


ISSUE 14

Insights and inspirations for living in the light

heart & soul

Formerly RETREAT Magazine



To Forgive or not to Forgive
Lessons from the Light
After Capitalism
Dreams and Reality
Y2K – What's the Vision?
Learn to Meditate
The Face of Honesty



Love

I used to think love was fire
Now I think it is water
Cool, making its way calmly
Nourishing from beneath, above, indirectly

I used to think love was expression
Now I think it is silence
Quiet giving, manifesting years later
Understood perhaps only in the moments before parting

I used to think love was excitement
Now I think it is soothing
Making someone strong, filling the gaps
Appearing and then going, slipping out

I used to think love was active
Now I think it is stillness
Carrying a gift, with no name tag, in your eyes
And giving it just by the holding

I used to think love was touching
Now I think it is standing at a slight distance
Watching with such care that you know when to come in
And when to leave
There is a lot of love in the leaving

I used to think love was people
I still think that
But also I do not

Because we have forgotten
Love's calmness
Its coolness
Its selflessness
We have made it too vivid, too painful

God taught me that

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Lessons from the Light

Kenneth Ring

Personal experiences of the moment which awaits us all – the 'life review'



To Forgive or not to Forgive

Sister Jayanti

The debate which was sparked by a certain President setting a certain precedent!



Images and Voices of Hope

Judy Rodgers

Is it not time we awoke to the power of the images on our screens and in our daily newspapers?



Life After Capitalism

David Kurten

A crisp and clear explanation why the way we manage the money of our world is not working



Showing a Little Appreciation

Jillian Sawers

Here is possibly the most painless way to generate positive change at any level



Dreams and Reality

Andrew Powell

Exploration of the meaning of dreaming and why we may all be dreaming most of the time



Y2K – What's the Vision?

Barbara Shipka and Meg Wheatley

A conversation about a certain moment of significance for us all which is not far away



The Law and the Wisdom of an Ancient Race

Tjanara Goreng Goreng

The Aboriginal way reminds us of the basics of right living and invites us to go back as we go forward



Faith Rediscovered

Catherine Lucas

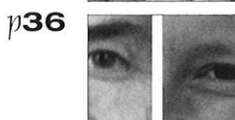
One person's moment of spiritual awakening



Learn to Meditate

David Fontana

An expert in the practice of this ancient art makes it sound simple



The Face of Honesty

Sister Mohini

The power and effect of an increasingly ignored value and behaviour

Date.....

Welcome

And so we see on the horizon, accelerating towards us at the speed of a wall calendar casting aside its days, that moment, that non-negotiable deadline, when we may have to face the disintegration of our current lifestyles. Ladies and gentlemen, will you please welcome Y2K. And while no one knows the impact, the implications or the ideal strategy of response, we may be forced to pay a little more respect to this moment of global celebration than we are currently giving it. In Y2K – What's the Vision? we eavesdrop on a conversation about one dimension of this communal experience which is racing towards us all.



For more than twenty years we have been hearing about 'near-death experiences' (NDEs), those transcendental episodes that so many people who have experienced the beginnings of death have recounted for us upon returning to physical life. These travellers' tales have helped to fashion a much more positive vision of the nature of death itself. Recently, however, NDE researchers such as myself have been more concerned with the question of how we can learn from these experiences so as to help us with our daily lives. How can we make use of this body of knowledge about NDEs so as to live with greater self-awareness and spiritual insight?

To extract the essential lesson of NDE for everyday life, I would like to draw on some of the material from a new book of mine, *Lessons from the Light*, which is an attempt to distil the wisdom teachings of the NDE in such a way as to enable its readers to apply them to their own lives. Here, however, I will focus on just one particular feature of the NDE which is usually called the life review, that portion of an NDE when the individual has a panoramic review of his or her life wherein virtually everything that has ever happened to the individual is revealed, often in an atemporal holographic display of countless visual images. However, in the life review you are more than a passive observer watching yourself in the movie of your life. Actually, you are back in it all over again, and you experience what happened to

Kenneth Ring is an authority on out-of-body experiences. In his latest book he reveals new research and, in particular, what we can learn from the near-death experience.



“ ...it was a total reliving of every thought I had ever thought, every word I had ever spoke, and every deed I had ever done. ”

you as if it were happening once more. In short, but to simplify somewhat, you are living your life afresh – your memories have somehow transformed themselves into vivid recreations of the episodes of your life.

To see what this kind of experience has to teach those of us who haven't had it, I'll concentrate on a single episode from a particular life review. It comes from the NDE of a man I know very well, with the unlikely (but actual) name of the famous fictional character of the American author, Mark Twain – Tom Sawyer. Here, let me introduce my friend, Tom, to you by giving you something of a context for this experience to follow.

As a youth, Tom had an uncontrollable temper, and one day it really got him into trouble. He had been driving his hot-rod pickup truck through town when a pedestrian darted out and almost collided with it. Tom, rather than being relieved that no accident had occurred, found himself incensed that this man had almost damaged his beautiful truck. Angry words were exchanged, soon followed by blows, and Tom eventually pummelled his victim into unconsciousness and left him lying in the middle of the street. Shortly afterward, however, overtaken by a fit of remorse, he reported the incident to the police and was let off with a warning.

Years later, during his NDE, Tom was forced to relive this scene, and like many others who have described their life reviews to me, he found himself doing so from a dual perspective. One part of himself, he said, seemed to be high up in a building overlooking the street, from which perch he simply witnessed, like an elevated spectator, the fight taking place below. But another part of Tom was actually involved in the fight again. However, this time he found himself in the place of the other party, and experienced each distinct blow he had inflicted on this man – thirty-two in all, he said – before collapsing unconscious on the pavement.

This role reversal in the life review in which one finds oneself directly experiencing the effects of one's actions on another is not unique to Tom. In fact, it is found quite often in accounts of life reviews and seems to ram home their lesson for living to those who experience this surprising empathic turnabout.

Here are some quotations from the many experiences I culled for my book, which give a sense of how powerful and all-encompassing the life review may be:

“FLASH! Brilliant colours came radiating from within me, to be displayed in front of us (she was with a group of persons whose faces were radiating unconditional love), like a theatre floating in air. It was a three-dimensional, panoramic view of my life, every aspect of my life. Everything I had ever said or done, or even thought, was right there, for all of us to experience. I re-thought every thought, I re-experienced every feeling, as it happened, in an instant. And I also felt how my actions, or even just my thoughts, had affected others. When I had passed judgement on someone else, I would experience myself doing that.

Then I would change places in perspective, and experience what that judgement had felt like for them to receive from me. Then I'd return to my own feelings, to be able to respond to the drama I'd just witnessed and experienced, to react, for example, with shame or remorse because of that episode. Multitudinous actions or thoughts, derived from my own meanness, unkindness, or anger, caused me to feel the consequent pains of the other people. I experienced this even if, at the time I had hurt someone, I had chosen to ignore how that would affect them. And I felt their pain for the full length of time they were affected by what I had done. Because I was in a different dimension where time can't be measured, as we know time to exist on earth, it was possible to know all of this and experience it all at once, in a moment, and with the ability to comprehend all of this information!”

(During her life review): “I remember one particular incident ... when, as a child, I yanked my little sister's Easter basket away from her, because there was a toy in it that I wanted. Yet in the review, I felt her feelings of disappointment and loss and rejection. What we do to other people when we act unlovingly! ...Everything you have done is there in the review for you to evaluate and when I was there in that review there was no covering up. I was the very people that I hurt, and I was the very people I helped to feel good ... It is a real challenge, every day of my life, to know that when I die I am going to have to witness every single action of mine again, only this time actually feeling the effects

I've had on others. It sure makes me stop and think."

"It proceeded to show me every single event of my 22 years of life, in a kind of instant 3-D panoramic review... The brightness showed me every second of all those years, in exquisite detail, in what seemed only an instant of time. Watching and re-experiencing all those events of my life changed everything. It was an opportunity to see and feel all the love I had shared and, more importantly, all the pain I had caused. I was able simultaneously to re-experience not only my own feelings and thoughts, but those of all the other people I had ever interacted with. Seeing myself through their eyes was a humbling experience.

"Mine was not a review, but a reliving. For me, it was a total reliving of every thought I had ever thought, every word I had ever spoken, and every deed I had ever done; plus, the effect of each thought, word and deed on everyone and anyone who had ever come within my environment or sphere of influence, whether I knew them or not No detail was left out. No slip of the tongue or slur was missed. No mistake or accident went unaccounted for. If there is such a thing as hell, as far as I am concerned this was hell."

To get more of the full impact of these observations and make them relevant to your own life, you can easily perform an instructive exercise by taking a few minutes to write whatever comes to mind, beginning with the words:

"When I reflect on these commentaries in relation to my own life, I ..."

Here are some of the implications that have emerged from my work with this material:

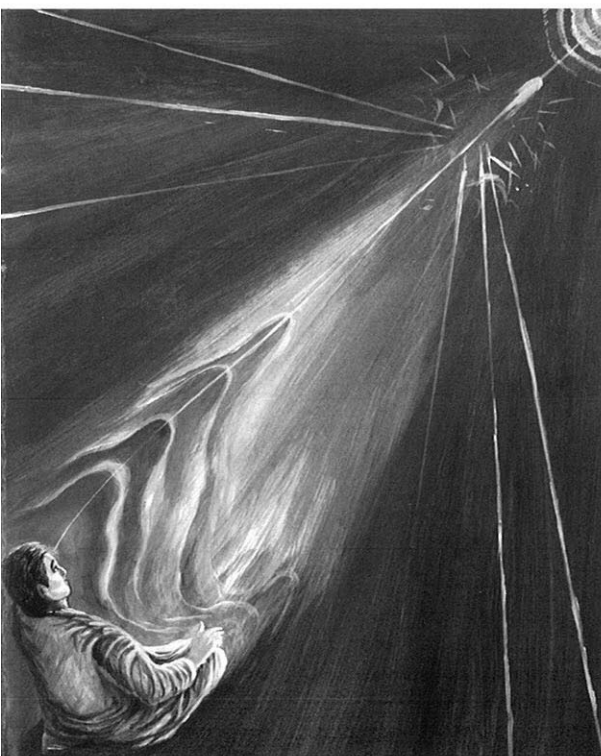
Perhaps the most obvious – and important – insight that is voiced, in one way or another, is that this exercise forces one to think about the meaning of the Golden Rule in an entirely new way. Most of us are accustomed to regard it as a precept for moral action – "Do unto others as you would be done to". But in the light of these life review commentaries, the Golden Rule is much more than that – it is actually the way it works. In short, if these accounts in fact revealed to us what we experience at the point of death, then what we have done to others is experienced as done to ourselves. Familiar exhortations such as, "Love your brother as yourself," from this point of view are understood to mean that, in the life review, you yourself are the brother you have been urged to love. And this is no mere intellectual conviction or even a religious credo – it is an undeniable fact of your lived experience.

As one near-death experimenter told me: "No matter what I did to any person – no matter what that action might be, good or bad – that action would react not only upon me but also on others around me. I knew that every action was its own reaction. What we do for or against another, we do to ourselves. I fully understand what Jesus meant when He said, 'As ye do it unto the least of these, ye do it unto me'."

Another way of putting this would be to say that the life review demonstrates that, psychologically and spiritually, there is really only one person in the universe – and that person is, of course, yourself. Every act, every thought, every feeling, every emotion directed toward another – whether you know the person or not – will later be experienced by you. Everything you send out, returns – just as Tom Sawyer felt each of the thirty-two blows he had viciously rained down on his overmatched victim. Remember what one of the persons above said, to pithily encapsulate this lesson from the life review: "I was the very people that I hurt, and I was the very people I helped to feel good." Next time you are in the middle of a heated



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argument with someone, you might find yourself stopping in mid-sentence when you realise that your verbal assaults will one day inevitably be reflected back to you from the unsparing mirror of your life.

Pondering these implications of the life review makes me think about justice in a new way, too. It occurs to me, what could be a more perfect form of justice than this – everything you do becomes yours. It is not that we are rewarded for our good deeds or punished by our cruel ones; it is simply that we receive back what we have given out, and exactly as we have done.

These reflections in turn suggest a revisioning of one aspect of the NDE that seems to give many people trouble. Very often, following a lecture on NDEs, a question is raised to the effect of whether everybody will eventually find himself in the presence of the Light and receive incomparable blessings from what the Light seems to extend to anyone who comes within its embrace. Behind the question, there is usually the implication that some persons should be disqualified from this experience – rapists, for example, or others who have led morally reprehensible lives (or even, with some fundamentalists, persons who are ‘unsaved’).

The answer I have heard several near-death experiencers give to this question is unqualified: Everyone, they say, will come into this Light. The Light is unconditional and plays no favourites. This reply invariably stirs an agitated response in some members of the audience, and someone will then play the trump card. “Even Hitler?” a voice will ask incredulously.

I remember an answer that was given to this query by a near-death experiencer who, as a child, had suffered severe sexual and physical abuse from her father. When she found herself in the Light, she asked it telepathically, “Does everyone come here?” She was told, “Yes.” Then she herself asked the very question that represents the limit for most people: “Even Hitler?” “Yes.” And, then pushing the Light even further, she found herself asking, “Even my father?” Again, “Yes”.

But having to re-experience what one had done, thought, and felt about others, can

be hell itself. A prisoner, not previously quoted, who actually had a long criminal career said, in a passage whose relevance to Hitler’s atrocities cannot be overlooked: “Apparently nothing was omitted in this nightmare of injuries, but the most terrifying thing about it was that every pang of suffering I had caused others was now felt by me as the scroll unwound itself.”

But in these life reviews, justice is seemingly always tempered by a kind of mercy that allows most of us to re-experience our lives without teeth-gnashing anguish and remorse. There is never any condemnation – you are not judged. You are in the presence of a being who loves you unconditionally. You are treated with total compassion. You are already forgiven. You are only asked to look at your life, and to understand.

Although the life review may be the price you pay for entrance into the Light, the presence within the Light helps you through it with the greatest and most tender compassion and love and, even at times, humour. You are not being punished; you are being shown, so that you can learn.

A man who had quite a hard time looking at his life during his review commented: “I feel strongly that the whole life review would have been emotionally destructive ... if it hadn’t been for the fact that my friend (the being of Light) and my friend’s friends, while we watched the whole thing, were loving me. I could feel that love. Every time I got a little upset, they turned it off for a while and they just loved me. Their love was tangible. You could feel it on your body, you could feel it inside of you; their love went right through you. The therapy was their love, because my life review just kept tearing me down. It was pitiful to watch, just pitiful ... it was nauseating. But through it all was their love.”

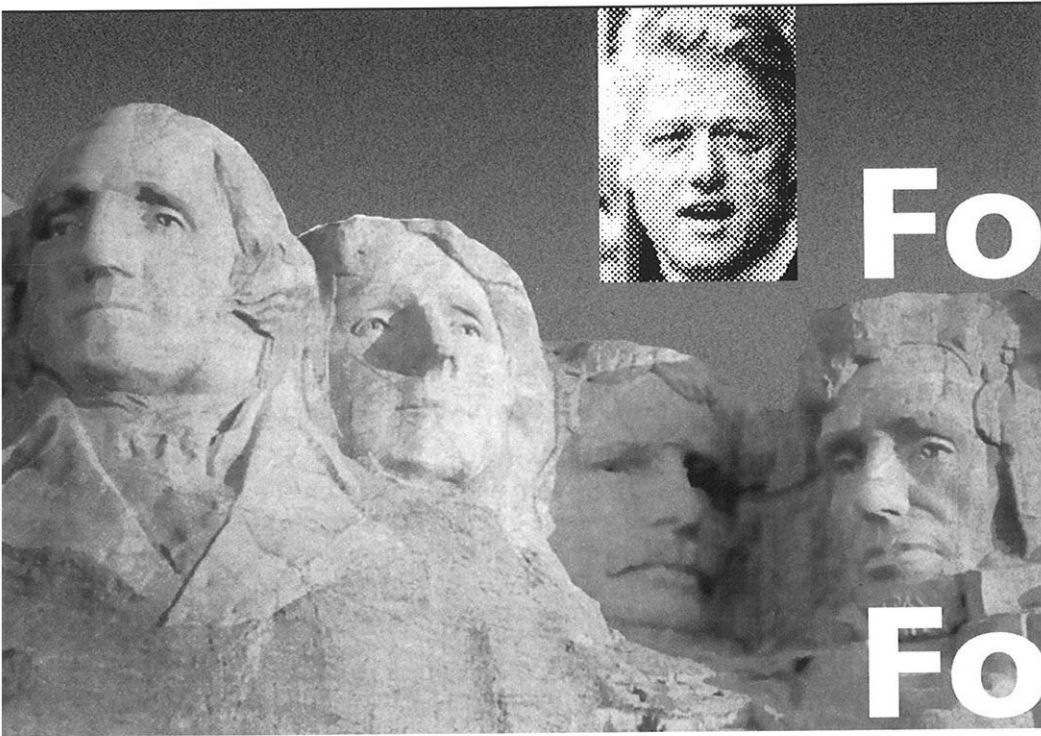
The lessons of the life review are available to everyone, whether one has had an NDE or not. All that is necessary is not to forget what one has learned and to act upon that knowledge.



