Zaadz unique is that we're concerned about the actualization of each of the individuals within our community. We named our business after the Dutch word for "seed." The idea behind Zaadz is that there's something within each of us, something inherent, that's driving us to our highest expression. We come back again and again to that as we set our purpose and our intention and our strategy and our specific day-to-day product development. What can we do to inspire and empower everyone we serve to live at their highest potential?

WIE: WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED IN THE TWO AND A HALF YEARS SINCE YOU FOUNDED ZAADZ?



BRIAN

Well, we've certainly learned enough in this business over the last couple of years to understand the saying "It takes shit to make a seed grow."

We've learned that we need to slow down and be patient. As with any ambitious venture, we wanted to get as big as we could as fast as we could. But we quickly realized that the core value we're bringing to the world resides in creating an online oasis that is judged more on the *quality* of the interaction between people rather than the quantity of people who have joined it. And we believe that slowing down has allowed us to create a vibrancy in our community that will help us accelerate two, three, four, five years down the line. That was the biggest shift—saying no, let's just lay a foundation in 2006 and 2007. We're not looking to spread everywhere; we want to continue to deepen relationships with people who get it, and then in 2008—a household name.

WIE: ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES HAVE EXPLODED OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, AND MANY OF THEM ARE PIONEERING NEW FORMS OF COMMUNITY. HOWEVER, EVEN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THESE NEW FORMS OF VIRTUAL COMMUNITY, ZAADZ IS TRYING TO DO SOMETHING VERY SPECIFIC, WHICH IS TO CREATE A FORUM THAT REALLY DOES INCULCATE AND INSPIRE HIGHER VALUES, ENCOURAGE DEEPER DIALOGUE, AND ATTRACT MORE SOPHISTICATED, MORE PROGRESSIVE PEOPLE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN MAKING A DIFFERENCE. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO CREATE AND BUILD SUCH A UNIQUE COMMUNITY AND DISTINGUISH IT FROM THE MANY OTHER NEW FORMS OF COMMUNITY ON THE INTERNET?



BRIAN

The internet is a beautiful tool, and social networking is an incredibly powerful vehicle to bring a large number of people together. Look at MySpace, look at Facebook, look at the other sites. At Zaadz, we want to use these world-class tools, to take the best from all of these different sites, and then create an oasis, a site that really holds a mirror to people's highest potential and gives them an opportunity to meet with other people who share their ideals. I mean, it also might challenge them, but we're starting with individuals who have a shared passion for improving their lives and making a positive difference in the world.

So we advertise in particular magazines. We've been very clear on unflinchingly reaching out to people who have a passion for life and a commitment to understanding and living higher truths. And you can define that however you want. I'm not a big fan of the "cultural creative" definition or others that could be thrown out there, but it's a group of people that is pretty self-identified as readers of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine, readers of *Shambhala Sun* or *Yoga Journal* or *Science of Mind*, etc. We get so many responses from people who read our first ad, or a letter from me, and come to the site and say, "Finally, I feel like I'm home. I finally have this place where I can commune with people who don't think that I'm weird. Finally, I can come to a place where I can share some of these ideas I have and get support from others that comes from the highest place."

WIE: SO WHAT WAS IT THAT INSPIRED THE REST OF YOU TO WORK FOR A COMPANY LIKE ZAADZ?



When Brian and I met, I didn't know what a social networking site was. It was all a foreign language. I connected with Brian's enthusiasm, and I had a great pang of hunger for service in the world. I've gone through different ventures trying to figure out how I can best live at my highest and serve. For example, I started a production company called Be the Change Productions, and we were working on a film on intentional communities and the power of community to change the world. We were making this tiny little documentary with just a couple of us working on it.

About a year into the process, I thought, "Who's going to see this? How am I *really* going to change the world with my little film?" I always felt called to help with so many things—with environmental issues, with children's health issues, with alternative health. I'm one little person, but I was born with wealth and with the ability to use that wealth in service to the world. So a big part of my connection with Brian was that he was helping me to skillfully use this financial gift that I have. And investing in Zaadz and becoming involved in Zaadz seemed a vessel for that gift, a way to serve. If I'm helping to empower people who are creating positive change in the world—a dozen of them or a hundred of them or a thousand of them—I feel like my gift is magnified. It's like a trim tab, a point of focus so that my energy will have the greatest magnification in the world.



I met Brian at the same time Christiana did. I was on my own spiritual journey of self-discovery. I had my spiritual life, my professional life, my social life, my love life—and they were all separate. As I talked to Brian about the vision of Zaadz, I started to get excited about how we can bring all of it together, how we can create a place where all these different areas don't have to be separate. At the bottom of it all, they aren't. They're all part of our self-realization and self-discovery.

I think I speak for all of us when I say that we feel a bit odd in the world, just a little different. And I think that's what excited me about Zaadz. First of all, I have a place to talk about the things that I'm really passionate about with people who are passionate about similar things. And then, second, I can actually learn about new things that I had never heard of before.

Take *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine. I came across the magazine probably four years ago, and it just blew me away. But I was essentially alone reading it.

I'd read these incredible articles and then go off in my world and be amazed and feel so connected—and so disconnected at the same time. So to create a place where you can bring people together who are interested in these things, and to see *them* light up—it just was a no-brainer for me. I was going to go backpacking through South America for six months, and ultimately I decided to put that aside and come to Los Angeles and work.



What inspires me to work for Zaadz? I love that question because it's like, why do you keep breathing? Zaadz brings together these two abiding passions of mine. First, the idea of self-actualization—that people have a seed in them that can be realized and all that is necessary is for you to create a healthy environment for that seed to grow. And second, to combine that idea with the power of community. M. Scott Peck said that in community lies the salvation of the world, and there's a huge part of me that just firmly believes that.

Zaadz is such an attractive community. It's that nexus, that little impulse of bright positivity that people feel attracted to.

WIE: WHAT DOES THE WORD "COMMUNITY" MEAN TO EACH OF YOU? BECAUSE IN A SENSE, ZAADZ IS A UTOPIAN COMMUNITY. SO HOW DOES YOUR IDEAL OF COMMUNITY ACTUALLY MANIFEST BETWEEN YOU? IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT ARE THE VALUES THAT YOU ARE SHARING TOGETHER AS A TEAM THAT YOU'RE TRYING TO BRING TO ZAADZ ITSELF?



We worked hard, first of all, in how we attracted and hired the initial group. I can't overstate the importance of that. You're talking to four of us, but we could have brought on any combination of our team and basically had the same articulate enthusiasm. We're fortunate to be a magnet for people who get it and who bring a great perspective and an amazing level of consciousness.