Professor Kenneth Ring is Emeritus Professor of Psychology in the University of Storrs, CT, and author of a number of well-known books on NDEs.



“You are not being punished; you are being shown, so that you can learn.”



To Forgive or not to Forgive

The debate which was sparked by a certain President setting a certain precedent



difficult - there's really no hope. I think that every human being has done things that need forgiving and so it's a subject which touches all of us.

Jim Flynn:

For the President of the United States to go on television and ask his country for forgiveness struck me as an extraordinary thing. What is your reaction?

Sister Jayanti:

I think it throws up the challenges that we face at the end of the twentieth century, where there's nothing that's private any more for an individual in that position. There could have been many leaders in the past who have done similar things, but the public didn't know about it. Now there is an accountability that's very transparent. This is a special situation, in which the leader of a nation that's as respected as the United States, has to acknowledge a mistake has been made and then has to ask for the forgiveness of the people. Here is a very special time in history.

Jim Flynn:

I think of it as the airplane factor, that if you go very high the fall can be more painful. That seems to be the special province of leaders. The man went on television and said, "Please, forgive me." Do you think he should be forgiven?

Audience:

He should be forgiven, but the problem is I don't think he forgave himself. The thing is you have to forgive yourself first, before you

Jim Flynn:

One of the most astounding events in American political history happened in this past year. We had the American President go on television and explain his side of the Monica Lewinsky story. He was forced to go back on television by the politicians, by the public, by everybody he knew; it all had to do with one word - forgiveness. The person who has never needed forgiveness, or who has never forgiven someone, is a person I would like to meet and ask questions of. I suspect they are not of this world. Why is this subject so important to us as people?

Sister Jayanti:

It is exactly as you said; if I look back on my own life, I know that I've made mistakes and I hope that God will forgive me and hope that my friends and my family will forgive me, and it's only on the basis of that, that I can have hope for the future. If I'm not forgiven I'm going to carry a lot of burden on myself and the future's going to be very

Jim Flynn of Channel 10 FCAC Fairfax, Virginia, interviews Sister Jayanti on a topic which has been occupying a nation for over a year. The audience had a few things to say too!



can be forgiven by others. The first time, he couldn't come on and ask for forgiveness because he didn't think he did anything wrong. Finally when he came back again he was forced to, by pressure, but then did he really feel he had done something wrong? I don't know. Yes, he should be forgiven, but he should forgive himself first.

Sister Jayanti:

I would think in seeking forgiveness I have to be able to be open enough to see where it is I have erred and with that realisation have the humility to accept that, yes, I have made a mistake. Being able to forgive myself is important but I think there also has to be a commitment to transformation in the future. I don't think that it is possible to forgive or be forgiven if I intend to continue with the same pattern of behaviour. That is as much a part of the process of forgiveness, and so I realise I have a commitment for the future, and I seek God's forgiveness, and I also am able to forgive myself. And then I will probably find that the people around me are willing to let me move on.

Jim Flynn:

So there are conditions that you give to forgiveness?

Sister Jayanti:

I think so, yes. If I put a cross on a sheet of paper, then I need to have an eraser for me to rub it out properly and move off all the dust and the marks. And so in a sense whatever it is the sinner has done there is a process to remove the impact of that, and the realisation, the humility and the transformation are all part of that process.

Jim Flynn:

I would like to focus on the question which you raised earlier, Sister Jayanti, regarding the contract for forgiveness being a contract between us and God. You were saying that God is the source of this forgiveness in our lives. Should we put a lot of conditions on forgiveness, knowing that that's in the background? That it is really between William Jefferson Clinton and his maker. Are we really capable of judging, forgiving? Are they acts which are really man's acts or are they acts we should just stay away from and say: I hope he does better, I hope he reforms, I hope he stops bringing pain to his family.

Sister Jayanti:

I think if I'm looking at myself and my relationship with God and seeing that I'm seeking forgiveness then these are the conditions of realisation and commitment to transformation that I need to have. Then my contract with God has to be based on sincerity, on humility. And then in terms of my relationship with others around me, if I've

benefited from God's forgiveness and others around me have given me that support, it's going to be much, much easier for me to send that in the same way to a fellow human being. There is also an issue of trust in all this. If I trust you to transform, I'm going to invoke the highest within you. If I don't trust you, then I'm probably going to get back what it is I'm expecting, and so if I invest my trust in you there's going to be a lot more possibility of your responding.

Audience:

Clinton asking for forgiveness made me realise that here is a word I've used all my life but I don't really know what it means. Does it mean accepting what he did, understanding it, excusing it? I could not answer that right away.

My best shot at this point is that if we're all programmed to make mistakes, to act rightly or wrongly, then we're also programmed to learn from them. In fact what makes us human is that we can learn from what we do, so that I now see that whatever forgiveness I can give to the President would be based on whether I can see what he learned from it, what effect - what we're all learning from it.

Jim Flynn:

I had a politician on this show earlier this year and he brought up the subject of forgiveness. I brought up repentance, and to me I am holding back forgiveness until I see the repentance. Does this make me wrong, right, or just growing to the point of where I can just give it unconditionally?

Sister Jayanti:

If I could absolutely develop that ability to trust in a contract with God, know that every human soul has its own personal relationship with God and leave it to God completely, then it's really not my duty - I can just simply forgive and let go and move on.

Jim Flynn:

Are you saying that we have to get to a place where we actually delegate the forgiveness responsibility to God, and we simply forgive and let that be in that vertical contract as it were?

Sister Jayanti:

Yes I think so. I'm just remembering certain very powerful yogis whom I know. A yogi means one who experiences union with God and I'm thinking of three yogis in particular whom I have met in my life, who had this capacity of really being able to simply love, let go and forgive, without putting any demands or conditions on individuals. So many people have benefited from these three souls and gained enormous strength with which to be able to move on.

Jim Flynn:

In America there isn't a week goes by that somebody isn't on TV who is the wife, mother, cousin of someone who has been killed by another human being, and to me it's one of the most extraordinary things to see these people on camera, the day after the event, on camera, talking forgiveness towards the person who took the life of their friend, relative, spouse.

Sister Jayanti:

I'm remembering a situation that had arisen a few years ago in London just about a mile from where I live. A sixteen year old youth was in a gang fight and the headmaster had come out into the playground to intervene and was killed. The widow, in a space of some hours, came on television and said she couldn't hold anything in her heart against this young man. She had a very important question which was, "What sort of society had we created that this young man came to the situation where he was able to do this?" Her stance was that this didn't happen in isolation, it wasn't because this young man was such a bad, wicked, evil person. She raised the whole question of the culture we've created in which there's a lot of materialism, in which there isn't spirituality, a culture in which we've forgotten about basic human values.

Audience:

I find it interesting that it's easier for me to forgive a big situation. It's much harder when it's somebody I love very much and I've already done a lot of work with forgiving. I've found that something very interesting happens to me. When I forgive, I start with a process in my head and perhaps I might even write the words that I forgive them. But I really don't find a change until my heart starts to feel differently, and I really and truly love them. I don't just forgive them, I love them, and so what I notice along the way is that when I actually forgive someone it's my gift to myself, because when I forgive them I feel freer inside. I've finally come to the point of realising that this is one of the reasons why I like who I am and the way my life is today. I've had to work so hard to forgive, that my life is what it is today because of that, because of those people in my life. So then I stand back and what I see is a divine plan or order: there is a God at work and that all things that are happening have a purpose and I'm not a victim. I finally get to the point where I can say, I'm really grateful for this.

Jim Flynn:

So you not only want to forgive the President, you want to thank him for raising the issue!

Audience:

Yes, and I was thinking that we don't know yet what good will come from this but yes, surely there will be good. We had a whole nation discussing what is right, we have us talking about compassion, we have a man who was the Speaker of the House, who had to resign because he was not forgiving and whatever else is yet for us to learn. So maybe he gave us a gift.

Sister Jayanti:

The other dimension to forgiving is forgetting. If I'm not able to forgive, I can't forget, and unless I forget and let go, I'm not able to move on. And so the more I'm hanging onto the things of the past the more burdened I am, and the less able I am to deal with the present moment and do anything that's positive for the future.

Jim Flynn:

I'm curious about how to practise forgiveness, because we've talked about what it is, and why it's very important and how it applies to the President, and we're now talking about how it applies to us, which really gets us into, "How do we do forgiveness?" How do people who are initially in that extraordinary negative mindset begin to practise forgiveness - what's the beginning of forgiveness?

Sister Jayanti:

I think firstly just learning to accept who I am and developing a value for the self. Our biggest crisis at the moment is the crisis of identity. We don't know ourselves. Our lack of esteem for ourselves, and the situation which we create where wrong things happen is because we don't have inner strength, inner power, and so we get led astray by many different things. One of the comments that I'd read about the President's story is to do with how needy these two individuals were. There's an emptiness there inside and I think the whole process of being able to forgive, let go of pain, come back to strength and power inside, is to be able to recognise my own spiritual identity, recognise the values that I have within my own being. It's being able to have esteem for myself and self-respect and it's through that, that I'm able to have a relationship with God, in which I'm not asking God for anything, but I know that all of God's treasures are there available for me, as a right. It all starts with an inner realisation of my spiritual identity.



Sister Jayanti is the Director of Brahma Kumaris Centres in Europe.

IMAGES AND VOICES OF

A Question of Choice

"The tendency to produce conflict has come from our thought, from how it has evolved over the whole period of civilization...In fact, almost everything we see around us in the world was created from thought. It is a very powerful instrument, but if we don't notice how it works, it can also do great harm."

—David Bohm, 1991



As an important and overdue conversation about the power and influence of images in our global media gets underway, Judy Rodgers provides food for thought and dialogue.

Each word we speak and action we take begins first with a thought. It is the collection of human thoughts over time that has created the world as we know it. So, to create the world we want, we must first be able to think of the world we want, and to see it as a real possibility.

One of the main influences on thought is what we see. Some scientists have suggested that 80% of our thinking is influenced by what we see and another 15% by what we hear. Scenes played out around us, images on the newsstands, stories recounted on the evening news, films we watch in theaters all trigger thoughts.

Dr. David Cooperrider of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland Ohio has written extensively about the impact of positive images on a culture. He tells a story about being in Moscow in 1991 and watching workmen carefully removing every image of Lenin and Stalin from public view. He asked them what they were doing – why they were removing all of these important images of history. They

responded that these images did not support the future they were trying to create.

In his sweeping study of Western civilization, the Dutch sociologist Fred Polak (1973) argues essentially the same point. For him the positive image of the future is the single most important dynamic and explanatory variable for understanding cultural evolution: "The rise and fall of images of the future precedes or accompanies the rise and fall of cultures. As long as a society's image is positive and flourishing, the flower of culture is in full bloom. Once the image begins to decay and lose its vitality, however, the culture does not long survive." (1973, p. 19) For Polak, the primary question then is not how to explain the growth and decay of cultures, but how to explain the successful emergence or decay of positive images. When a culture's Utopian aspirations die out, the culture dies: "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

(Proverbs 29:18).



In the early 1960's, a group of psychologists and social researchers under the direction of David McClelland from Harvard set out to explore the relationship between stories and the cultures they foster. They looked at narratives from ancient as well as more modern cultures and, when available, at children's stories. They were looking for a correlation between the narratives told by a society and the culture subsequently created by those who listened to those stories. The results confirmed their hypothesis – not just in one society, but in cultures from ancient Greece, from Tudor England, and from the United States, between 1800 and 1950. They empirically demonstrated that thoughts of a certain type (for example ambition) create a certain type of action (for example accomplishment). They proved that if you have a different vision and a high level of aspiration for your children, that will translate into the actions you take and the stories you tell in raising them, and that they will in turn behave differently. (*The Achieving Society* by David McClelland, © 1961 D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc.)

America as a Creator and Exporter of Images and Stories

If, as this research suggest, there is a direct and powerful relationship between the images and stories a culture generates and the future it creates, then America's role as the world's premier creator and exporter of images and stories may be more

significant than its role as a military power. Every day a flood of advertisements, news broadcasts, radio programs, television series, books, music, software and films pour into American homes and into homes in countries all over the world. Embedded in each image are values, interpretations of the world and a sense of our possible future. Over the past decade the sheer volume of images has exploded: families add a second television set for the children and computers that play CD ROM games and surf the internet. Cable companies add bandwidth. Movie theaters sell ad space to local businesses. We are all inundated with images, voices and stories – each one freighted with messages about the world and our future.

The 'system' that has evolved to generate and distribute images and stories to society has three components: the artists – photojournalists, writers, directors, musicians, et al. — who create them; the distributors — the media companies, publishers, and news agencies — who disseminate them; and us, the men, women, and children who acquire them — who turn on a television program or buy a movie ticket, a book or a magazine. In each case there are choice points, moments of decision about which image or story to select. The choices made in these moments have enormous consequences for the 'mood' of the society and for our sense of possibilities for the future.

It is these choice points that contain the leverage for change. What are our criteria for selection? What questions do we ask ourselves as we make these choices? Do

“ Much like a movie projector on a screen, human systems are forever projecting ahead of themselves a horizon of expectation (in their talk in the hallways, in the metaphors and language they use) that brings the future powerfully into the present as a mobilizing agent.

To inquire in ways that serve to refashion anticipatory reality – especially the artful creation of positive imagery on a collective basis - may be the most prolific thing any inquiry can do. ”

Dr. David Cooperrider
“Positive Image.
Positive Action”



“ We possess the power to paint the hour, transfigure the day. We need not wait for a church to canonize us before we become the fully conscious beings we were meant to be. If we fail, we will pay for it with our lives. I mean that literally, for the consequences of indifference to the little wonders of the world are all too plain. Even now an epidemic depression born of boredom, spreads across the land, and we turn to violence to fill the void. Instead of watching the spider weave its web, we watch slaughter in the living room, murder in the movie house. Hopelessly addicted before we know it, we find that make-believe killings aren't enough; they no longer satisfy the gnawing hunger in our bowels. We need real mayhem, real war, real corpses to relieve the tedium that threatens to bury us alive. ”

*(First You Have to Row a Little Boat
by Richard Bode.)*

we only ask, “Will this sell?” or “Will we be entertained?” If so, we become part of the vast ubiquitous media system that seems to roll forward oblivious to what it is creating in its wake. When we aren't conscious of the consequences of our choices, the choice points become transparent and we lose our opportunity to select images and stories that instill the thoughts and ideas we say we want most.

Each of Us is Responsible to All of Us

At a recent forum in Miami, Florida, this subject was put before a distinguished panel of media representatives. The overarching question being asked was, “What are the opportunities that accrue to the media in serving humanity?” The forum looked at violence in local news, the Monica Lewinsky transcripts and the stereotyping of minorities, among other things. As the session concluded, one of the guests on the panel suggested that they are just giving the public what they want – that the real leverage is with those who consume images and stories. In effect, he said that the media has no responsibility to serve humanity – just a responsibility to sate the seemingly endless appetite of the public to be aroused, terrified or entertained.

There is a widely held belief that “good news doesn't sell”. Clearly this is not the case. Stephen Spielberg's film on the Holocaust, *Schindler's List*, was extremely



successful and spawned the ambitious Shoah Project which successfully captured on videotape the stories of over 50,000 Holocaust survivors. Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hanson's book 'Chicken Soup for the Soul' has turned into a series that has sold 40 million copies to date. Oprah Winfrey has consistently demonstrated that talk show hosts can claim the moral high ground as well as the top ratings.

Even the reporting of straight news can appeal to what is best in us and most hopeful. BBC's main anchor Martyn Lewis has formulated Lewis's Laws for journalists, which would create the kind of reporting and programming he seeks:

- ❖ Try to report negative stories at least partly through the eyes of those who are seeking solutions to them.
- ❖ Don't automatically dismiss stories of success and achievement as the products of public relations teams.
- ❖ Consider success as worthy of news analysis and explanation, as failure is.
- ❖ Editors should challenge and encourage young journalists to write up positive stories in as interesting a way as negative ones.

As Mr. Lewis observed, “Where there is disaster, there are people trying to recover from it. Where there is suffering, there are people trying to help. Where there is conflict, there are people trying to end it.”

Images and stories have immediate and personal consequences, and they also have consequences for the entire society and the world. They affect our thoughts and our collective sense of the future. They have the potential to expand our horizon of possibilities.

No one part of the 'media system' can hand off responsibility to another. Each of us is responsible to all of us. When we're making a choice about an image, message or story to send out to others or to bring into our homes, we need to ask ourselves, “Will this expand our sense of possibilities or constrict it?”

Launching a National Conversation

Clearly every one of us is touched by the images that surround us – whether we are a politician or a parent. To heighten awareness about the effect that images, voices and stories have in shaping a society and its culture, three organizations with a deep commitment to the power of thought and the importance of images have come together to launch a national conversation. This conversation will invite people from all sectors to begin a serious exploration of the power of the images in our media. During a rolling series of dialogues through the USA, politicians, teachers, leaders, parents, psychologists, social commentators, artists and media executives will be invited to dialogue.

They will consider questions with a bearing on the relationship between public images and the sense of possibilities experienced by the society:

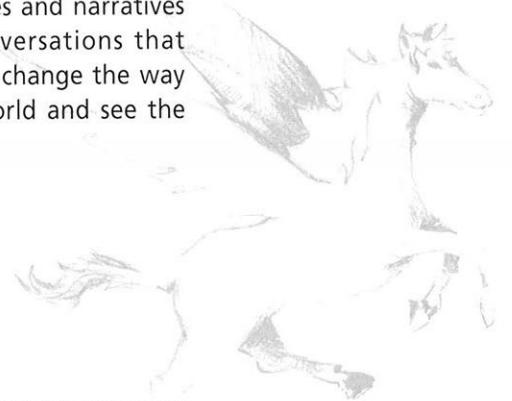
- ❖ What are the most powerful images, voices, and stories extant in media today?
- ❖ What examples do we have of times when media have had a significant impact on the way the world understood what was possible?
- ❖ What is the scope of possibilities created by images and messages of hope?
- ❖ What opportunities accrue to the media through presenting humanity in a more positive light – as a more enlightened, elevated, and evolved species?

Parents and educators, because they are involved with the culturalization of children, may consider the particular impact of children's television, films, and video games on the perceptions of children. Here the relevant questions aren't just about appropriateness of material that may contain images that are violent or sexually explicit, but whether the values embedded in the image or story are consistent with the highest values of the society, and whether they describe a world that is essentially safe and a future that is full of hope or one that is unsafe

and unpromising. What makes the case of children so important here is that it is through our children that the culture is conserved generation after generation.

The highly regarded Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana has observed, "Cultures are closed networks of conversations conserved generation after generation through the learning of the children that live in the culture. As such, cultures change if the closed network of conversations that the children learn as they live in them changes. When that happens a new closed network of conversations begins to be conserved generation after generation." (*'Metadesign' 1998*)

We can change the culture. We do it when we change the network of conversations. When we introduce images and narratives into the network of conversations that constitute the culture, we change the way we and others see the world and see the future.



Judy Rodgers is a communications and media consultant in Boston, Massachusetts. She is a writer and executive producer of non-theatrical programmes for broadcast and non-broadcast markets in the US. She is the recipient of a number of prestigious awards for her work.



Life after Capitalism

The crisis of modern society can be traced in large measure to our potentially fatal ignorance of two subjects: the nature of money and the nature of life.

This ignorance has led us to create an economy that trades life for money.

David Korten explains how this happens and how we can move towards a post-capitalist culture.

Given the pervasive role of money in modern society, the emphasis on economics training in our universities, and the number of economists, money managers and financial analysts who regularly appear in the media, it may seem odd to suggest that modern societies are ignorant on the subject of money. Unfortunately, most of what is taught about money in our universities and communicated about it in the media does more to perpetuate misleading myths and illusions than to advance meaningful understanding of what money is and how its institutions really work.

Indeed, the vocabulary of finance and economics is itself a world of double speak that obscures the real nature and ways of money. For example, we use the term *investors*, when speaking of the speculators whose gambling destabilises global financial markets. We use the terms *money*, *capital*, *assets* and *wealth* inter-changeably, leaving us with no simple means to express the difference between money – a mere number – and real wealth, which is comprised of things of real value such as food, our labour, fertile land, buildings, machinery, and technology – things that sustain our lives and increase our productive output. Thus we accept the speculators' claim that they are creating wealth, when they are actually expropriating it, and honour them with special tax breaks and protections. Such confusion has led us to establish a capitalist system of world rule by money, that is literally killing us.

In the United States, the corporate-controlled media keep the public preoccupied with the details of our President's sex life, which deflects public scrutiny from an unholy alliance to push through funding increases for the IMF to bail out those banks who put the entire global financial system at risk with reckless lending. Moves are afoot to advance financial deregulation that will encourage even more reckless financial speculation, by recreating the conditions that led to the great Depression of the 1930s. And there is the negotiation of international agreements such as the

Multilateral Agreement on Investment to give speculators international guarantees against governmental interference. To the extent that these activities are mentioned by the press at all, they are presented as beneficial actions needed to restore global financial stability and economic growth. To understand what is really happening, we must educate ourselves about the nature of money and the ways of those who decide who will have access to it.

As a medium of exchange, money is one of the most important and useful of human inventions. However, as we become ever more dependent on money to acquire the basic means of our subsistence, we give over to the institutions and people who control its creation and allocation the power to decide who among us shall live in prosperity and who shall live in destitution. With the increasing breakdown of community and public safety nets, our modern money system has become possibly the most effective instrument of social control and extraction ever devised by human kind.

But what of capitalism's claim to be the champion of democracy, market freedom, peace and prosperity? Capitalism is a term coined in the mid-1800s to refer to an economic and social regime in which the ownership and benefits of capital are appropriated by the few to the exclusion of the many who through their labour make capital productive. Contrary to its claims, capitalism is the mortal enemy of democracy and the market.

Capitalism has brought us to a defining moment in our own history and in the evolution of life on this planet.

In a healthy market economy, enterprises are human-scale and predominantly locally owned.

Economic exchanges are shaped and controlled by people through the expression of their cultural values, their purchasing decisions, their democratic participation in setting the rules by which the market will function, and their



ownership of local enterprises. It is a dynamic and interactive system in which people participate in many roles and bring their human sensibilities to bear on every aspect of economic life.

Political democracy and the market economy work well together as means of organising the political and economic life of a society to allocate resources fairly and efficiently while securing the freedom and sovereignty of the individual. When they function properly, they result in self-organising societies that maximise human freedom and minimise the need for coercive central control. The special magic of the market is its ability to reward those who do productive work responsive to the self-defined needs of others as they add to the total wealth and well-being of society.

Capitalism, by contrast, is about using money to make money for people who already have more of it than they need. Its institutions, by their very nature, breed inequality, exclusion, environmental destruction, social irresponsibility and economic instability while homogenising cultures, weakening the institutions of democracy, and eroding the moral and social fabric of society. Though capitalism cloaks itself in the rhetoric of democracy and the market, it is dedicated to the elitist principle that sovereignty properly resides not in the person, but rather in money and property. We are often told that deregulation and economic globalisation are necessary to free the market. In fact, efficient market function depends on both regulation and borders. What deregulation and economic globalisation actually free are the forces of capitalism's attack on democracy and the market.

The 'global corporation' uses its great power to reshape cultures, limit consumer choices, pass costs onto the public, and press governments to provide subsidies and rewrite the rules of commerce in their favour. Commonly, the global corporation responds in ways that destroy the most precious of all wealth: the living capital of the planet and the society on which all life and the fabric of civilisation depend. Living capital, which has the special capacity to continuously regenerate itself, is ultimately the source of all real wealth. To destroy it for money, a simple number with no intrinsic value, is an act of collective insanity.

Another insanity of global corporate capitalism is the instability inherent in a financial system that sends trillions of dollars around the world at light-speed in a speculative frenzy that has nothing to do with productive investment. Here again we are blinded by our myths and illusions. Overall the stock market is not a source of investment capital. It is simply a kind of gambling casino where bets are placed on which stock prices are going to rise and which are going to fall.

It is time to acknowledge the obvious fact that capitalism is a disastrous failure for reasons inherent in its values and its institutions. To create a world in which life can flourish and prosper we must replace the values and institutions of capitalism with values and

institutions that honour life, serve life's needs, and restore money to its proper role as servant. Capitalism has brought us to a defining moment in our own history and in the evolution of life on this planet. The time has come when we, as a species, must accept conscious collective responsibility for the consequences of our presence on the planet. This implies taking the step to a new level of species consciousness and function. We have both the knowledge and the technology to take this step. The question is whether we will awaken to the nature of our current folly in time to make the necessary collective choice to recreate ourselves and our institutions before we have proceeded so far down the path of social and environmental disintegration that the task becomes impossible.

As to economic alternatives, the answer is quite familiar to all of us – indeed it is the answer in which most of us already believe: democracy, market economies and an ethical culture. The self-organising market is structured to respond in a highly democratic manner to human needs and values. We must concentrate on creating the conditions necessary for healthy market function. Since capitalism is the mortal enemy of democracy, markets and ethical culture, it should not be surprising that in most instances this means embracing policies exactly the opposite to those favoured by capitalism.

Whereas capitalism prefers giant global corporate monopolies with the power to extract massive public subsidies and avoid public responsibilities and public accountability, the efficient function of markets depends on rules that keep firms human-scale and require producers to internalise their costs. Whereas capitalism institutionalises a system of absentee ownership that keeps owners far removed from the consequences of their choices, a proper market economy favours ownership by real stakeholders – workers, owners, suppliers, customers and communities – to bring human sensibilities to economic decision making. Whereas capitalism prefers the economic man or woman to the ethical man or woman, a proper market economy assumes an ethical culture that nurtures in its participants a mindfulness of the social and environmental consequences of their behaviour. Whereas capitalism encourages and rewards the speculator, a proper market economy encourages and rewards those who contribute to wealth creation through their labour and productive investment. Whereas capitalism places the rights of money above the rights of people and seeks to free it from restriction by national borders, a proper market seeks to guarantee the rights of people over the rights of money and honours borders as essential to the maintenance of economic health.

The time has come to speak the obvious truth that global capitalism is an anti-democratic, anti-market cancer that feeds on our forgetfulness of our nature and place as living beings within the larger web of planetary life. We have the right and the means to eliminate the cancer as we work together to build the culture and the institutions of the just, sustainable and compassionate world of which we all dream.

“ the global corporation responds in ways that destroy the most precious of all wealth: the living capital of the planet and the society on which all life and the fabric of civilisation depend. ”

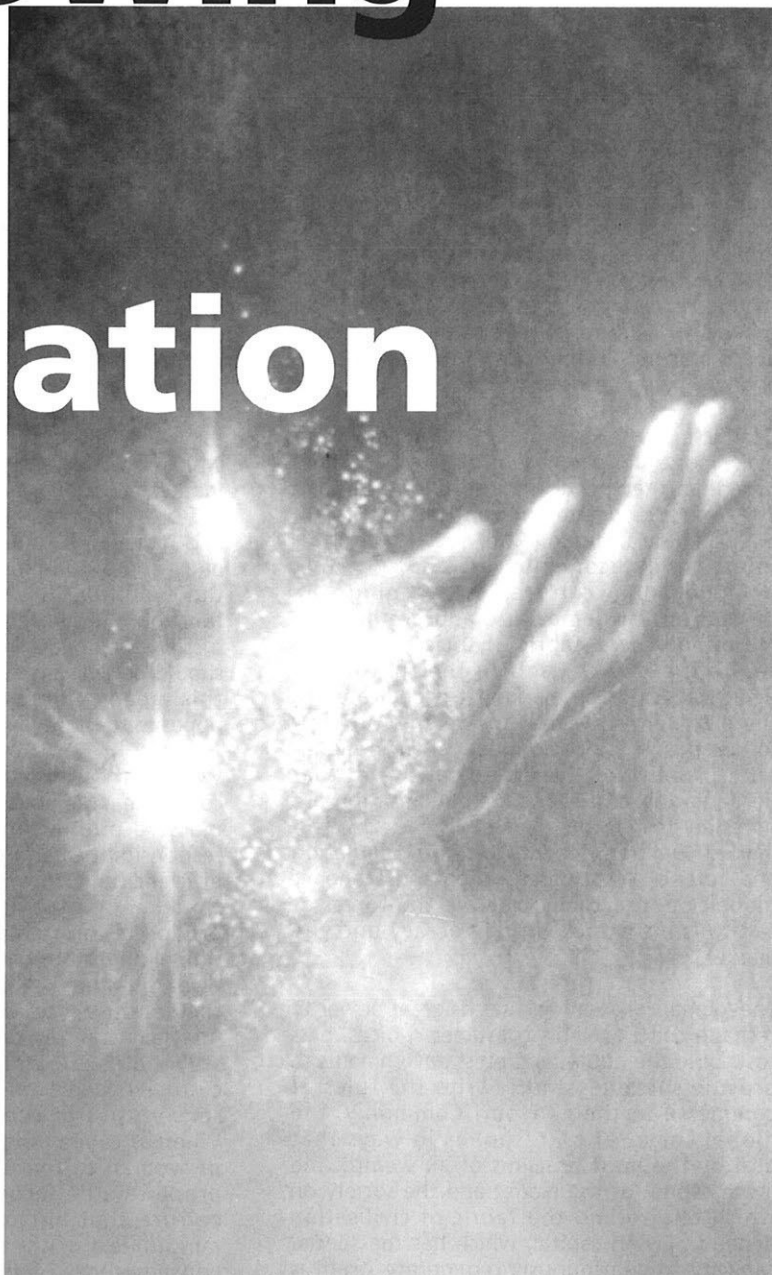


David C. Korten is author of
When Corporations Rule the World

This is an extract from a presentation at the recent Schumacher Lectures and first published in Living Lightly, the magazine which accompanies Positive News (01588 640 022).

Showing a little appreciation

There is a new way to bring positive change to organisations and people, and it's almost painless.



Jillian Sawers sings its praise, sketches out the method and describes its effect.

With change now the most common word on most people's lips, both inside and outside today's organisations, there are nearly as many magical change management strategies as there are change management consultants offering to transform your company. Some time ago I had the good fortune to discover a fresh and exciting approach to managing change called Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Its principles and practices can be applied to both the corporation and to the individual.

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach to change within organisations that truly respects people, acknowledges achievements, appreciates the best within the status quo, and yet encourages people to dream and build for a better tomorrow. When I first encountered this as a participant in the process, and then as I began to run the process for others, I was more than delighted to find that at the deepest level, the approach sat true with my inner conscience or highest values. But equally my excitement was coming from a recognition of the potential of this approach to bring about positive personal change in myself and others.

PROBLEM SOLVING

The first difference that AI underlines between itself and traditional change management theories is in relation to problem solving. Normally most of us tackle the need for change by asking, what is the problem, analysing possible causes and finding a solution to match. Simple enough. But yet, because the primary

focus is on finding what isn't working, what is wrong, we no doubt find it. And, as the saying goes, "Where attention goes, energy flows". And so we find that the problem actually seems to worsen. On a personal level, who hasn't ever made an audit on their shortcomings, to despair that only the best shrink in the world would ever be able to 'fix' them. And only this morning we may have felt quite O.K. about our life.