For example, take our lead developer. When we sent out our request for developers and posted it on different job boards, the title was "Seeking enlightened developers to change the world." One of the first responses we got is from a guy who's now on the technology team. He started his application with, "I don't usually start my job applications this way, but I am a practicing Buddhist." And then he gave us his dharma school. And we offered bonus points for veganism or familiarity with integral theory. This is a guy who built incredible code, and we didn't know it at the time, but he decided to put a little line in the code so that

every time our server is hit with a request, the first line that goes out is "Om mani padme hum."

WIE: THAT'S AMAZING.



BRIAN

It's been sent out millions of times, if not tens of millions of times now, and no one knew. He did it on his own and then announced it a couple of months later. It's that ethos. And I want to make an important point—we don't all practice the same things. In fact, none of us do. There's a shared intention and a shared purpose, but what we're doing is showing a broad makeup of different paths and finding harmony and resonance around the common impulse to evolve and to create and to serve.



SIONA

For me, a community is a group of people who, despite their backgrounds, have come together to transcend or embrace their

differences and communicate openly regardless of what might get in the way. Whether or not there's a goal to strive for, I think that building community itself is an admirable goal, and not just an admirable one, but sort of the goal of the planet right now—how to be in community with people whom you don't necessarily share things in common with. I see Zaadz as being a place for people to build those tools.

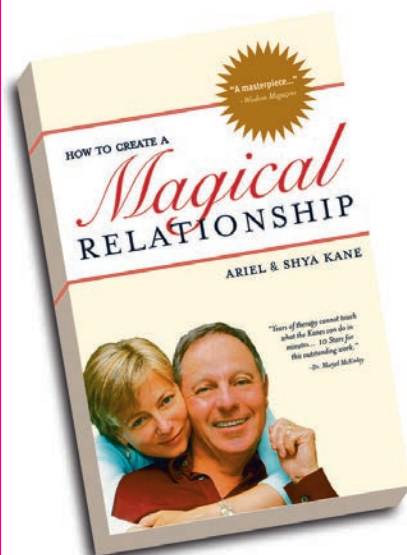


CHRISTIANA

You referred to Zaadz as a utopia. Utopia actually means "no place," which I think is really interesting. A topia would be a place, but a utopia means no place, and so I think it's kind of ironic that you referred to Zaadz as being a utopia. It is really a non-place.

As I worked on the film on ecovillages, I was traveling around kind of looking for the perfect community. What is the perfect community? It was my own personal adventure. Where can I find people who share exactly my ideals, and think what I think, and eat what I eat,

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Peter Ragnar

Before the petrochemical drug culture existed, native peoples kept themselves alive and well with wild foods. The ancient Greek father of medicine Hippocrates stated, "Let food be your medicine." Animals instinctively know which foods they should eat to heal their ailments. It's only modern-day humans who are in the dark. So, what do people do? They rely on doctors and pills instead of their own backyard.

Every time we are awakened by Mother Nature's earth changes, be they hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, fires, or floods, untold thousands scramble for safety. Most folks are flat-out clueless and totally unprepared for human survival. The sad and sobering evidence are the untold numbers of needless deaths, which could be prevented. How? Simply by accurate knowledge. But what do people do? They wait in vain for government agencies to come to the rescue.

The answer to safely surviving everything from a lock down or quarantine of your town or city to a simple ice storm that could leave you and tens of thousands of your neighbors without electricity, water, or food is proper knowledge. This is why I've written ***Alive and Well with Wild Foods—A Raw Food Survival Guide***.

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The best part about this is the new sense of optimism, confidence, and security you'll experience as you turn the pages of this colorful book. I assure you, this is very juicy stuff, not just some dry technical text! Your emotions are about to take the ride of a lifetime. So, welcome aboard and get ready for a new way of winning—by returning to the old ways

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and want to raise their kids the way I want to raise my kids? And literally, there is no place like that. But there's something beautiful about that "no place" in cyberspace that is actually the convening of people in many places.

WIE: IS THERE A PARTICULAR PRACTICAL EXAMPLE THAT HIGHLIGHTS WHAT IS SO DIFFERENT ABOUT WORKING TOGETHER AT A PLACE LIKE ZAADZ?



DAVE

I think one of the biggest things is the idea that working on our personal growth as individuals is *the* most important thing that we can bring to this organization and to the world. I mean, we work our butts off; we work hard. But at the same time, that is not *the* most important thing. We've got to be healthy. We've got to be able to have our own personal development on all the different lines of development—from the physical to the emotional to the spiritual to the professional. So as much as it's the community, it's also the individual in the community and how we interact together.

WIE: ALL OF YOU WORK TOGETHER WITHOUT A PHYSICAL OFFICE SPACE. SO YOU ALL ARE, IN A SENSE, PART OF A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY THAT IS ITSELF TRYING TO CREATE A NEW ONLINE VIRTUAL COMMUNITY. IN THAT WAY, YOU'RE ALSO MODELING WHAT YOU ARE DOING. DO YOU FEEL THAT THERE ARE LIMITATIONS TO THAT TYPE OF VIRTUAL WORKSPACE?



BRIAN

If anything, perhaps the work is enhanced. We have people who couldn't work in a traditional office space. But I don't care when you show up, what hours you're putting in, if you want to take this or that day off, or if you want to show up wearing whatever it is you want to wear—that's okay. We measure things on results and productivity and efficiency, and there's a respect for the individual that is inherent to how we're building the business.

Having said that, we're also realizing that when we get together physically, there is a power that's remarkable. In the third or fourth quarter of this year, we're probably going to begin moving some of the people out to LA. But we're still going to break all the rules in how we come together. For example, we'll start with a different type of space and very different types of hours. Maybe we'll only require people to be at the office Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from ten to two and otherwise they can do whatever they want to do.

WIE: AS LONG AS YOU'RE PRODUCTIVE.



BRIAN

Well, that's a given. It doesn't even need to be stated. That's the thing that we have in our company. I mean, the gratitude that I feel to get paid to have this conversation right now.

Am I working or playing right now? These apparent dichotomies are dissolving. It's Maslow 101. And the gratitude that Dave expresses and everyone on the team expresses—we get the opportunity to do *this*? Of course, if there wasn't the productivity, then we'd need to do something about it, but we're so far from having that issue, it's remarkable. It's the exact opposite actually. We have to talk to the guys to make sure that they're taking some time off.

WIE: WHAT IS YOUR LONG-TERM VISION FOR ZAADZ? WHERE DO YOU WANT ZAADZ TO BE IN 2020?