A powerful real life illustration of the results of negative focus was shared on the training. The story went that a trainer had been running a sexual harassment prevention training programme with a large company in the United States. Using a very common training technique the employees focused on learning checklists of what not to do. The result was an increase in the number of sexual harassment complaints. One could argue that the previously ignored cases were now being reported due to an increased sensitivity to harassment and awareness of personal rights. However the trainings had seemed to create a notably negative environment and certainly went no way to solving the problem at hand.

The trainer in question here, eventually realised the impact of her well-intended trainings and instead applied an AI approach. She asked the employees to share personal stories and examples of what it felt and looked like to be treated with dignity and respect. They were left with the inspiration to re-create such circumstances in their workplace, instead of walking around with a list of 'do nots' in their awareness.

THE APPRECIATIVE EYE

AI was first developed and pioneered by David Cooperrider at Case Western University, USA. One day David's attention was drawn to the idea of the 'Appreciative Eye' by his artist wife Nancy. The 'Appreciative Eye' assumes that in every piece of art there is beauty. He then applied this notion in a business context, to view organisations as expressions of beauty and spirit. He suggests that we 'inquire' into an organisation to find out its strengths, what is working, with the result of a series of statements describing where the organisation wants to be, based on the high moments of where it has already been. How refreshing, how positive, how energising!

Now imagine turning back to that encyclopaedia of your defects and problems and saying, "Enough, I know you're there" and turning to a blank page. It's time to show a little bit of appreciation! When we begin to recall the achievement of our lives, little and large, the friends kept, the children brought up, the jobs held down, the 100's of pounds we may have lost over the years, even the lessons learnt from failures, then we begin to get a sense of our potential, our inner qualities, our possible futures. We feel like giving thanks for the gifts of our lives, rather than diving for the nearest psychiatric couch.

POSITIVE ENERGY

When we are focused on what is wrong, often

energy and enthusiasm drop. Think of the last meeting you attended where everyone's mental guns were at the ready and their emotional defences were up. No enthusiasm, no creativity, no trust, and no appreciation. Remembering and appreciating past successes whether in a group or personal context create an energy which is positive and synergistic, enabling people to feel a sense of commitment and confidence. They have confirmation that they have been successful and they know how to create more such success.

WHAT IS WORKING WELL HERE?

It is a simple, but seldom asked question. If 94% of our customers are happy, most of us will interview the 6%, instead of finding out from the 94% what we are doing well. Some cynics would dismiss this as a naïve, perhaps even dangerous approach to business. And yet, truth is often disguised in amazingly simple clothes. Most of us are pretty good at the art of problem-solving, but we rarely think of finding out what works well and finding ways to do more of that. In our own lives we may see the results of the problem-solving process in an array of broken resolutions, unused exercise bikes, organisers, gadgets and self-help books. The logic goes, that I have this gap in my personality, here's the right purchase, book, relationship, method to treat it. Yet, years on, we are still complaining about our inability to manage our time, weight, relationships, responsibilities.

To illustrate the AI approach versus the problem-solving approach, let's look at the issue of laziness. I may feel that this is a problem for me. Now I could analyse possible causes, perhaps diet, lack of purpose, depression, no goals, no newness, low self-esteem. I have now added to my list of problems. So I then try and find the right 'treatment' for my increasing number of recognised personal ills. AI might look no further into the issue of laziness, but ask, "When did I last feel alive, energetic, enthusiastic, inspired, tireless?" Recall that time in detail. What were the factors involved? Who was there? What did you do, say, feel? What can I do now to recreate that enthusiasm?

Now I know what works, because I've done it before. My confidence rises, I'm inspired to take on new challenges with more energy and enthusiasm. Oh yes, and as a side line, my laziness seems to have reduced, without my giving it a second thought.

An interesting example of this approach is the ten-pin bowling scenario. A group of ten-pin bowlers were divided in two. Both groups were filmed bowling. The first group was then coached in the traditional method, by having an expert point out to them where they were going wrong, and what to do instead. The other group were shown an edited video, which featured themselves only knocking all ten pins down. This group were then asked to discuss how they had achieved this. They then became experts in describing the perfect motions for achieving bowling success. The final result: the first group improved minimally, the second group showed 100% improvement! This



“Most of us are pretty good at the art of problem-solving, but we rarely think of finding out what works well and finding ways to do more of that.”

“When we appreciate the reality of multiple realities we are content to let each one be.”



highlights well the enormous difference between the problem-solving focus: doing less of something we do not do well, and the AI focus: doing more of what works.

THE ASSUMPTIONS OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

There are eight assumptions or principles on which the practice of AI is based. Each offers valuable insights to live our lives by.

1. In every society, organisation, or group, something works.

No human being is a total disaster or, worded more positively, everyone has something special or unique about them. If I don't know what mine is, I'd better get looking! On a spiritual level, I might say that we all have the potential for unlimited goodness, to experience and express our innate divinity. In fact this first assumption points to an acceptance that each human being has positive innate qualities.

2. What we focus on becomes our reality.

Every day we are offered myriad choices which demonstrate the power of this principle. Walking by the sea, I can marvel at its majesty and be in awe of the setting sun painting the waters red, or I can curse the rubbish tossed on the beach, and the noisy tourists. Because our feelings run so quickly after our thoughts, it pays well to choose their focus wisely. It's also stated on the basis of scientific experiments, that flowers bloom with positive verbal appreciation, and wilt under criticism! Imagine the effect of my own self-criticisms, or alternatively, the boost of energy I can enjoy when I direct thoughts of appreciation towards myself.

3. Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.

I may walk into a company and see and speak of the politicking, backbiting and competition within it, or I may see individuals each striving in their own ways to find meaning, purpose and self-respect within their lives. One could say they are both valid observations, but it all depends on who is looking. Reality is multi-dimensional and in the words of an ancient wisdom, "I don't see the world as it really is, I see the world as I really am". My reality changes as I change. I can choose to see myself as a problem to be fixed, or a complex wonderful being, learning more each day. It's my choice, but I have to live with the results. And remember that each day, each moment, I must continuously consciously keep choosing. Because reality is created in each moment.

4. The act of asking questions of an organisation or group influences the group in some way.

Thoughts are the ancestors of action. And thus focusing thoughts in a positive questioning process has a powerful influence. When an

experienced AI facilitator asked the company with sexual harassment issues to discuss times when they had experienced dignity and respect within relationships, dignity and respect grew. Whatever we think about influences us. So for sustained personal transformation I need to get asking myself a lot of questions. What does self-respect look like, feel like, sound like? When and where have I experienced patience and peace operating within my life? What you are doing in this process is in fact rather like a meditation, focusing and going deeper into your inner qualities, re-discovering and re-emerging them.

5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).

In India they have a famous mantra (sacred phrase) Hum so, so hum. This means, that which I was I am once again becoming. Perhaps the ancient mystics knew a thing or two?! On the deepest spiritual level, this could refer to the original divinity of the soul or spirit returning at the end of our journey of learning and purification. But in a very down to earth manner, if I reflect on the thoughts, attitudes and actions which have brought me previous successes, I will have more confidence in my ability to thrive in new situations.

6. If I carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.

Reminiscing and regretting past mistakes doesn't change them. In response to his apparent lack of success, Thomas Edison responded 'Why, but I've discovered 1000 ways not to make a light bulb!' Wasting energy on the past drains us and keeps us in the past. Take the best, leave the rest and keep moving!

7. It is important to value differences.

"You are right, and you are also right," as the Zen master said, in response to two novices disagreeing. When we appreciate the reality of multiple realities we are content to let each one be wherever they choose to be, or whatever they choose to see. If I want to help I need only choose a positive reality and perhaps throw one or two useful, thought provoking questions in the direction of the die-hard pessimist.

8. The language we use creates our reality.

Perhaps we believed that we used language to describe reality. But when we consider the power of perception, we can see how close perception, thoughts and words are. In a work situation where I describe my colleagues in negative terms, I am only revealing the colour of my own glasses. What I describe becomes my own reality, further confirmed when I then behave on the basis of these assumptions and glean the result. Be very

Careful with the words you use to describe yourself. In times past, people had great faith in the results of verbal blessings or curses. Regularly confessing my shortcomings can actually strengthen them. My words become prophecy. Many words which have entered our daily usage are relatively new, but now extremely prevalent in the way we describe ourselves and each other i.e. dysfunctional, co-dependent, stressed, addicted, depressed, neurotic, paranoid, burned out. However, equally, we can harness the power of positive language and create positive affirmations to describe our worthiness, qualities and success.

This principle was illustrated cleverly for us in the example of President Jimmy Carter's focus on the malaise of the country just before his re-election bid. People found this language disturbing, even if they agreed with him. It was Ronald Reagan with his optimism and insistence that America was great and glorious which inspired the people who then voted him in. If a country, organisation or individual keeps hearing or thinking about how ill they are, the group or individuals will begin to behave as if they are in fact ill. Child psychologists and teachers are very familiar with this principle, known as the Pygmalion effect. But we too can apply this principle within our lives and describe only the most beneficial desired reality, in order to manifest it further. So mind your language.

LESSONS FROM THE LEARNED

Another interesting approach which AI used was in the case of a hotel which was in a very distrustful and negative mindset, and feeding its poor self-image with careless customer service. Rather than letting them dwell on their numerous problems or get them to recall some successes. David Cooperider took the entire staff on a journey to visit a 4-star hotel in another city to observe what made this hotel an award-winning enterprise. In the process of appreciating what was happening there, they realised that they too could work in similar ways with similar results. Some years later, they themselves became a top-rated hotel.

Applied within our own lives, we might seek to improve in whatever given area of our lives, by observing, appreciating and learning from those further along the path or those who are getting the results we desire. It's much easier when we are feeling low to find someone unsuccessful, in order to compare ourselves for a short ego-boost. But this is the fast way to lose energy and further diminish self-esteem. If I can find no suitable role model, dead or alive, let me ask myself, if I were feeling strong, wise, benevolent, courageous, etc. right now, how would I behave in this situation, or what would I do next? In this way I am appreciating the greatness and wisdom of my higher inner self and thus empowering its growth.

The idea of seeking higher possibilities instead of sinking into a quagmire of problems was captured beautifully by Jung when he said: An important problem is rarely solved, instead it is outgrown, as newer, stronger interests come along to crowd out

the problem. When a newer and stronger urge or life force appears on the horizon, people adjust to grow towards it, much like a plant grows towards the light.

BEGINNING THE PROCESS

"If whatever we focus on is magnified by our attention, we want to be sure we are magnifying something worthy".

If you are interested in using this approach for your own personal growth, where do you start? May I suggest you try all or some of the following suggestions and experiment for yourself with the possibilities of AI?

1. Study the eight assumptions carefully and find examples from your own life to testify to their validity. Aim to increase your awareness of these principles and act in accordance with them in your daily life.
2. Choose 2 or 3 areas of your life which you would like to see flourish. You may start with a broad topic such as career, health, family, community. Then narrow it down to your 2 or 3 areas as sub-topics of one area. For instance, you may choose family, and then narrow it down to explore communication, trust and enjoyment. Then starting with one topic, formulate a series of questions, which when answered would further your awareness and understanding of the area. You may ask yourself; when have I experienced excellent communication within my family, how would I describe excellent communication, why was it so good, what were the factors involved, what qualities were people displaying etc. (One might say, wouldn't it be much simpler just to read a book on the subject of families or communication? But remember the 4th assumption - the act of asking questions influences).
3. Interview others involved directly or indirectly with your 'issue' and seek their experiences, stories, thinking on the topic. You will both benefit from the process. If you don't feel a list of questions is your style, then simply initiate a conversation "Have you ever thought about, or how do you manage to?"
4. Find an example to learn from, either through autobiographies or through direct encounter - someone who embodies what you are wishing to learn. Ask a question of them or of yourself, to deduce how they are doing it.
5. Find your own creative ways to develop appreciation in the unique context of your daily life.

THEN WHAT?

Once your inquiry in any chosen area is complete, then what? You should be half-way home. The inquiry process is in itself transformative. It creates awareness and confidence based on past success. It also creates the enthusiasm to then ground any new realisations and behaviours into your daily life by discovering where or who you'd like to be and choosing the most useful attitudes and behaviours to get you there. If it sounds too simple, give it a try. As stated earlier, Truth often comes disguised in simple clothing.

“An important problem is rarely solved, instead it is outgrown, as newer, stronger interests come along to crowd out the problem.”



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What do we mean by these two deceptively simple words which are found in the language of everyday life? Dreams can mean the experience of mental activity which takes place when we are asleep and which we can reflect on when we wake. Reality, in contrast, is supposed to be what we find in the waking state. It allows us to say, whether in relief or disappointment, "It was only a dream!"

Dreams are also used to mean what we hope for, our aspirations and longings, with the proviso that if we work hard enough at it, "the dream can come true". It will become reality, part of waking life. If we don't succeed, the dream remains no more than a fantasy.

All this seems straightforward enough. If we are agreed on what these words mean, we can communicate person to person, as well as being able to hold a dialogue with our own inner self. This is the miracle of language. It is the foundation of our capacity for self-awareness and thought, which together form the basis of human consciousness.

There is just one problem to bear in mind. Words also impose limitations on us, because they structure our thought processes. We have to live with this fact and make the best of it. But if we don't take care, these limitations have a way of leading us up the garden path.

Let us see how this works, by going back to the distinction which is made between dreams and reality. Supposedly, these are two entirely different situations. It is like a map of Europe. When you look at the map, a line is drawn which tells you which country you are in. Here and there, the distinction is reinforced by frontier posts. But in the countryside, you walk from one field into the next. What happened to the frontier? Where is the fence or the barbed wire? In fact, this field looks just like the next one. It turns out that the line on the map was devised in order to define and regulate certain social structures. The farmers pay their taxes to different governments, and so on. Nature knows no such border and so it is with dreams and reality.

Psychologists and psychiatrists have spent the last hundred years inventing maps of the mind. These maps are useful and I refer to them every day at work. If the person seeing me is confused or disorientated, we can take compass readings, so to speak, and get our bearings. If I get confused, which

also happens from time to time, I can do the same, by standing back and reflecting on what is going on! There is one proviso - to be able to work together, patient and psychiatrist need to be able to use the same kind of map. When the patient can't or won't do this, if he is suffering from acute schizophrenia, for example, we say that his 'reality-testing' is impaired.

The patient won't agree with this. He knows what his reality is, no matter whether the voices he is hearing are welcome or a torment, and will be convinced he has been specially chosen by God, or singled out by the Devil. But as mental health professionals, we have an equally strong belief in what is 'real' on our side. There are more of us than him and we have been authorised to intervene because we represent the social consensus of the society to which we belong. So this is not a level playing field.

Dreams & Reality

Of course, we intervene because we are wanting to help and there is other evidence of disorganisation of the mind, usually causing the person great distress. But my own view is that the belief system itself is not something we are entitled to call false. We may not hold the same view but we do not have the right to tell someone that their beliefs are false. Jesus was tortured and killed for his beliefs, which has been of immense comfort to the many who have suffered persecution for their spiritual beliefs and practice over two millennia.

What about the following statement? "A person is free to think what he likes but not to do what he likes." This sounds good and

**Andrew Powell
enters into the
world of
dreams, and
challenges our
definitions of
reality.**

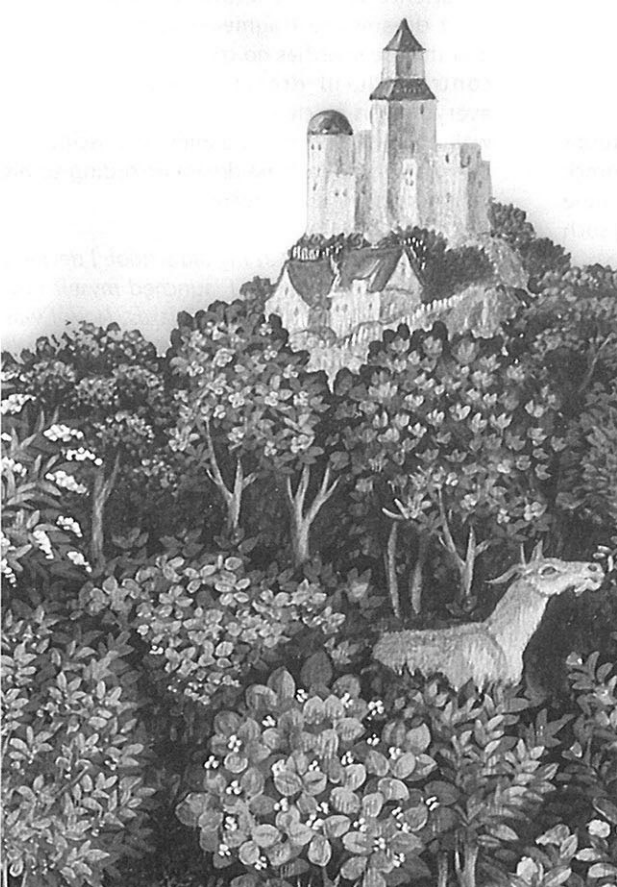
democratic. But thought and action are two sides of one coin. Even if someone stands perfectly still, it may be in the way of a tank. Or a person might start speaking and people might start listening. In the case of Jesus, this is why the Romans and Jews conspired to have him silenced. It didn't work and I will be coming later to why I think it didn't. A lot of people also listened to Hitler and dreamed of a master race. First, the world had to be cleansed of Jews, people with disabilities and other riffraff. Fortunately this dream was stopped, but not before it had become a terrible reality for millions of men, women and children.

The point I am making is that everything begins in the mind. The idea that 'out there' is an objective, stable and enduring reality is an illusion. Reality is not a thing, like a chair or a table. It is a state of mind and when enough people share the same outlook, it goes on to shape and structure social reality, for good or ill. So far, I have been talking about the power of the mind. Since the time of Isaac Newton, scientists held that the physical world, at least,

bullets. Change the apparatus to two slits side by side and the light coming through the slits generates a wave interference pattern, like ripples crossing when two stones are dropped into a pond. This simple experiment shattered three hundred years of certainty. Depending on the way the experimenter sets up the light experiment, particles become waves and waves become particles. We find we have two realities with equal validity. If two, why not twenty? If three dimensions, why not four? In fact, some physicists think there are at least twenty-five dimensions, all but four of them curled up into a space smaller than a millionth of an inch. That is, of course, looked at from the point of view of our space-time. From within that multi-dimensional world, our whole physical universe might look like a mere drawing on a piece of paper!

I say this not to belittle our wonderful cosmos but merely to emphasise that mind comes before matter and reality is what we make it, both mental and physical. We are the architects of our reality, with all the privilege and the

“ Reality is not a thing, like a chair or a table. It is a state of mind and when enough people share the same outlook, it goes on to shape and structure social reality, for good or ill. ”



was fixed and independent of mind. More recently, with the advent of quantum theory this century, that view can no longer be held. Shine a beam of light through a narrow slit so that it falls on a particle detector and little packets of light called photons can be detected hitting the detector screen like miniature

responsibility of deciding what to build and how to build it, for build we must. The human psyche is born with an irresistible yearning to create, be it the hell of the holocaust or heaven in a wild flower.

So, if we are agreed that there is no sharp line

“... lucid dreams run in real-time, everything is as clear and coherent as in the waking state and the dreamer is conscious of being able to direct the dream according to his will.”

to draw between the inner world and the outer world, let us look a bit further into the nature of this consciousness which we hold in our hands.

The science of psychology is largely based on an assumption that the kind of consciousness which we are sharing as we go about our daily lives is the only one that matters, in which the five senses of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing stand watch over all the comings and goings of the mind. In this regard, the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and B.F. Skinner, the father of behaviourism, are united. The great difference between them lies in Freud's concept of the internal world of the unconscious, a cauldron of instincts and impulses which continually threaten civilisation and which continually have to be repressed. Freud held that the necessary policing was carried out by the part of the mind he called the super-ego, formed from the internalisation of parental values and morality. I should mention here that Freud's interpretation of dreams is based on this theory. In dreams, forbidden wishes break free but then have to be heavily disguised so that we don't consciously become aware of their nature.

Most depth psychologies have stuck with this same hierarchy of seeing consciousness in terms of everyday awareness, resting on the bedrock of the unconscious. Dream analysis along these lines certainly has its place. Here, briefly, is such a dream:

"I am going somewhere in a crowded bus. I get off at a stop and the bus goes on. But then I realise I have got off too soon. I don't recognise where I am. Nor do I seem to know where I am meant to be going. I am left hurrying along anxiously looking for the way."

For the dreamer, this dream expresses both the wish and the danger of going it alone in life. The analysis work focuses on the unconscious fear which prompted the dreamer to get off the bus too soon, the root of which lay in a childhood lacking in trust and resulting in a fear of intimacy.

This dream was also about making a journey. Carl Jung believed that dreams often hold the key to the personal journey we are making through life, that they are not just concerned with past conflicts but look to the future, and that the unconscious has its own wisdom which we need to respect. Jung saw the unconscious not just as something personal but spreading out from each of us and connecting us all, just as the land mass of the continents join together under the ocean. Out of this collective unconscious arise the archetypes, images which reflect the story of the whole human race. Jung

went on to become deeply interested in telepathy and psychic phenomena and himself had a number of profound spiritual visions.

The evidence for paranormal phenomena is much too strong to be dismissed except by die-hards who are clinging either to prejudice or Newtonian physics. Quantum field theory gives support to a theory of consciousness not as something isolated in each individual, the 'grey matter' between the ears, but as flowing everywhere, which each of us can tap into like tuning a radio to pick up what is around on the air waves. As we get on with day-to-day life, this consciousness is structured, we might even say dominated, by the information coming in through our special sense organs. Nature has arranged things this way for good reason. We need to live our lives with our feet firmly on the ground. But many people intuitively recognise that there is more to life than the world of our five senses. When is it safe to open that door and where does it take us?

Some people find the door ajar when they experience what are known as lucid dreams. Most dreams are fragmentary, kaleidoscopic and the dreamer has no control over events. In contrast, lucid dreams run in real-time, everything is as clear and coherent as in the waking state and the dreamer is conscious of being able to direct the dream according to his will. Here is one such dream:

"I found myself back at my old school. I decided to go up to the roof so I launched myself into the air and gently floated upwards. Now I was at tree-top level and looked down at the woods all around the school. It was all crystal clear, like a still autumn day, the sun shining and with the leaves red and gold. I descended some way and floated along, following a path through the woods. Everything was inexpressibly beautiful, more vivid even than in waking life. I somehow knew that I had created this experience and that I could make happen whatever I wanted to happen. It was sheer beauty and perfection. I felt joy, like when you hear beautiful music. At the same time I had a profound realisation which brought a kind of sadness. I saw that because I could make it all happen without any effort, like being God, I wouldn't be meeting any situations, or other real people, that would challenge me. There would never be anything to learn and I would always be alone. I found myself longing for that other 'real' world again. Then I woke up. It made me think hard about why we are here."

The world of the lucid dream corresponds closely to what in esoteric literature is called the astral plane. It also has many similarities with the out-of-body experience. OBE's, as they are called, are sometimes associated with shocks or



illnesses but there is a mass of research on what is called remote viewing, which has demonstrated that while your body stays on the couch, you can programme your mind to travel to distant places, come back and report with astonishing accuracy on where you went and what you saw. This is something Yogis have long known how to do. Unfortunately, the US military intelligence got hold of the idea for the purposes of spying. Worse still, they also wanted to use it for remote influencing, which is manipulating minds at a distance. Several of the remote viewers involved in the project had breakdowns as they became obsessed and disorientated by the work they were doing. One of them, who was nearly destroyed by the psychic trauma, has also revealed that when he first realised he had this ability (in his case following a bullet wound to the head) he had a vision in which he was warned by a spiritual being never to use it except for the good of mankind.

Many a psychiatric breakdown has been precipitated by opening the doors of perception, using drugs, playing with ouija boards, invoking spirits and dabbling in the occult. Unless there is a pure spiritual aim and the right conduct to go with it, opening to other realms of consciousness is a dangerous game. It is like throwing open the front door of your house to the street and letting anybody and everybody come in who wants free lodging. Your guests won't move out as readily as they came in!

When my work with patients takes us to other realms, we are protected on a number of counts. I have to decide when it is advisable from a clinical standpoint. I also ask for guidance which I believe is given to me. The motivation for doing the work is to relieve suffering and in the course of it the patient may feel emboldened to consider life from a deeper spiritual standpoint. Here is a recent example which concerns a patient suffering from an irrational fear of heights. There was no apparent reason for this symptom in her personal history.

The patient had been visiting a museum and wanted to go upstairs to look at the paintings on the first floor. There was a big central sweeping staircase going up, with stairwells on both sides. As soon as she started going up, she felt dizzy, flooded with anxiety and could not proceed. Since that time, open spaces and heights evoked severe anxiety attacks.

In the session, I asked her to close her eyes and imagine herself back at the bottom of the staircase. She became visibly tense. Then I asked her to focus on the feeling of fear and go to when it first happened. She might find herself

somewhere unfamiliar, in a quite different time and place.

She reported that she was standing at the bottom of a stone pyramid with big steps leading upwards and a sheer drop on each side. What was she wearing? Rough leather sandals and a long cotton skirt. I asked her what she was doing there. She said she was going to be sacrificed. By whom? The chief priest. Where? She could see him, waiting for her at the top of the pyramid. What was he going to do? He was going to cut her throat.

Why had she been chosen? This immediately took her back to the scene in the village where there had been a meeting and the elders had pointed to her and said "It might as well be her." She had no relatives to protect her. So she was dragged away shouting, "No! No!" Now she is standing here. She knows what she has to do. As if in a trance she slowly goes up the steps. The height makes her dizzy. At the top she is placed on a stone slab. The priest raises his ceremonial sword. What next? Suddenly she is free. It is over. She feels no pain or fear. She is moving away and feels no more interest in the body lying on the stone slab.

When this kind of thing happens, no one is more surprised than the patient. The experience can be interpreted in several ways. It could all be unconscious fantasy. Alternatively, if every event sets up a lasting vibration in the collective unconscious, might this be the trace of someone else's life once lived and now resonating with the patient's anxious condition? Could such a traumatic death have left a wandering soul earthbound, unable to move on and now making itself known through the patient? Or was this patient re-visiting a life she herself had once lived, cut short without mercy and leaving her psyche with a wound which her body, though not her mind, suddenly recalled when she stood at the bottom of that flight of stairs?

If it should be that life is but a waking dream, with every lifetime like one night's dreaming while the great wheel of birth and death ever turns, where then is the greater reality which could show us the whole picture and the whole journey, both the road behind and the road ahead? What an awakening that would be!

The good news is that we don't have to wait until we die to find out, since the greater reality is right here on our doorstep. After all, where else should it be? We don't live on that map with its artificial frontiers. But, try as we might, we can't access the greater reality with our intellect alone. We can only go in by way of the soul.

**“ Since the
soul is eternal,
when it speaks,
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**“... even in
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A patient came the other day whom I had seen just once four years ago. Her life has been one of terrible abuse and hardship and she had for many years taken refuge in alcohol. During that first interview, I had encouraged her to look inside herself for her soul.

What she saw was her ‘heart beating so hard it could burst’. She put it to rest in a silk lined coffin, saying “only death will bring it peace.” But then the heart transformed into a little whirligig of energy. It would not be trapped but flew about. She released it and watched it fly away.

After this, although therapy was proposed, for various reasons she did not take it up. Now she had come back, in the meantime having faced up to the harm alcohol was doing to her. We picked up where we had left off. Again I asked her to visualise her soul. This is what she reported.

She ‘goes inside herself’ and finds a treasure chest. She opens it. It is empty. Where is she? In a dark cave. I ask if she can pick up the treasure chest and to see if there is any way out. She says she can lift it up quite easily, puts it under her arm and soon finds an archway and goes through. Now where is she? In a desert, it’s all sand. I ask her to look around. Is there anything to see? Yes, a pool of water and some trees. What next? She sits by the water, resting peacefully and says with a sigh, “This is for me!” (All her life she has rushed around trying to please others). Does she want a drink? Yes. The water is cool and fresh. Now where does she need to go. She immediately finds herself back home, still holding the treasure chest. It is studded with jewels and very beautiful. What does she want to do with it? To put it on the floor, right in the middle of the room. She doesn’t want to hide it away. On the contrary, she wants to show it to everyone who comes in the house.

At the conclusion of this meeting, again therapy is offered and I feel confident the patient will make good use of the opportunity.

Since the soul is eternal, when it speaks, it is with absolute assurance. Recently I met for the first time with a man who had suffered a grievous loss and had for many months been in a severe depression. This patient had survived a childhood of great deprivation. He was rescued from the streets aged four by Bob, a neighbour. Bob took the boy in and from that time he was father in all but name. Everything he had, he shared with the boy and the boy loved him like no other.

The boy grew into a man and made good. He married, had a family and moved south where

he did well professionally. But he often went back to see Bob, now alone and ageing but fiercely independent. Bob still went around the neighbourhood giving a helping hand to all in need and never thinking of himself. Then he got so frail he couldn’t help anyone any more. Instead, his neighbours had to come in and start washing and caring for him. Bob couldn’t bear it. Not long after, he went upstairs to the spare bedroom, got into bed fully clothed and with his cap on his head, took tablets and died.

The blow to my patient was devastating. He kept dreaming that Bob was still alive and then, on waking, the shock of his death would hit him all over again. But for his own family, he too would have willingly let go of life.

My patient then told me that just a few days before coming to see me something had happened which had knocked him for six. He had dreamed of Bob but this was different.

In the dream, for the first time he knew that Bob was dead. Yet there was Bob, sitting across from him, large as life, cap on head, just the way he always sat. My patient asked him outright, “Bob, are you dead?” Bob answered him as direct as ever, “Yes!” His next question was, “Is there life after death?” Another emphatic “Yes” came right back. Then he challenged Bob head on. “Prove it to me!” Bob pulled out a book which looked like a bible with some detailed drawings in it and sure enough, the proof was all there.

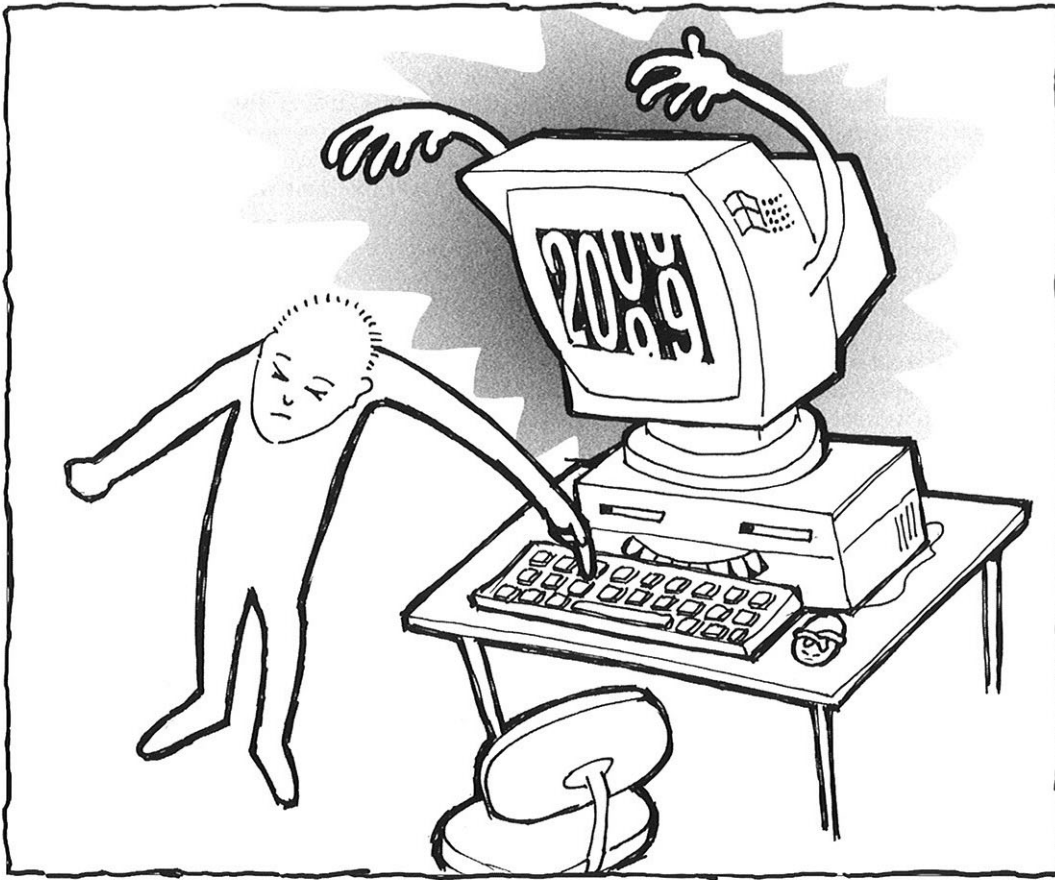
Then he awoke. All day he could intensely feel Bob’s presence. He found his emotions welling up and although in one way it hurt more than ever, he could say to me in that first meeting, “I know I’m getting better”.