SIONA

I'm excited about Zaadz making the leap from being a virtual community and a "virtual company" to being out there in the real world. Our next major transformation is going to involve what we've been calling the Zaadz Oases. These are going to be physical spaces where people can meet and work. Imagine a relaxing place where you can find a café, organic restaurant, massage venue, and yoga studio, staffed by a team of people who are dedicated to whatever it is they do. And then we'll have Zaadz Publishing and Zaadz Resorts, which will be an expanded eco-friendly, spa-like version of the smaller oases.

So in the long term, I'm excited about Zaadz becoming synonymous with its meaning in Dutch. When people hear "Zaadz," they'll think, "Self-development, authenticity. Am I doing all that I can to be the person I'm truly meant to be?" And I'm excited about us, as a company, presenting a challenge to the rest of the world. I'd love for us to be a model for other companies in being transparent and in providing employees with the same degree of support and trust and empowerment. That's what I have my eye on.



CHRISTIANA

My vision for the future involves Zaadz providing a platform for conscious capitalism, changing the way the world does business. What I see for us in 2020 is the facilitation of complete transparency between producer and consumer. What we have now is a disconnect between ourselves and our stuff. We're cut off in so many ways from understanding where it comes from, who makes it, and what the social

or environmental cost is. Now, though, people are bringing more and more awareness to what and how they choose to consume. As a society, we're demanding authenticity and responsibility from the businesses that serve us. The internet has given us windows into worlds that were previously hidden from the consumer's perspective, and I can only imagine the evolution of that transparency as we develop more tools for communication and expand our awareness and care. Zaadz is in the process of building the structure that facilitates the shift—while being a model of conscious business ourselves.



BRIAN

I'm passionate about taking the online experience offline. How do we go from ten, twenty-five, fifty, a hundred thousand, one million, ten million, twenty-five million online members within this worldwide community to the

offline experience? The Zaadz Oases are going to be exciting, as is the impact of transparency and conscious capitalism.

I'm also excited about creating the greatest place in the world to work. Fourteen years might seem a short time to get to the point of having a hundred thousand people on our team. Right now we have fourteen. But for whatever reason, when I'm quiet, that's a goal that comes through me. I feel personally compelled to create the infrastructure to support that.

So 2020? I've said before that our goal is to become the most impactful and trusted company on the planet, and I have no doubt that in 2020 we'll still be working toward that vision. We might be a great deal larger and we might look nothing like our current online incarnation, but we'll still be striving to do whatever we can to inspire and empower everyone we touch. ■

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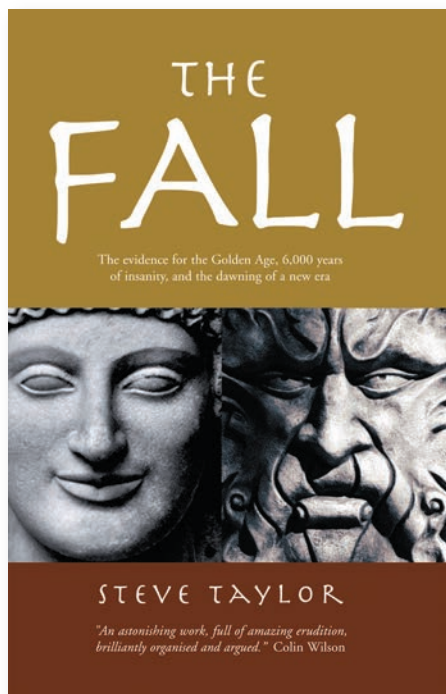
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THE FALL

by Steve Taylor

(O Books, 2005, paperback \$24.95)

Once upon a time, long, long ago, Man and Woman walked side by side in a lush garden, plucking ripe fruit from trees. Wild lions ate from their hands, and shy deer lay beside them to give them warmth when they slept. And then Woman, call her Eve, ate the forbidden fruit. Or an evil being came and destroyed the garden with snow and ice. Or humans somehow lost the way of heaven, the Tao. Then all hell broke loose. And human life became an endless cycle of suffering.

So goes the story of our fall from paradise—a tale told in some form in every civilization on record, according to Steve Taylor in *The Fall*, his passionate and often polemical exposition of the trajectory of human history. While many scholars have assumed that these stories emerged from a

common *psychological* root—to provide an explanation for suffering, for instance—Taylor disagrees. He offers a *historical* explanation: These are not myths, he says, but accounts of an actual Golden Age that existed for nearly one hundred thousand years before the start of recorded history. The existence of this lengthy paradisiacal time proves, as he says, that “*it doesn’t have to be like this*”—meaning that we do not have to live as “fallen” people mired in violence, oppression, and alienation. The six thousand years since this primitive time of paradise have been a tragic mistake, Taylor argues, and we desperately need to “rekindle . . . the Golden Age of our past” before we destroy ourselves. It’s hard to argue with his sense of urgency. But Taylor’s ultimate dismissal of the last six thousand years—the entire sweep of civilization—as having no real evolutionary significance only makes his long view of human history seriously shortsighted.

Taylor provides thorough documentation of the existence of hunting-and-gathering clans and horticultural societies that rarely engaged in warfare. He presents archaeological evidence from Crete and Çatal Hüyük, China and Europe, that feminist scholars, such as the acclaimed meta-historian Riane Eisler, have used to demonstrate that male domination and warfare are recent developments in human culture. Using anthropological descriptions of life among the world’s indigenous peoples, Taylor highlights key similarities with the archaeological evidence to make his case that until around 4000 BCE, human beings lived lives characterized by “peacefulness,

equality, an absence of male domination, a reverence for nature, and sexual openness.” In fact, he goes so far as to say that human beings were once “sane” and for the past six thousand years have been “insane.”

What happened to make us so crazy that we lost paradise? Taylor carefully dismisses the arguments that have been traditionally made, which are beyond the scope of this review. He notes that these horticultural societies did occasionally practice warfare (in response to drought, for example) and argues that it was a wide-scale environmental disaster that led to a transformation in the human psyche. Over a very short period of time, the Sahara—one of the most fertile regions of the New Stone Age—dried up. Horticultural peoples in the fertile Saharasia region became nomads who began to invade and conquer other territories. Faced with extinction, Taylor observes, something changed in the human psyche: The ego, the individual sense of self, emerged. And along with the ego came a creativity that Taylor and other scholars recognize as enabling humans to respond to their dire predicament as well as giving our species the psychological impulse to acquire, dominate, and assert ourselves.