Are we human beings on a spiritual path or spiritual beings on a human path? I am indebted to my patients, for in their extremity there is no disguise and no pretence. We are shown in so many ways that the soul cannot die, that it never dies. This is not just a dream but the greater spiritual reality, all the more telling when it pierces the darkness of a living nightmare like a shaft of light. Knowing that we are all eternal souls is the truth from which all other truths and realisations flow. This is why the radiance of the great spiritual teachers shines like a beacon that can never be extinguished for, even in mankind’s darkest hours, spiritual reality cannot be tarnished or destroyed. If life is but a waking dream, then the message is clear - it’s time to wake up!



*Talk given at the Global Retreat Centre 1.10.98.
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psychotherapist in the Health Service.*

Y2K – What's the Vision?



For some time we have been hearing about Y2K and that "bug". But what does it really mean and how should we face it. This is an extract from one conversation between two concerned people, Barbara Shipka and Meg Wheatley, which highlights one of the many dimensions of this fascinating challenge in which we are all caught.

Dear Meg,

I've been thinking a lot lately about how I just haven't been able to 'get with the program' around Y2K planning, disaster preparedness, or even community building. And, since my lack of enthusiasm has puzzled me somewhat — not to mention brought up the thought that I 'should' perhaps feel guilty, I've been busy observing, pondering, reflecting.

What's come to me is a sense that there's a need for an articulated positive, creative, coherent shared vision. A vision that is not in reaction to Y2K but, rather, that leverages Y2K. A vision that makes Y2K into a Petri dish for experimenting, incubating, learning, and growing into the greatness that we are so deeply longing to emerge in ourselves anyway; a vision that serves us 'locally' in terms of being Y2K specific, yes, but also serves us 'globally' in that we learn principles we can apply to the many other global systems issues we face.

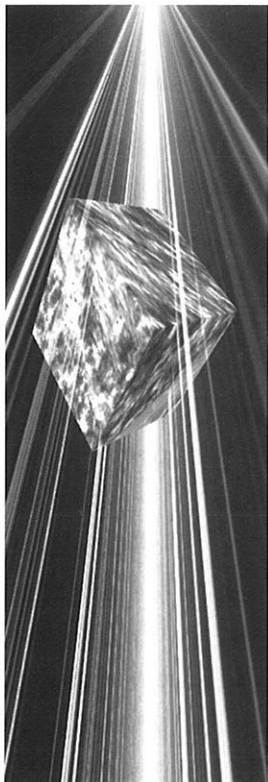
While there are shared visions for Y2K out there already, they are almost exclusively based on what we want to prevent and/or protect ourselves from rather than on what we want to create. Y2K planning, preparation, and community building appear to be almost all 'in

reaction to' with very little if any 'in creation of'. Thus, in and of itself, the preparatory part does not engage my passion. At times it engages my fear and perhaps my sense of duty but not my passion.

At this point I find myself wanting to say somewhat apologetically that I don't know what that vision is. But then, part of the reason for that is that we must create it together. I know my personal vision fairly clearly but I long for a shared vision. It again brings to mind the quote, "We are called to the place where our deep joy meets the world's deep hunger." As we explore that meeting place of joy and hunger individually, we come to know our creative personal visions.

But first, what are the current 'visions' that are out there and that are serving (or not serving) as core assumptions for alignment at this time?

1. There is an emerging shared vision of disaster that is very strong — and very coherent. It is being spread very powerfully over the internet and more and more every day through the media. If we understand and interpret this time as a natural reorganizing



“... the analogy used is that fixing the Y2K problems is rather like trying to change every nut and bolt on the Titanic as it's sinking.”

and renewal process, then it can be put into the context of transformation. In that case, as in Aikido or T'ai Chi, we can look for ways to assist it, help it move on by. But when we see it as a threat to our survival, a dangerous level of shared fear and panic emerges. And along with the fear comes fear-based thinking and decision-making, as well as powerful resistance to change. Perhaps it's trite to say, but in my experience the adage “What we resist persists” has proven to be true time and again.

2. There is also a powerful negative vision of what we ‘need to’ do as a result of the vision of disaster that is leading some people to ‘head for the hills’, stockpile guns, pull money out of the stock market. The danger here comes from the ‘fact’ that our institutions are built primarily on a foundation of trust. Remove the trust and the institutions crumble.

3. There is even an anti-vision. While this vision shows recognition of the need to continue to maintain trust at some level, it's a ‘don't do’ vision. The basic message is ‘don't-do-x-or-things-will-collapse-for-sure.’ It describes what not to do but gives us precious little in terms of what to do — other than try our hardest to keep things pretty much as they are, in the face of evidence that suggests we need to do something else — but what?

4. Which leads to yet another vision which is implicit and insidious: that we must — and even more, that we have a right to — hang on to the status quo.

Eugene Linden has written a book you may have seen, entitled ‘The Future in Plain Sight: Nine Clues to the Coming Instability.’ Y2K is not mentioned even once in the entire book! One part that especially struck me was where he pointed out how our generation in the West has never known instability, and how we view stability as our birthright. And, yet, how uncommon it is in the history of humanity for any group to have a lifetime of physical, social, economic, political stability!

I suspect that, at some level, even our political leaders, whether consciously or unconsciously, know they are not going to be able to control this one. Impeachment won't work; missiles won't work; special investigations won't work; elections won't work; persuasion or lobbying won't work; confessions or resignations won't work.

I must confess there are days when I think I might be making it all up about Y2K. But the fact remains that even if we are able to somehow pull an Apollo 13 relative to Y2K, the next global systems issue is on the horizon.

5. Another ‘vision’ — and perhaps most important to our conversation together — is the empty or non-existent one. In terms of Y2K, it has two main aspects:

- 1) community building and
- 2) contingency planning/scenario planning/ disaster preparedness.

In my view, community building is a method, a means toward something. When I work with corporate groups who want to build cohesive teams, I always remind them that having a team is not a goal in itself but rather a means toward achieving some other goal. Were there not another goal, why would they need to be a team? Isn't the same true here? I suspect that when people speak of community building, with passion, they actually have some assumed vision in mind and that that vision can perhaps be achieved through building community.

But, again, it is essential that we articulate that higher order assumed vision. Why? So we can identify with it, sing the music of it, find our unique ways to ‘go for it’ in the context of its commonness.

Two scenarios have been present for me over the past few weeks. The first is the Titanic and the second is Apollo 13 (and the US space program).

I've seen Y2K linked to the Titanic a few times now on the internet. Not a pretty picture. In one case the analogy used is that fixing the Y2K problems is rather like trying to change every nut and bolt on the Titanic as it's sinking.

But, on the other hand, it has also been suggested that on the Titanic were all of the materials necessary to make floats for everyone aboard. And yet, what we saw — at least in the Hollywood version — was a range of reactions from apathy to panic, futile heroics to self-protection. Not unlike what we're seeing re Y2K.

Where's the visionary, creative leadership that might think of the non-conventional idea like building floats for everyone and that, by beginning that task with abandon, might create a tone and atmosphere of hope that is catchy? I think of the Rumi quote, “Start a huge, foolish project. It absolutely does not matter what anybody thinks of you.”

In contrast, Apollo 13 was also an ‘impossible’ situation. There was no way those astronauts were supposed to be able to get home safely. But they did. What made the difference? First, a large group of people supported them on the ground. And, as Jim Lovell experienced to the point of exhaustion those folks refused to give up and even helped the astronauts figure out how to put a square peg in a round hole (or vice versa) with the air filters.

The people on the ground didn't know until all was said and done whether their efforts would bring them the positive outcome they wanted or not. But they didn't let up either. They could have. It was a choice they made. It was a

different choice from that made on the Titanic. How come?

I think it's critical to take note of how Apollo 13 was not seen as an isolated event. It lived within a larger context — the framework of the entire space program. There was a community with a larger goal. And they had an explicit, understandable, but all the while impossible vision that had directed myriad efforts of hundreds of thousands of people over a number of years: to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade.

"To put a man on the moon by the end of the decade" is an incredible vision! It's specific, it's measurable, it's impossible, it's compelling, it's one sentence. Think how things might have been different if the 'vision' had been "To have the best space program in the world." What's that? How would you know when you got there? Who cares? But A MAN ON THE MOON! IN TEN YEARS! Wow!

Could we look at Y2K as being like Apollo 13? If so, could the larger context within which it sits be the myriad, interconnected and interdependent global systems for which we need a simple, positive, creative, impossible vision that compels us to labor totally, lovingly, and lightheartedly from now until whenever — all the while not necessarily knowing whether our efforts will bear positive fruit on the physical level? I'm certain that engaging deeply will bear fruit for us all on the spiritual level. Love to hear your thoughts on this.

Very best
Barbara

Dear Barbara,
Thank you for your fascinating thoughts. I think part of the problem is that we think it's up to us to create that compelling vision. I asked a question in November: How is our desire for Y2K to be the door that opens people to the things we care about (awakening, evolutionary consciousness, systems thinking, whatever) blinding us from seeing what Y2K might be.

I believe that even those of us who have already hoped that Y2K is a doorway to a more desired future are not on the right path.

Coming off a few weeks of Y2K impotence/depression/what's it all for space, I am trying to stay humble to the fact that I haven't the faintest idea what Y2K is, how it will manifest, or what higher purpose it might be serving. I feel my chief work now is to stay in that humility and open myself up to see if I can glimpse all this at least for a moment, from the workings of Spirit/Divine Mind/God. I truly don't believe it's our lack of vision that is sapping us. It's that we're not meant to be the source of that vision. Something else far beyond traditional human ways of comprehension is occurring, and I won't even get a taste of what that is as long as I still believe I'm supposed to provide the vision.

So I think what's required of us now is to let go of making Y2K the lever we think the world needs, or is waiting for. I believe we need to become very quiet and access Source. This isn't what we think it is.

Yours
Meg Wheatley

Dear Meg

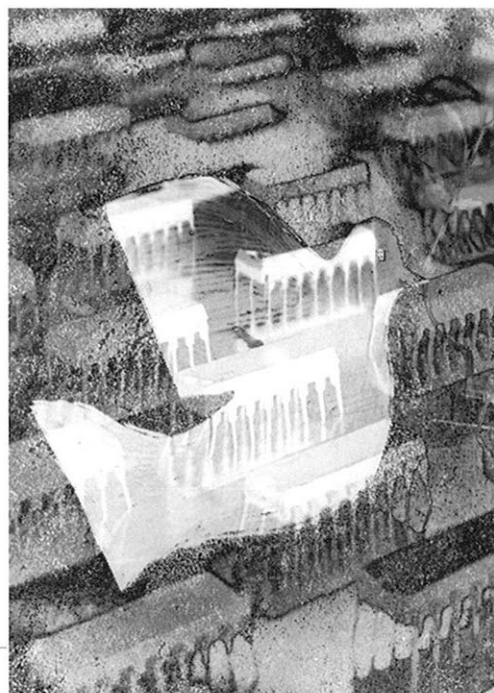
Thanks you so much for your thoughts with which I deeply resonate. I'm touched by your insight because it offers me a real opportunity to both challenge and stretch my worldview. Here are a few initial thoughts that it brings up for me.

First, it brings forth the question of the relationship between humans and the Divine as well as the 'both/and' between will and destiny. I believe we are by definition in a relationship with God (paradoxically, whether we believe it or not) and that we are intended to come to KNOW just how much we are in relationship. I fully agree with the mystery — that Y2K isn't what we THINK it is, that we cannot think our way out of it, and that we must become very quiet and access Source. And, for me, that brings forth another both/and: that becoming very quiet and accessing Source is not in conflict with but rather in complement to profound, purposeful, visionary action. We are God's hands. In my view, true vision is not a human creation. It is, in fact, a response to Divine inspiration. We are God's instruments. True vision only comes from God. If I think that I, Barbara, am the source of vision, that is ego. Plain and simple. Rather, I need to 'listen into' what God is wanting, what my role is in the world. As I do that, I am not to worry about the 'why' or 'how' of it all. Just to stay with the Voice of inspiration — and lead from my heart first.

Much Love
Barbara

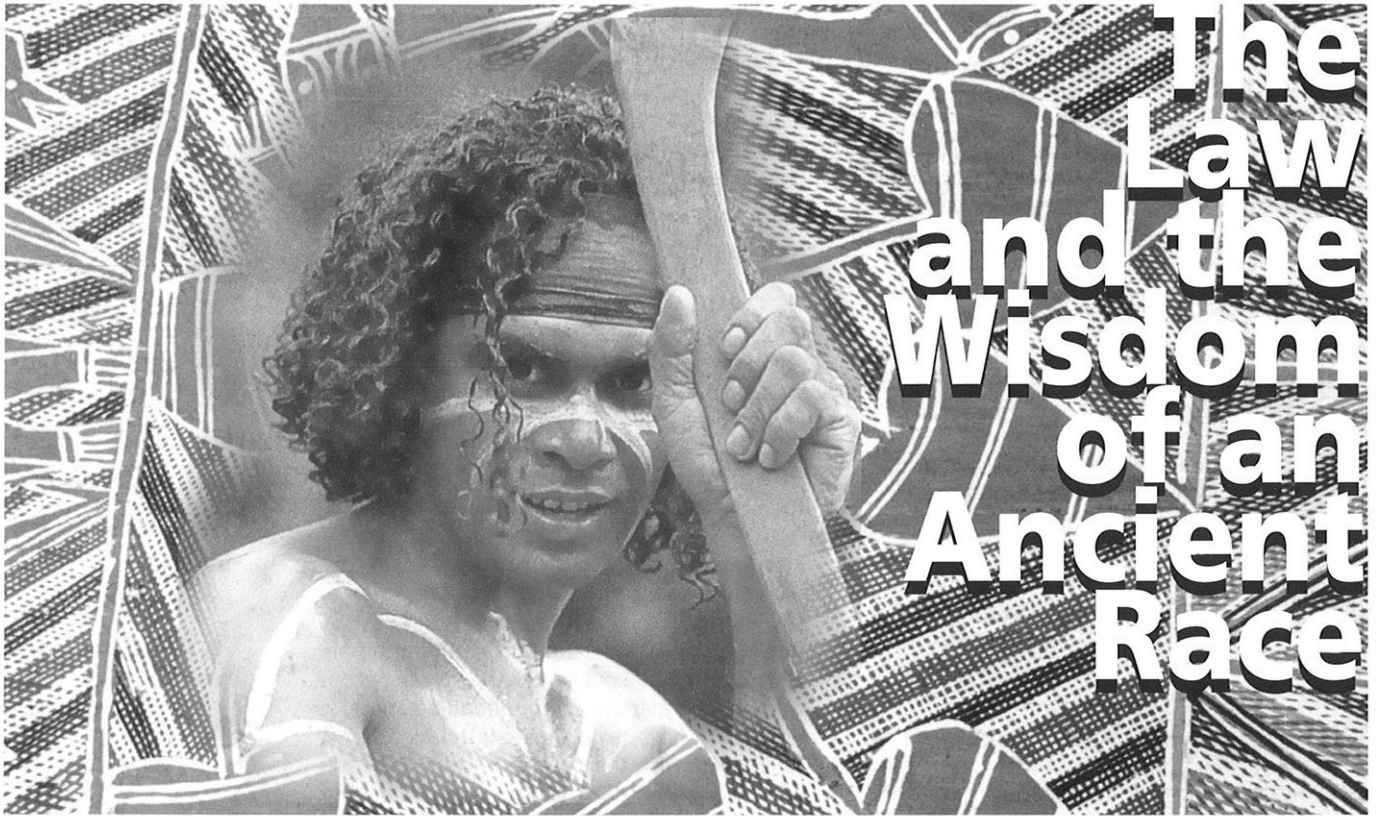
“Probably one out of every five days I wake up in a cold sweat thinking Y2K is much bigger than we think, and then the other four days I think maybe we really are on top of it. Everything is so interconnected, it's very hard to know with any precision that we've got it fixed”

Deputy Secretary of
Defence,
John Hamre,
19 October 1998



Barbara Shipka is an Organisational Consultant and author of *Leadership in a Challenging World: A Sacred Journey* (Butterworth-Heinemann, 1998).

Meg Wheatley is the author of several books including *Leadership and the New Science*



The Law and the Wisdom of an Ancient Race

**Tjanara
Goreng
Goreng
presents a
fascinating
and personal
insight into
Aboriginal
awareness
and a
lifestyle
which has a
potent
message
for us all
today**

The Law of the 650 clans of Aboriginal people in Australia was given to them from the Divine Ones - the Wandjinas who came to Australia in 'the Dreaming', many, many years ago. The Wandjinas are depicted as beings from another dimension with a golden halo of light around their heads, with large eyes to depict the powerful energy which flowed from their vision. They are drawn with no mouth, which depicts that they used the power of their thought to communicate, not the voice through the mouth.

Aboriginal people for many centuries have painted the Wandjinas - the most sacred ancestors - on the walls of caves, and the rock art is now famous around the world as being the oldest living expression of a culture on the Earth. These wise beings were given the Law by Biaime - the Creator or God in another time dimension beyond this physical world. They were then sent to the Earth in human form to live the Law in a practical way. So the Law was to assist them live as spiritual beings on the physical earth plane. They were the Keepers of the Law and were responsible for sustaining it and giving it to the generations of Aboriginal people who have populated Australia for centuries.

The Murries, Koories, Goories, Anangu, Noonyahs, as Aboriginal people call themselves, keep the Law still. The Law is a spiritual law given to enable the spirit to be in human form. The ancestors understood the difficulties of being in human form and so the Law was given by Biaime to assist us be human beings and to ensure that we took care of ourselves, each other and our physical world while we were alive.

The main part of the Law is based on three principles :

to take care of and have respect for yourself;
to **take** care of and have respect for your family, your community and all living creatures around you;
to take **care** of the Earth, (Nyungynateea-Mother and keep its energy pure, and to always follow the Law.)

Within each different clan-group the method of practising the Law varied according to traditions, ceremonies, rituals and totemic ancestors. But basically every clan had these three things as the basis of the Law. Each child was trained in understanding the Law from the age of four, when the intellect begins to rationalise and use logic. Before that age they are taught by their elders to follow

and learn by watching. Children are never traumatised before this age, because we understood the needs of the emotional and psychological development of the human being meant that children would be scarred for life if this occurred, and there would be a tear in the embryonic ego state which would take most of the adult life to heal.

If a person chose to break the Law knowing the consequences, they would be punished swiftly in order to bring balance back to their energy with the Earth, themselves and God. This happened also to ensure that their spirit left their body in a state of harmony and peace. It was important to settle any wrongdoing before leaving the physical plane or you could not go to the 'Dreaming'.

The 'Dreaming' is a dimension beyond space and time to which we are always connected by way of our spiritual being. To practise 'dreaming' means to be able to know the past, present and future in the moment and to use your wisdom in this knowing to act in the moment.

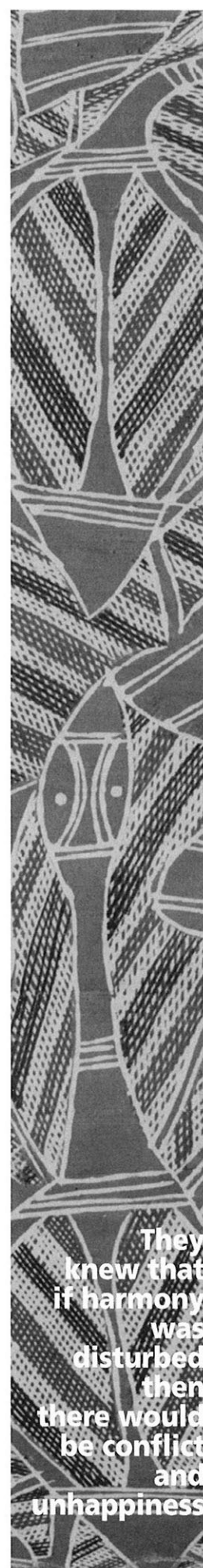
One can be in the 'Dreaming' through the act of dreaming while asleep, where answers will be given in the form of dreams; you can 'live on the wind' which is meditation which transports you beyond your physical form to your spiritual form and allows your soul to travel through other dimensions and to connect with the ancestor souls in the 'Dreaming' or to sit with Biaime; or you can sit on the earth in a special or sacred place and listen in silence to the voice of the ancestors who reside in the 'Dreaming'.

In Aboriginal society everything is cyclical; there is no word for time in any of the 600 or so languages and no word for possession. We do not consider ourselves the owners of anything but custodians of our bodies, our country and our families. Therefore it is important to treat these things properly. The Elders are the Keepers of the Law and the Wisdom and provide teachings to the younger people in the clan to enable them to become teachers and Elders. Elders are chosen because their words and actions show humility, the ability to co-operate, to share, to provide wisdom without force, to teach those younger than them and to encourage spiritual growth in the young people. Their roles are given to them spiritually and they

are initiated into their role in ceremonies which invoke Biaime to be with them always. The main quality of an Elder or a teacher is to show humility in every word, thought and action. If this is not observed in you, you will not be invited to teach, or to become an elder.

In the Goreng Goreng/ Wakka Wakka clan we practise a form of meditation called 'Living on the Wind'; this is open-eyed meditation where listening to the voices of the ancestors and Biaime is done by sitting in a particular place in the bush and feeling and listening to the wind in silence. Messages are then conveyed to you about what you need to do, your state and the actions you need to take on a daily basis. The basis of this meditation is direct connection with Biaime. Granting love through the eyes is also practised in certain ceremonies and places, where an Elder will do this within a ceremony.

The basis of the Law was to continue the harmony established in the world by the ancestor Wandjinas. They knew that if harmony was disturbed then there would be conflict and unhappiness. Of course with the coming of the English and other races of people to Australia this conflict of cultures, religious beliefs and lack of understanding due to judgements made caused great upheaval and chaos for the Aboriginal people and the keeping of their Law. Owing to policies of successive governments to this day, Aboriginal people have had to keep the Law within great disharmony, war and conflict. It is a measure of their spiritual ability that they have managed to maintain their culture, their spirituality and their ability to share, and to educate the non-indigenous races in the importance of their role in this Land. It is their skill of recognising that each person is a special spiritual being and therefore must be honoured that enables them to continue to negotiate, mediate and quietly speak of the importance of their custodianship of this Land. In Australia today there is a lot of conflict in relation to Native Title Rights to Land, and the conflict stems from the completely different understandings and view of the Land. On the one hand, the Aboriginal people know that they must protect and maintain their custodianship in a spiritual way because it was the Law given to them and if they cannot then it is difficult for them to return to the 'Dreaming'. On the other hand, the 'western' European,



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English and Asian cultures who now reside in Australia view the land in a completely different way. It is a commodity to use, to buy and sell for profit, to grow crops on, to feed animals from, to build houses on and to hold onto with life itself and pass on to your family. This is not to say that many Australians do not have a great love for their land and their country, but when a conflict exists between a spiritual understanding and a worldly one there will always be disharmony and usually the most powerful, wealthy and manipulative win.

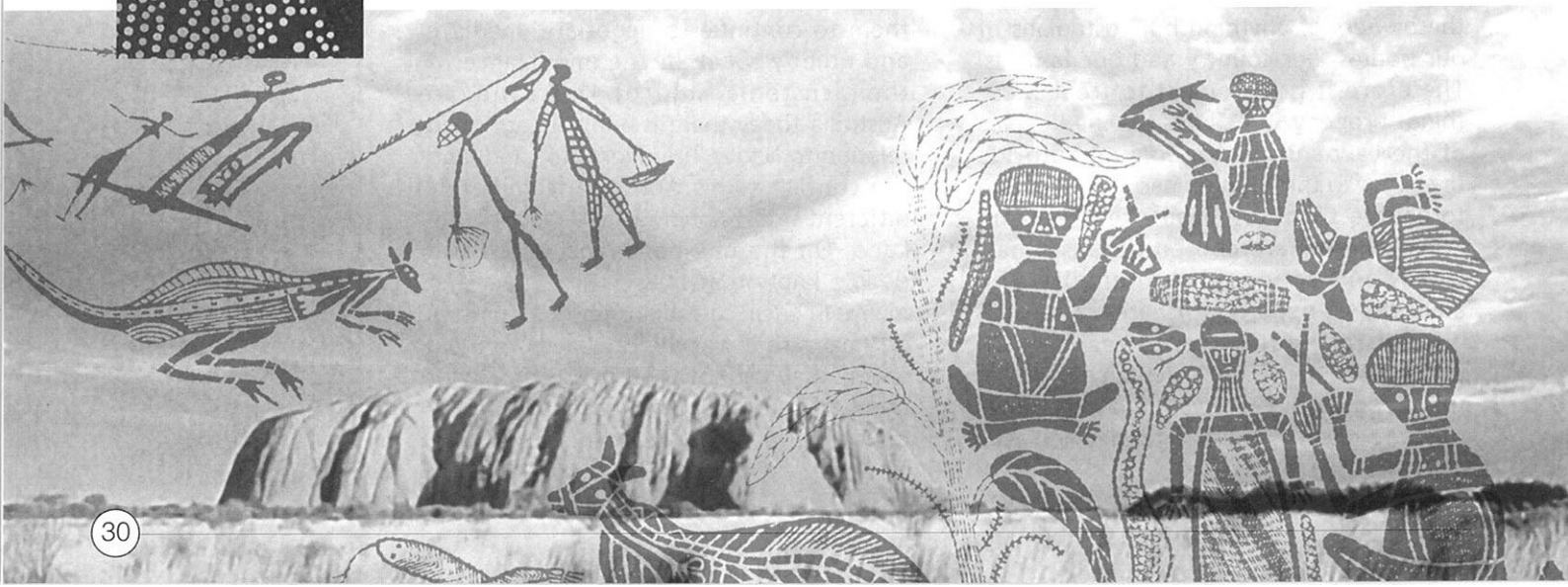
Aboriginal people understand that if you operate your life out of greed, ego, abuse of others and anger, then you will lose eventually because the actions always return. So we know that if we keep negotiating within the principles of our Law then we will be taken care of and no matter what happens we will be able to keep this Land pure, because a spiritual bond is stronger than a greedy one.

Many years ago when I was 18 years old and involved in my initiation into adulthood, one of my Elders/teachers, a Kaidaichi man, said to me when I was expressing my young impatience at the way of the world and particularly politicians – he looked into my eyes for a long time and then quietly said to me with so much spiritual power that I would never have not believed him, that in 20 years I would see that it would all change and we would be O.K., that I was to just wait and learn patience, continue to follow the Law and speak my mind whenever I was in a position to and it would come. Practically to the month, 20 years later the, 'Wik' legislation was passed by the High Court of Australia that granted Native Title Rights on pastoral leases, a difficult issue in Australian Land Law. Some years before

that the 'Mabo' legislation was passed, which granted Native Title Rights to all Aboriginal people based on their ongoing connection with their Land. This was despite a piece of English Law which said that Australia was 'Terra Nullius' when Captain Cook arrived to claim it for England. This means that Australia was an empty land except for the kangaroos and emus and other wildlife. Perhaps Aboriginal people were considered 'wildlife', not human. So even against many odds, right has been done because we and our Elders continue to uphold the spiritual Law given to us by the ancestor souls. This does not mean that I/we don't speak strongly about the need for proper recognition of one's right to practise one's spiritual life – is this not the basis of the UN Declaration of Human Rights? – and yet in Australia there is a strong mentality which does not understand and will not ever want to understand the spiritual position of Aboriginal people. Therefore I find it is important for me to go beyond the earthly question of rights to land, to life, to practise the spiritual Law, to knowing what the ancestors have always told us, that there is a place and a world beyond this one which we are helping to create because of our spiritual practices and that this one will change as everything does and we will return to the ancestors and that special place in which they reside for a little while until we return to the Earth in a space and time when it is completely pure again.



Tjanara Goreng Goreng is an Aboriginal songmaker and medicine woman. She is writer, poet, traditional dancer and painter. She is a trainer and counsellor to Aboriginal Business in Australia and overseas.



Personal Experience

Faith Rediscovered



An atheist, scornful of belief and pitying believers, Catherine Lucas recalls a moment of revelation

Not long ago, I was walking in Hyde Park when I bumped into a friend I had not seen for ages. During the conversation I mentioned something about the spirit. He listened for a moment or two and then asked, in absolute astonishment, "Catherine, have you become religious?" I sensed he would have been less shocked at the possibility that I had become a prostitute or a drug addict.

Hastily I reassured him that I was not, then felt guilty for betraying what I have become. So I added, "At least not in a conventional way. But I do believe we are all connected by spirit ..." From the expression of alarm on his face, I could see my explanation was not going down well, so we parted company.

His thoughts I can only guess at, but mine were clear. Why, I wondered, do I feel such acute embarrassment at publicly admitting my spirituality? How, as a society, did we lose our belief and respect for religion to such an extent that it has become social suicide even to mention God? It seemed especially ironic given that only a stone's throw away, Oxford Street was an orgy of people doing their Christmas shopping.

The answer, I fear, is obvious. We are living in an age and culture where intellect and scepticism triumph. The existence of God can only be felt in the soul; it cannot be measured with a ruler or proved with a calculation, therefore God does not exist. It is that simple.

I used to be a product of this mindset. I was brought up as an atheist to believe

that religion is preposterous. Faith in God was for the weak or feeble-minded, those not strong enough to survive the ordeal of living without a crutch. Or worse, it was evidence of an appalling arrogance in which man tries to deify himself by casting God in his image.

Several years of compulsory church attendance at school did nothing to kindle my faith, and when I finally escaped from formal religious education, I assumed my dealings with God were over. Then, at 18, I spent three weeks hiking in the mountains of Oregon. It was the first time I had seen such beauty and I found it awe-inspiring, I soaked up the magnificence of the rocks, the trees, the mountains and the light above them, so shatteringly clear.

I felt a tremendous sense of joy and realised that if this beauty was in everything around me, in every scrap of matter, then it must also be within me. My heart broke open and my soul leapt free, exulting in this moment of inner connection. Then I went home and forgot about it.

At least I thought I did, except that I now had a mysterious hunger of the soul. Something deep within me came to the surface that summer, bringing with it a longing that I could neither name nor satisfy. The only time I felt peace from it was in nature, where I re-experienced the joy of union and the feeling of expanding into the infinite.

One day it dawned on me that this joy was a spiritual experience. I was horrified. But the feeling was so powerful and the logic





I felt a tremendous sense of joy and realised that if this beauty was in everything around me, in every scrap of matter, then it must also be within me.

so overwhelmingly simple that my intellect had no chance to defend itself. For the first time I understood and experienced the presence of God.

Not that this made it any easier to accept. My rational mind was outraged and civil war broke out between my head and heart. Over the years my experiences of the presence of God grew stronger. But this only intensified the conflict, because I still did not understand what God is. I could not get past the idea of an old man with a white beard up in Heaven, and was torn between the undeniable truth of my experience and the doubts and thoughts of my disbelieving mind.

Until one day a couple of years ago. I was in the countryside on my own and had spent several glorious summer days walking in the hills. One evening I was sitting quietly when suddenly everything around me dissolved. It was like dropping through a trap door into darkness and I found myself in what I can only describe as a sea of sparkling energy. I was conscious, but nothing, including my body, had any form or structure.