Taylor sees this as a tragic mistake—even though he recognizes that this more creative variant of human being was able to govern larger and more complex societies, solve problems that baffled early horticulturalists, and develop abstract thinking that would allow the use of writing and computation to flower. So how does he arrive at the conclusion that it is all a

mistake? By insisting on seeing these prehistoric societies in a profoundly romantic light. To his credit, Taylor does admit that he is painting a “very rosy picture of life” in prehistoric times. And he does note, in passing, their “lack of understanding of cause and effect, and the large number of superstitions and taboos which filled their lives.” But he ignores the full implications of what this means. For example, he notes that in one tribe “a person’s clothes, tools and even the remains of meals and their excrement are so closely linked to them that to burn or damage them is thought to lead to death or injury to the person.” Taylor uses this as an illustration of

how these indigenous people lack individual psychological boundaries, and he claims that this is the root of an empathy far greater than what we experience. But can we legitimately call this *empathy*? The subjective reality hinted at here seems motivated by fear of unknowable, and potentially harmful, forces rather than by deep concern for others or even for the natural world. At the very least, it suggests a way of being and perceiving that is so alien to us that it is incomprehensible.

Because Taylor’s underlying motive is to condemn modern society for its sexism, domination, violence, and sexual repression, he idealizes these neolithic societies, thus committing what integral philosopher Ken Wilber calls the “pre-trans fallacy”—attributing to an earlier, far less developed human psyche and culture a level of development beyond individual ego. Taylor therefore upholds these societies as “egalitarian,” when in fact it appears from his descriptions that they were bound together in conformity to rituals and taboos. He claims that they were “peaceful” as if it was a choice that they made rather than an expression of an inability to assert themselves even in the face of extinction. And he posits that prehistoric and indigenous peoples were spiritually advanced, living in a unity consciousness, when it seems more true to his own evidence that they existed *embedded* in, and often deeply confused and frightened by, the inexplicable flux of the living world. (Meanwhile, it should also be noted that the jury is still out as to whether these societies practiced blood sacrifice.) By pointing to our one hundred thousand years of prehistory with little armed conflict, Taylor provides

us with a powerful reminder that human life does not have to be as it is. And he may not be wrong that the emergence of ego—the individualized sense of self—set off a chain of historical events that include domination and war. But without that spark of self-awareness and creativity that came along with it, *Homo sapiens sapiens* might be history. The cultures that he holds in such regard were apparently too bound by tradition to respond to new challenges. Looked at from another direction, one can say that it took one hundred thousand years of fearful conformity until human beings, faced with calamity, awakened to a new creative, individualized potential in consciousness.

So, ultimately, does such a romanticized view of the past actually give us the motivation to create a new future as Taylor believes it will? Isn’t it far more powerful to recognize that in the nanosecond of evolutionary time of these past six thousand years, humanity has been engaged in a gruesome and glorious struggle to evolve beyond superstition and toward greater equality, freedom, and rationality? *And that this is actually happening?* Not everyone on this planet has made the journey. For reasons we don’t understand, only certain peoples have evolved to the point of valuing equality and human freedom. Others have barely changed since prehistoric times; still others are somewhere in between. What does seem certain is that our future does not lie in the past. It lies in a full embrace of the human struggle to develop the capacity to become increasingly self-aware and conscious of our unity with all things.

Elizabeth Debold

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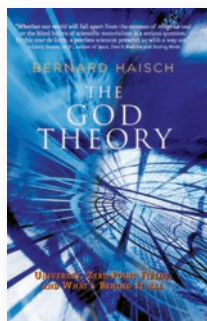
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THE GOD THEORY

by Bernard Haisch

(Weiser Books, 2006, hardback \$21.95)

The God Theory is astrophysicist Bernard Haisch's brilliant, yet at times impenetrable, synthesis of science and spirit. Haisch cuts a courageous path toward a reconciliation of these two domains of wisdom by upholding the most profound realizations from both, without subordinating one to the other. God, he argues, is consciousness itself,

existing both as the unmanifest ground of being *and* as the force that guides the workings of the universe. Creation is God's experiment; its purpose, and our own, is to experience "the richness of his potential . . . because we are the incarnations of him in the physical realm."

Haisch is in a unique position to make his case. His early life was simultaneously deeply religious and expressive of a passionate curiosity about the natural world, particularly the heavens. The heroes of his youth, Father Giuseppe Piazzi and Father Angelo Secchi, nineteenth-century astronomer monks, were examples of how the sacred and the scientific could be combined in one's life. After a year in seminary, however, Haisch decided that his deeper interest lay with science and its hope to answer ultimate questions

rather than with the mythic worldview of a traditional religion. Yet his early recognition of the mystical dimension stands him in good stead. It keeps him from the reductionism that plagues so many efforts to reconcile matter and spirit. In other words, Haisch does not believe that the mystery of consciousness and life can be reduced to anything physical—no matter how subtle or mysterious the physical world might be at the level of quantum phenomena or the zero-point field.

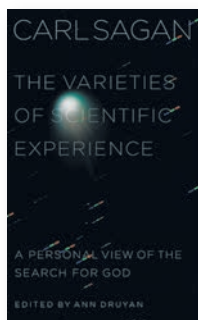
While Haisch appears to be aiming his book at the intelligent layperson, his heart seems set on making his argument to his scientific colleagues, which makes the book both fascinating and challenging. For example, he uses the light that comes through a prism or slide projector as a metaphor for how consciousness can be the ground of all that is, even though we perceive separate objects in space. White light, when filtered, breaks into colors or images. Couldn't this be similar, he asks, to the way the mind works? The human brain/mind, he suggests, may filter the pure "light" of consciousness so that we sense and perceive separate objects in space. Mystical experience allows us to drop the mind's filter, revealing the unity that is belied by our senses. While this example is relatively easy to follow, Haisch often goes into heady territory—such as when he argues that God's first act of creation, expressed by the statement "Let there be Light," may actually have validity in the material world. God's statement makes no sense to materialist scientists because they believe that light has to come from the sun or another star. But Haisch argues that God's light could be the zero-point field, which some suggest is the source of inertia, the force that holds all of creation together. While one has the sense that there is something profound in what he is pointing to, for the reader without a serious



background in physics, it's difficult to make sense of it all.

There are other aspects of the book that fall short, such as a less than felicitous writing style and an overly simplistic assessment of what it means for conscious humans that God is consciousness. Despite this, *The God Theory* makes important inroads toward the creation of a higher-order synthesis grounded in today's most cutting-edge science. Haisch has taken a daring step, putting his reputation as a scientist on the line, to uphold his intelligent and deeply informed conviction in the mystical truth that we are all part of the process whereby "the One who became many is becoming one again."

Elizabeth Debold



THE VARIETIES OF SCIENTIFIC EXPERIENCE

A Personal View of the Search for God

by Carl Sagan, edited by Ann Druyan
(Penguin, 2006, hardcover \$27.95)

Edited by Ann Druyan, widow of the late Carl Sagan as well as his long-time collaborator and coauthor, *The Varieties of Scientific Experience* consists of transcripts from Sagan's Gifford Lectures on Natural Theology,

which he was invited to present at the University of Glasgow in 1985. Like the famed psychologist William James, whose Gifford Lectures of 1901-1902 were the basis for his influential book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Sagan sets out to examine science and its relation to religion, specifically as it relates to "the Western kind of God."

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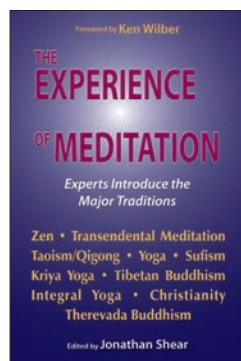
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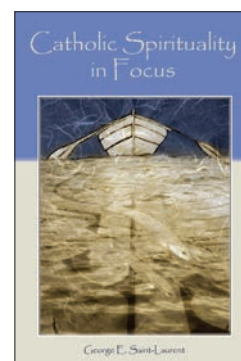
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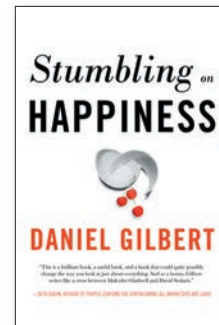
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lamenting humanity's nagging preference for blind faith over rational skepticism, Sagan is a clear and compelling professor, and his love for the power of scientific inquiry is contagious. "In a complex universe, in a society undergoing unprecedented change, how can we find the truth if we are not willing to question everything and to give a fair hearing to everything?" he asks. "There is a worldwide closed-mindedness that imperils the species."

With his audience now hanging on every word, he draws them into a perspective on life that situates human beings on a tiny "pale blue dot" among billions and billions of worlds, before easily driving home the main thesis of his lectures: "This vast number of worlds," he says, "the enormous scale of the universe, in my view has been taken into account, even superficially, in virtually no religion, and especially no Western religions."

Tom Huston



STUMBLING ON HAPPINESS

by Daniel Gilbert

(Vintage, 2007, paperback \$14.95)

Did you know that human beings are the only animals that think about the future? We are, and Daniel Gilbert's book *Stumbling on Happiness* is an exploration of this unique capacity we have to "mentally transport ourselves into future circumstances and then ask ourselves how it feels to be there." We excitedly plan for vacations at the beach, our mouths water in anticipation of a scrumptious meal, we longingly imagine how happy we'll be when we have a new baby—we consider our future hundreds of times each day. But wait. How often does it all turn out the way we've imagined? If you have ever sought an explanation for why we repeatedly make the same kinds of mistakes in our search for happiness, *Stumbling* will reveal many surprising secrets about the processes of your brain that interfere with accurately predicting the future.

A professor of psychology at Harvard University, Gilbert is considered the world's foremost authority in the field of affective forecasting, and he has a lot to teach us about what we're doing wrong as we gaze forward into a future time and imagine ourselves doing something that we *think* will make us happy. (Pause here for a moment, because it is important for us to understand that Gilbert defines *happiness* in a very specific way,

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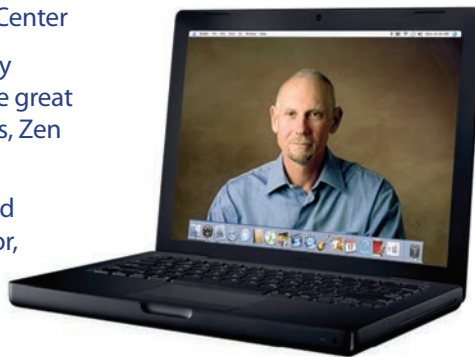
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limiting it to the realm of feelings and omitting other possible sources of happiness, such as doing moral acts or having a sense of meaning in one's life. By "happy," Gilbert simply means the "subjective emotional experiences that are vaguely described as *enjoyable* or *pleasurable*."")

So what exactly are we doing wrong as we try to predict and affect our future happiness? It's all in our heads, so to speak. The human brain has evolved in such a way that it is, in fact, constantly undermining our best efforts to determine our future, and Gilbert provides hundreds of examples from various social and scientific studies to illustrate the physiological and psychological processes at work. They can be summarized in these three main points:

1. Our present feeling state can erroneously influence how we think we will feel later. (A classic example: You are on the beach at sunset with your new sweetheart, and under the influence of your *present* feelings, you propose marriage, thinking you will be forever as blissfully in love.)


2. Our brains do not have the capacity to imagine every detail of a future experience—we paint the picture of our future in broad strokes and leave out important details. (You imagine your perfect honeymoon in the mountains . . . but you fail to anticipate all those darned mosquitoes. You imagine having the time of

your life when your home team wins the college football game, but you fail to consider that afterward you'll be studying for finals.) If we were more rigorous in imagining the details of our future, we might be more realistic—and less idealistic—about how we will feel when the future rolls around.

3. Social scientists have found that when we imagine a particular event in the future, we always *overestimate* how good or bad we will feel about

it. We think we will feel much happier (or much more distraught) than we actually will. So if you think winning the lottery will make you feel especially happy or losing your job will make you feel especially horrible, you'd be wrong. In both cases, after some time passed, you'd be just as happy as you are right now.

It is a powerful message Gilbert is able to convey with the tools of science, and it is one worth listening



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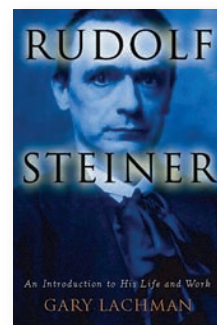
Janet Quinn, Ph.D., R.N.

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to. Our incessant search for happiness is thwarted from the start . . . by our own minds. But what are we to do about it? This is where *Stumbling* falls short because Gilbert fails to provide any satisfying answers to how we might reconcile our desire for happiness with our inability to secure it. Despite the fact that Gilbert warns us in the foreword that "this is not an instruction manual that will tell you anything useful about how to be happy," at the end, we close the book wanting *some* sense of what Gilbert proposes we do about this mess we're in. The solution he offers is uninspiring and impractical, and he leaves it up to us to make practical sense of the plethora of data we have about how our minds work.

Perhaps the real shortcoming of the book is the premise it is based on, which is that we cannot make distinctions between different kinds of happiness. Thus, we cannot compare our level of happiness resulting from doing a good deed to how happy we feel when eating a piece of banana cream pie. This position frees Gilbert from concerning himself with whether one kind of happiness is more significant than another, and this is certainly important for scientific measurement purposes. But the limitation of this position is why he fails to deliver a satisfactory solution—and even a satisfactory analysis—to the problem of pursuing happiness. After all, it's a tough argument that eating banana cream pie is equivalent to living a life of meaning and purpose. Even if my brain is not well developed in forecasting my future, I bet that if I had to predict which one would make me happier, I'd be spot on.

Laura Hartzell



RUDOLF STEINER

An Introduction to His Life and Work

by Gary Lachman

(Tarcher/Penguin, 2007, paperback
\$16.95)

What's the first thing that comes to mind when I mention Rudolf Steiner, the early twentieth-century esoteric thinker? Biodynamic farming? Atlantis? Architecture? Esoteric spiritualism? Perhaps your child attends one of the many Waldorf or "Steiner" schools in America or Europe, and you're wondering if there is a connection. It is a tribute to Steiner's eclectic genius that his influence is felt in fields as diverse as education, farming, politics, medicine, and spirituality. Steiner, who died in 1925 at the age of sixty-four, would surely be pleased to know that so many of his insights continue to find practical application almost a century after his passing. But as Gary Lachman makes clear in his popular and highly readable new biography of this enigmatic figure, Steiner also aspired to be an important thinker in the great tradition of German Idealism. Though he is best known today for his innovative contributions to education and agriculture and for his elaborate metaphysics that describes the evolution of consciousness and the nature of higher spiritual realms, most of that work was completed in the latter half of Steiner's life. The foundational ideas that gave rise to those contributions, Lachman's book argues, were developed much earlier in Steiner's career, derived from his intense immersion in the rich

philosophical climate of Austria and Germany in the late nineteenth century.

Born in what is now Croatia, Steiner was raised mostly in Austria by German-speaking parents. His father was a telegraph operator for the railroad, and during his early life, the family lived near a remote mountain railway station surrounded by a majestic natural landscape that would heavily influence the temperament and attitudes of the growing boy. Lachman's account of these early years suggests that Steiner's love of nature, along with his budding fascination with science, represented twin passions that would inform all of his later work. The first sign of his more celebrated spiritual side began to show itself at around six years old, when he had a paranormal experience that would be, as Lachman puts it, a "determining event of [Steiner's] childhood":

Sitting in the waiting room of a railway station, he saw a woman that he didn't know open the door and enter. . . . Although he hadn't met her before, Steiner could tell she looked like people in his family. She spoke to him saying, "Try now, and later in life, to help me as much as you can." She... then walked toward a stove on the other side of the room and disappeared.

Later that day, Steiner learned that a close relative had committed suicide, and his encounter with the spirit of the woman was a catalytic event that introduced the young boy to spiritual realms beyond the physical. This capacity to access higher planes of reality would, according to Steiner himself, become part of his consciousness for the remainder of his life.

While Lachman recognizes the profound significance of otherworldly cognitions in Steiner's work, he also points out that Steiner didn't speak

about these "higher worlds" until much later. Indeed, Steiner's primary studies throughout his twenties and thirties were more concerned with the German philosophical tradition. Lachman creates a vivid portrait of Steiner's early career as a young Austrian intellectual living in the rich philosophical culture that had recently witnessed the brilliance of Kant, Goethe, Hegel, and Nietzsche. We see him editing the scientific works of Goethe and visiting the aging and diseased Nietzsche. We see him as a struggling writer, working fervently on his first manuscripts amid the hustle and bustle of the "megalomania café" in Vienna, a haven for young philosophers, artists, poets, spiritualists, and "other eccentrics" in the German avant-garde. These encounters gave rise to Steiner's most significant work from that time, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, which some describe as his best book. "To an unbiased reader," Lachman writes, "it's clear that there's nothing occult about the early writings, and anyone who follows [the early] Steiner . . . will see in him a passionate Idealist, trying to throw a monkey wrench into the machinery of materialism. In *The Philosophy of Freedom*, he succeeds."

In 1900, at the age of thirty-nine, Steiner was invited to give a lecture at the German Theosophical Society. In front of this spiritually receptive audience, he felt the freedom to speak about his more esoteric perceptions, and the crowd loved it. One lecture led to many, and eventually he became president of the German branch of the society, and began to rival theosophical leaders Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater in charisma and popularity. Lachman is not the first to suggest that Besant and Leadbeater's search for a new "world teacher"—which culminated in their eventual coronation of a young boy in India named Jiddu Krishnamurti—was in part designed

to counter Steiner's growing influence in theosophical circles. Whatever the case, Steiner was not interested in Krishnamurti; his spirituality leaned more toward the West than the East. Soon he publicly broke with theosophy and formed the Anthroposophical Society, which continues his work to this day.

Lachman's account of Steiner's later years and his prolific work as head of the Anthroposophical Society is lucid and absorbing, but not exactly detailed or comprehensive. Perhaps it is simply due to space constraints, but perhaps it is also because Lachman's favorite version of Steiner is not the mature esotericist, spiritual advisor to thousands, and developer of sophisticated occult philosophies that blended science, spirit, and evolution in radical ways. His respect for this sagely Steiner is undeniable, but his real love is for the younger version, the budding philosopher matching his wits against the best minds of the day, the lover of science, reason, and progressive ideas who found common cause with fellow Idealists in the battle against scientific materialism.

To the contemporary reader of Lachman's impressive biography, both parts of Steiner's story fascinate even as they cut the outlines of a difficult and often frustrated life of genius. Lachman acknowledges that Steiner's spiritual philosophy could be brilliant, practical, and innovative one moment—and strange and archaic the next. In fact, given this penchant for arcane esotericism, Steiner himself is unlikely to be taken seriously anytime soon by the mainstream of our contemporary culture. But his eclectic influence is profound nonetheless, and his pioneering ideas, stripped of their esoteric overtones, sparkle with fresh relevance to the concerns of our own age.

Carter Phipps

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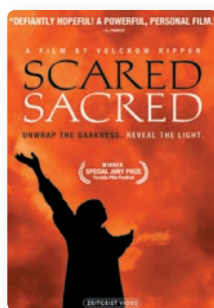
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**SCARED SACRED**

Written and directed by Velcrow Ripper
(Producers on Davie Pictures, Inc.,
DVD, 105 min., \$29.95)

It takes a special kind of talent and commitment to put together a film like *Scared Sacred*, the recent DVD release directed and written by first-time filmmaker Velcrow Ripper. The movie is a veritable tour of tragedy, the result of Ripper's five-year venture into the world's "ground zeros"—places like Cambodia, Hiroshima, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Bhopal, India, the occupied territories in Israel, and more—to find remnants of the sacred within these islands of suffering and pain. It doesn't exactly sound like easy viewing, and be warned: *Scared Sacred* will indeed upset, challenge, and disturb you. But this unusual journey through the manmade hells of the late twentieth century manages to somehow transcend its morbid subject matter. Indeed, Ripper's film is not really a history of these terrible tragedies; rather, it is a story of remarkable individuals who have endured them and who are enduring them still. It is a chronicle of the deeply human struggle to survive, thrive, and persevere, even in places and contexts where all the odds are stacked against you. From the artists he interviews in Bosnia who continued to work diligently while snipers' bullets filled the streets around them to the young Cambodian man who has dedicated his life to the dangerous task of clearing away the many thousands of land mines still buried in his country to the Japanese ceremonial remembrance of the Hiroshima bomb blast, Ripper

finds unexpected stories and remarkable storytellers amid the rubble. His documentary manages to simultaneously convey a profound sense of horror at the unbearable reality of human tragedy and a genuine sense of faith in the surprising resilience of the human spirit—no small achievement. And all of it is woven together with impressive camera work, as some of the most mundane scenes of life at these ground zeros become the fodder for beautiful and haunting cinematography.

The only disappointing aspect of *Scared Sacred* is that Ripper, who began the film in an effort to come to terms with his own crisis of meaning and existential foreboding, does not, in the end, have a lot to say about the relationship between the "scared" and the "sacred," between these dystopian disasters of modernity and the search for meaning amid the wreckage. But perhaps that is for the best. After all, Ripper's project was not a preplanned, prepackaged production for some Discovery Channel documentary; it was clearly an authentic, personal, open-ended quest. And his reluctance to draw neat conclusions about human nature and the sacred from his travels feels authentic as well. One is left at the end to divine one's own meaning from the images and stories. In a sense, *Scared Sacred* feels more like the beginning of a longer story than a finished and complete package. And given that Ripper's next film—*Fierce Light*, which is about spiritual activism—is due out soon, let's hope that we are seeing the birth of that unusual combination of talented filmmaker and genuine seeker, one who has the moviemaking passion and cinematic palette to bring the subtleties of human spirituality to the silver screen.

Carter Phipps

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Are Hormones the Fountain

THE WORLD IS AWASH IN STORIES and myths of sages who have secreted themselves away from the world. In the Taoist tradition, you'll hear them described as immortal. The term "immortal" was actually translated from "mountain man." This referred to people who sought out personal solitude to practice spiritual discipline, and for a very small minority, to seek the elixir of youth.

Can such a thing be found? After all, the search for the fountain of youth is thousands of years old. Has anyone yet come close? Oh, yes, allegations abound about unknown persons from an unknown time who shattered known (or assumed) scientific limits. However, allegations don't erase facts. But what actually are the facts?

Chinese herbalist Li Chung Yun was said to be 256 when he died in 1933.

According to anthropologists, primitive man was fortunate to live 18 years; according to historical records, that's a pretty good approximation of the average life span in Europe during the Dark Ages. Some healthier people might have made it to the ripe old age of 25 or 30. In the United States of the 1800s, the average life span was 25; a hundred years later, it had soared to 47; and in the year 2000, the figure had shot up to 80. Wealthy Asian-American women slam-dunked the other countries of the world with an average life expectancy of 95.

Of course, an unequivocal study accepted by the scientific community acknowledged that a French woman, Jeanne Calment, almost made it to 123. But this is a far cry from the assertion made in the *New York Times* that Chinese herbalist Li Chung Yun was 256 when he died in 1933. Old Li's age

was confirmed by Professor Wu Chung Chich, the dean of Chang Tsu University. It was said that Li was born in 1677 in the province of Szechuan, China. He received a special recognition from the government in 1827 on his 150th birthday, and again in 1877 at age 200. On his 200th birthday, he was lecturing about the power of wild foods and herbs at the University of China.

Now, of course, without a photo ID and a provable birth certificate, all this is considered nothing but a fanciful claim. After all, I can't even prove who *I* am. Don't you just hate it when some official shouts, "Show me your papers!?" I guess that's why people scoffed at Harvard professor Dr. Alexander Leaf, an accomplished gerontologist, whose January 1973 *National Geographic* article claimed the life spans of Georgian Russians to be well beyond 120. As an example, Shirali Mislumov believed he was 168 and his wife, 120. They had been married for 102 years at the time. If 50 years is a golden anniversary, what would 100 be?

Okay, so we don't really know any of this for certain. But what we do know is that all the long-lived people of the world had a fondness for wine, herbs, and tea as well as a slower pace of life. In Dr. Leaf's article, Mrs. Khfaf Lasuria, who believed she was 141 years old, said she worked as a tea leaf picker up to age 139, so she must have consumed a lot of green tea!

It is now confirmed that green tea alters hormone levels and reduces breast cancer risk. I found it quite interesting that green tea affects the body's hormone levels in a beneficial manner. (See the 1998 study by Nagata, Kabuto, and Shimizu, published in *Nutrition and Cancer*, on how green tea and caffeine affect serum concentrations of estradiol and sex-hormone-binding globulin in premenopausal Japanese women.) This is especially powerful if the tea is handpicked and only the top two leaves and leaf bud are used. The first spring leaf buds, called the first flush, are the most potent and the finest quality.

Back in the early 1900s, German physiologist Max Rubner came up with a rate of living theory. In simple terms, he thought that living a slower-paced life appeared to slow energy

of Youth?



Peter Ragnar is a natural life scientist, modern-day Taoist wizard, and self-master par excellence. A martial arts practitioner for over fifty years, he is renowned for his teachings on optimal health and longevity. He is the author of twenty books, including *The Art and Science of Physical Invincibility*.

consumption, increasing longevity. Today, we understand this relationship in terms of the stress hormone cortisol and how it affects other life-extension hormones such as human growth hormone, DHEA, gonadotropic hormones (sex hormones), and melatonin.

Increased stress decreases our youthful hormone levels. As an example, when cortisol goes up, memory goes down, sleep patterns are interrupted, and bodily growth and repair cycles are interfered with. After just twenty-four hours of stress, your thymus gland, the seat of your immune system, can shrink to half its former size.

Human growth hormone, or somatotropin, is like the umbrella under which all the other hormones function. It peaks at around age twenty, and by the time you get to be sixty or seventy, you have only about fifteen percent left. The difference between a youthful, vital person and an aging, frail, decrepit person is now believed to be simply the body's hormone levels.

Li Chung Yun claims to have met a five-hundred-year-old sage who instructed him to make a tea with an herb called ho shou wu. He also consumed copious amounts of ginseng. There is no greater hormone replacement therapy than good, wild-crafted ginseng. When pioneering Russian scientist Georges Lakhovsky (1869–1942) went to Manchuria, he was told about a radioactive ginseng, wild tung pei. Tung pei roots emit a “gurwitch” or mitogenic ultraviolet light, as well as ginsenosides, which improve sperm levels, hormone levels, and memory. These types of herbal elixirs are legendary among long-lived peoples, and scientists have now awakened to the beneficial effects of certain herbs on our hormones.

In fact, with anti-aging knowledge doubling every three and a half years (since 1997), by the year 2017, we will know sixty-four times more about how to stop and reverse aging than we do now. That may sound like a mouthful, but here's what Harvard biologist and professor Edward O. Wilson, a National Medal of Science and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, had to say when asked if we can live forever: “I see

no reason why humanity and the species as a whole cannot be immortal!”

The same question was posed in a *New York Times* article, “Pushing Limits of the Human Life Span.” The article states, “The question is no longer ‘Will it happen?’ but rather, ‘When?’” The founder of Human Genome Sciences, Inc., Dr. William Haseltine of Harvard University, states, “I believe our generation is the first to be able to map a possible route to individual immortality.” Dr. Ronald Klatz of the American Academy of Antiaging Medicine believes that “human immortality is achievable by the year 2029.”

Yes, these are quite optimistic statements made by respected experts in the field. They all agree that death is a biological problem requiring a biological solution. While there is much research into many areas, the possibility that hormones may hold the secret to the fountain of youth is certainly on their minds. One thing we do know for certain is that when hormone levels become depleted, we age; when they are replenished, we don't.

In conclusion, I'd like to inject one more point: Our willful surrender to aging and death is a perversion of our natural instinct for self-preservation. I believe we already possess the tools for an open-ended longevity growing in forest and meadow. If we only expand our conscious awareness of the preciousness of life, savor it, honor it, celebrate it, and feel it pulsing through us, we can expand it. Expand it just a little, and you'll have the confidence to expand it a lot. Once the juice of your hormones flows like a river, you'll be the biggest scandal in your neighborhood when they find out that you plan on living forever!



Learn more about the amazing life and work of Peter Ragnar at wie.org/ragnar



Enlightenment for the 21st Century

How a New World Is Born

by Andrew Cohen

THE ULTIMATE SPIRITUAL REVELATION IS that *there is no other. There is only One*. When any individual goes very deep into a meditative state, momentarily transcending the separate self-sense or narcissistic ego, this profound singularity at the level of consciousness itself is what he or she will find. There is an uncontainable thrill in those moments when the nonrelative nature of consciousness actually becomes apparent. It's as if the water boils over the edge, and the individual suddenly finds himself or herself overwhelmed by the absolute dimension of Being. That is the revelation that enlightens: *Consciousness is One without a second, and I Am That*.

The ground, or the foundation, of an enlightened perspective is the direct experience of the nonrelative or absolute nature of consciousness itself. Matter, mind, and time are all relative. Consciousness is not. And it is that interplay between the absolute and the relative, between the revelation of One and the appearance of many, that generates the awakened intensity that is the quality of enlightened awareness. An enlightened human life would be one in which the individual is living right on that edge, in the very heart of that paradox.

The most thrilling discovery I have made in my two decades as a teacher of enlightenment is that if a group of individuals chooses to go beyond ego *together*, it is possible to experience exactly the same overwhelming revelation of the absolute dimension with our eyes open, in a context that is not one of withdrawal and stillness but one of creativity and engagement. We discover a state of consciousness in which we are each aware that there is only One and yet, simultaneously, we are *engaging* as many; a state in which we are able to experience unqualified communion *and* powerful autonomy at the very same time. That's nonduality—*incarnational* nonduality. It is experienced in the body, in relationship, not only in the stillness of inner revelation.

In the traditional notion of enlightenment, the egoless state is just consciousness or Being. There is no activity involved, no relationship. It is easy to be egoless when there's no relationship. Anyone can *experience* egoless consciousness in the stillness of his or her own meditation. But the real challenge of enlightenment is egoless *engagement* in an intersubjective, creative context. That, to me, is the call of the future. That's the new enlightenment that I am endeavoring to bring into being. This new enlightenment is not an individual attainment; it is a *collective emergence*. And it occurs when all individuals involved awaken simultaneously to what I call the Authentic Self, which is the evolutionary impulse itself, the energy and intelligence that created the universe, experienced directly in the human heart and mind. In that awakening,

there is no difference between the deepest spiritual revelation of oneness and a fully embodied, conscious engagement with others and with the life process itself. The timeless paradox of enlightenment enters the stream of time in a collective or intersubjective context and becomes the ground for a higher evolutionary or developmental process. The Authentic Self or evolutionary impulse is the urge toward ever-greater complexity and higher integration. So in this intersubjective nondual or enlightened state, there is the living revelation of the fact that there is only One while simultaneously there is the appearance of the many; and the many, in the knowledge of being One, are ceaselessly striving to realize greater complexity and higher integration.

If each of the individuals in such a gathering is deeply committed to the Authentic Self to such a profound degree that it has displaced the separate ego to become the primary locus of identity, something quite miraculous and dramatic starts to occur. The nature of the Authentic Self is ecstatic urgency and unconditional commitment to creating the future. So when two or more individuals come together and awaken to the Authentic Self, a glorious future is created, at the level of consciousness, right now. Heaven comes to earth *now*. Heaven is a state of being in which the ego is not necessarily transcended altogether but is defeated. Ego is defeated when an individual's primary locus of identification shifts to the Authentic Self. Then the future at the level of consciousness does emerge in the present moment, and that's what a truly new world is. It's not some vague utopian vision a thousand years from now; it's a new structure in consciousness that emerges at the deepest level, in the most interior dimension of the Kosmos, in real time, right now. At first it is glimpsed as a new potential, and eventually it becomes an actual structure in consciousness that emerges through the many simultaneously. In this intersubjective egoless field, everyone is relating to each other in a completely different way, from a radically different perspective, for very different reasons. And that is how a new world is born.

A new world means a new level or stage of development, and that's something we have to build together. Throughout history, there have always been rare and extraordinary individuals who were trailblazers, out ahead of everyone else, but new stages of cultural development are not individuals. They are intersubjective *structures* that are created in consciousness as human beings come together having transcended old value systems and worldviews and created new ones. So if the shared foundation upon which we build new structures is the transcendence of individual and collective ego, we are going to be consciously creating nothing less than an enlightened culture.

Andrew Cohen, founder and editor in chief of *What Is Enlightenment?*, has been a spiritual teacher since 1986 and is the author of numerous books, including *Living Enlightenment* and *Embracing Heaven & Earth*. For more information, visit andrewcohen.org