At first I was astonished and then I realised that whereas before I had experienced the presence of God in all things, this was God. At least, this is what people call God for the sake of calling it something. Finally I understood that God is not an old man in the sky, it is a limitless ocean of consciousness, of unmanifest energy, and the source of everything in existence from the largest planet to the smallest insect.

Gradually things rematerialised and, although they were exactly the same, I was completely different. Suddenly everything made sense. It was like watching the sun sail out from behind a cloud – the light was there all the time, but now I knew its source and everything became more radiant.

The understanding of God is a feeling of coming home in the fullest sense, of finally knowing one's true nature, because everything we experience, from joy, love and acts of genius to pain, grief and destruction – all come from this source. And knowing this has taught me to be grateful for every breath.

This is why the loss of faith is so devastating to our society, because we no

longer have a way of recognising and celebrating what is precious and sacred. It is only when we experience a crisis such as the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, that we see the appalling emptiness of our lives. Or at Christmas, when our pursuit of the material and the meaningless reaches its peak and yet does nothing to satisfy our deepest needs. So, contrary to my expectations, believing in God has nothing to do with arrogance. Instead it creates true humility, because it reminds us that everything we are is thanks to God, that we are each a speck in the divine whole. And it is certainly not a crutch, because admitting our divinity demands that we give everything.

I would like to say it has been easy since that moment of revelation, but it has not. I have found that it brings an awesome responsibility. For it is not enough to live an ardent but secret spiritual life. It forces one to come out of hiding and own it publicly – to allow the divine to shine through and, as Buddha said, to 'make of thyself a light'. Or, as Christ instructed, to 'stand and testify'.

That brings me back to my conversation in the park, for clearly I am still struggling against my conditioning. When I think of the prophets, writers and the millions of ordinary people who have been willing to share the truth with others, I know it is an honour to join them. But I also know, because of the tyranny of doubt in our society, that to speak of God is to risk becoming an outcast.

Christmas is a good time to speak of God. Nowadays I appreciate Christmas far more because I understand the truth in Christ's teachings and I may well go to church to honour his birth. But to me, it is more important to practise what Christ and all the other great prophets preached: to love God above all else and to share that love with others. This awareness allows me to enjoy every aspect of Christmas, and reminds me that there is something far more precious than presents or turkey or Christmas pudding.



Catherine Lucas is a writer, poet, columnist, inspirational speaker, filmmaker, wilderness guide, freelance writer based in San Francisco who is completing her first book on Spiritual Awakening.

Learning to Meditate

What is meditation?

Put simply, meditation is the experience of the limitless nature of the mind when it ceases to be dominated by its usual mental chatter. Think for a moment of the sky. If the sky is continually covered by clouds, we are never able to see its true nature. Roll the clouds away, and magically we experience the blue vastness of the sky in all its beauty. If the mind is continually clouded by thoughts, we are never able to experience it in and of itself. All that we experience is the cloud-cover of its contents.

Why should we want to experience the mind in and of itself? The answer is that it represents our true nature, a nature that is naturally calm and serene, unclouded by the various anxieties and wishes, hopes and fears that usually occupy our attention. To experience the mind in this unclouded way is to experience the sense of being fully and vitally alive, yet at the same time deeply at peace within ourselves.

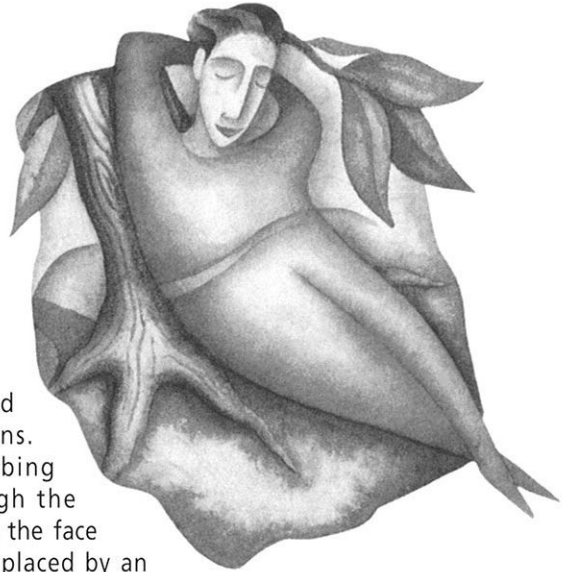
Meditation brings with it many other benefits for body and mind, but all of these depend upon the ability to experience this central state of alert yet peaceful being. A way of understanding this is to imagine the mind as a pool of water that for years we have been busily churning into mud with our mental chatter. Once the churning stops, and mind settles to the bottom, the pool becomes clear. Not only can we now see the limpid, pure water itself, but also we can enjoy other pleasures, such as quenching our thirst, and bathing. Its clarity and cleanliness allow us to see through to the bottom of the pool, and discover there a new world of interest and wonder. When the mind becomes calm and still in meditation, we come to a much deeper understanding of ourselves and of our own true nature.

By stilling and calming the thoughts, meditation also stills and calms emotions. Thought and emotion are inextricably linked in our everyday lives. The mind goes over painful memories, current worries and concerns for the future, and as it does so it sparks off emotions such as regret, anger and fear. When the mind enters into meditation, the emotions experience a new sense of peace. Even if troubling thoughts arise, much of their usual power is lacking. The

meditator is able to observe them objectively, without becoming lost in them and identifying with them. As a result, his or her ability to rouse unwelcome emotions decreases. At the centre of everything, the tranquillity of mind and feeling remains. Potentially disturbing thoughts pass through the mind like clouds across the face of the sun, and are replaced by an equanimity only possible when one is at peace with oneself.

Meditation should never be thought of as an external technique that we impose upon ourselves, much as we might learn a foreign language or master a computer. It is in essence a re-discovery of something that has always been within us, an opening of half-familiar pages in a book that we once loved but have put aside. This does not mean that in meditation we return to the mind of a child. Meditation does not ask us to relinquish our life experiences nor to distrust the power of thought. It also does not ask us to become different or less interesting people than we are now. Once the meditation session is over, the mind returns to the plans and concerns that are its usual way of being - but now with an added clarity and power in its thinking, and a greater ability to meet both the challenges and the frustrations with which life continually confronts us.

Meditation does not take us away from the world, but helps us to become more clear-sighted and effective people within it. It also enables us to become more sensitive and compassionate toward other people and toward the natural world, because it develops within us a sense of the unity and inter-dependence of all things, and an awareness of what it means to be human. With this greater sensitivity and awareness comes an enhanced feeling of self-awareness and self-acceptance. For the first time, we really sense the deep mystery and the precious nature of life.



**David Fontana
presents the
easy approach
to the time
honoured
practice of
meditation
as the best
way to get
to know
ourselves.**

WATCHING THOUGHTS

An early exercise in meditation is to take an objective look at the mind in order to see what goes on within it, and the tricks that it can play.

1.
Sit and relax.
Close your eyes and turn your attention inward. As objectively as you can, watch the thoughts that pass through your awareness.
Don't judge them, or attempt to hang on to pleasant ones, or push unpleasant ones away. Just watch.
2.
Notice the nature of your thoughts - how one thought leads to another, and how quickly a chain of associations is set up. Notice how these associations sometimes follow a single theme, or go off at a tangent into a quite different set of considerations. Notice how intent your mind seems on distracting your attention, and observe the strategies it uses to do so.
3.
Notice how easily your objective awareness does in fact disappear, and you become 'lost' in your thoughts. Each time this happens, gently re-establish awareness.
4.
Continue the exercise for as long as seems comfortable.
Afterward, write down what you have discovered about your mind.

Mind Benefits

The term mind covers three levels of our mental life. These are the conscious level (the thoughts, feelings and emotions of which we are currently aware); the preconscious (everything that we can call into consciousness at will); and the unconscious (the vast reservoir of memories, unacknowledged wishes and fears that lie below normal awareness, but that can exert a major influence over how we think and behave). Many of the great traditions, together with some newer psychotherapeutic movements in the West, maintain that spiritual and psychological development depend in part upon improving communication between the conscious and unconscious levels of the mind. Such communication not only enhances our self-knowledge and self-understanding, but also provides access to the creative and transformative abilities that often lie latent within each of us.

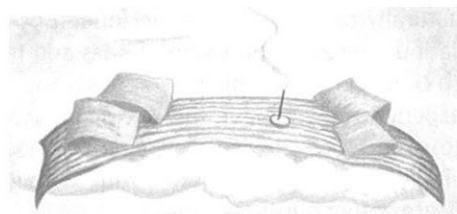
Meditation can be one of the most effective ways of improving this communication. When the conscious level of the mind becomes still, awareness of the deeper, unconscious, level grows. The unconscious is an essential part of ourselves: it determines many of our hopes, anxieties, likes and dislikes, and other important personal characteristics and perhaps contains the secrets of our very being. Failure to access the unconscious means that we remain strangers to an essential part of our own nature. The Russian mystic Georgei Guridieff likened the mind to a house, and suggested that our failure to explore its deeper levels is like living in a single room instead of roving through the spacious corridors from one room to another.

The principal mind benefits of meditation are improved tranquillity, patience, concentration and memory, and enhanced understanding and sympathy toward others.

Tranquillity arises naturally from the alert state of peaceful being that is central to meditation. In this state the meditator is in the role of an observer, conscious of whatever arises in the mind, but detached from it, instead of identified with it. Thoughts, emotions, feelings and memories are seen without judgement and allowed to pass into and out of awareness like images across a screen. Essentially, when we meditate we become aware that although we have these

thoughts and feelings, they are not who we are. They are impermanent, transitory events in our mental life, whose power over us is in direct proportion to the strength of our attachment or aversion toward them. True identity lies beyond such passing experiences. This does not mean that the meditator becomes insensitive to pleasure and pain; it means only that pleasure and pain no longer take control.

Patience comes as a consequence of the unhurried act of peaceful sitting, and the contrast it provides to the frantic pace at which most of us normally live our lives. The meditator becomes aware of the essential "nowness" of existence. All we have is the instant of each present moment. Concern for the future and over-preoccupation with the past are seen as artificial distractions from the direct experience of living. Something of this



unhurried approach persists even when we are not meditating, so that life comes to be experienced at a gentler pace, and its minor irritations are faced with greater equanimity. The result is not only reduced stress for ourselves and often for others, but clearer vision and more objective judgement. Hurry is seen as counter-productive, and with patience there comes a greater ability to discriminate between what is important and what is not.

Concentration permits the meditator to practise mindfulness. The usually scattered elements of our attention are drawn together and focused, clearly and calmly, upon a single stimulus, initially our breathing. Whenever the mind wanders it is brought gently back to this point of focus. By degrees, as the mind becomes concentrated, it calms down and becomes tranquil.

Memory is the fourth key mind benefit. Much of our inability to remember things stems from our failure to attend properly to them in the first place. Often our minds are busily thinking about something quite different, with the result that we function practically as

automatons. Worse still, we frequently tend to do several things at once without concentrating properly on any of them. Meditation trains the mind to be in the present moment, focused upon whatever is at the centre of awareness. The result is that more of what we experience is registered and transferred to our memory stores. Together with the practice of mindfulness, meditation helps us to use our minds in a more efficient way.

Enhanced understanding and sympathy toward others is based in part on enhanced understanding and sympathy toward ourselves. With meditation comes increased self-insight and understanding, and a corresponding increase in our understanding of other people. We become aware that what we see inside ourselves is also there in them. Other people have the same emotions and feelings as ourselves. They make the same mistakes, seek the same goals, and can show the same compassion and generosity. Even if we consider that there is no need for their anger or for their fears, we can appreciate the reality of the suffering that these emotions cause them.

For the advanced meditator, there often comes an awareness of the underlying unity and inter-dependence of all things. This leads to a recognition that to harm others is to harm oneself, and that to show kindness to others is to show kindness to oneself. The weaknesses and vulnerabilities of other people thus come to be seen as images of our own weaknesses and vulnerabilities. There is a growing awareness of shared humanity, which leads naturally to the development of what in the East is called *ahimsa*, an emphasis upon non-violence and a concern and respect for all life.

Creativity and Problem-solving

One of the greatest mysteries of the mind is the origin of thoughts. The more we watch our own thought processes in meditation, the more we become aware of this mystery. One moment the mind is empty, next moment, as if from nowhere, a thought appears - then another and another. Who or what puts together these strange mental events? Modern psychologists have no final answer. We say that thoughts emerge from the 'unconscious', but this is simply to invent a term for mystery. The unconscious is as far beyond our direct comprehension as

the invisible dark matter that holds the universe together, which eludes direct scientific observation.

The mystery that surrounds the origin of our thoughts is particularly apparent when it comes to creativity. Many creative artists have written of their creative processes, yet none has been able to explain their operation. A prime example is Mozart, who claimed to 'hear' much of his music, so that he had only the task of writing it down. Where the music came from was a much a puzzle to him as it is to us. It is said that Shakespeare never had to correct a line he wrote - each one came to him ready-made. Many great scientists such as Poincaré, Mendeleyev and Bohr have also claimed that many insights came to them as if fully-formed from the unconscious, sometimes even in dreams.

There can be little doubt, however, that the more open we are to the inner world, the more readily creative thoughts and ideas are able to emerge into our consciousness. Meditation can be like 'listening in' to some deep well within us - an imaginative spring that is capable of generating creative insights and impulses far beyond conscious thought. It is not surprising that the ancients thought these creative insights came from the gods.

One thing we can say is that creativity can be viewed as a form of problem-solving characterised by fluency and originality, whether the problem is to do with scientific invention, or with the idea for a play or a novel, or with the poetry needed to express a profound emotion. It is thus possible to meditate on a certain problem and listen for the answer. Whatever the problem, even if it is only a fairly mundane one, the process is the same. Keep the problem in your mind as you establish your meditation, as if confident that the solution will be found for you. Then let go of the problem, in the same way that you let go of all thoughts.

If solutions to the problem arise during meditation, instruct them to re-surface at the end of the meditation, then let them go. If you hold on to them, not only will you disrupt the rest of the meditation, you will prevent any further insights arising. If the required insights fail to appear, do not regard the exercise as a failure. They may arrive when least expected during the rest of the day, or be there when you wake the following morning.



WHO AM I?

1.
Sit comfortably and relax by tensing and releasing your muscles. Take a deep breath and slowly exhale, imagining that any remaining tension is set free with your out-breath. Close your eyes and turn your attention inward.
2.
Watch the thoughts that pass through your awareness, but don't judge them. Try not to hang on to pleasant thoughts, or push unpleasant ones away. Just watch.
3.
Now go one step further and ask yourself, "Who is it who is watching?"
4.
Repeat the question mentally from time to time throughout the meditation, but always in a light, half-amused way, without demanding an answer.

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THE FACE OF HONESTY

Sister Mohini holds up a mirror which can provide us all with useful reflection.

Sometimes ambition without aim, purpose or clarity can be dangerous. Ambition is fine as long as there is discrimination as to how a desire will affect others. This is real honesty. Honesty is something that neither brings harm to the self nor hurts others.

Most of the time when we think of values like humility and lightness, thoughts turn to the self, but when we think of honesty, the thought turns outward. Conflict arises when we begin to think that honesty means fulfilling all our own desires. When honesty is understood as bringing satisfaction only to the self, this is not total honesty.

People who are addicted sometimes feel as though they can't feel the pain. It's the same with thoughts: there are certain thoughts that are not beneficial for us, but we allow them to continue because we don't feel the damage these thoughts bring. Honesty is not just being natural, but giving to ourselves what is good and positive.

When a person uses abusive language, they often feel that they are just being 'frank'. However, this frankness is a form of dishonesty because the person is not only hurting others, but the self as well. The power to discriminate is needed to determine which word brings relief and peace to the self and others. This is honesty.

Each part of the body is assigned a place. The tongue is supposed to be behind the bars of the teeth. It is said that before you speak, think many times because the wound caused by the sword of the tongue heals very slowly. If you are honest, any little difficulty only comes to make you more honest. In performing various day to day tasks, we should ask ourselves: Am I really being honest? Any difficulty is because of lack of honesty. The more honesty, the more feelings of lightness we have, and the burdens are taken off us.

We need to make sure that there is no selfishness mixed in with our honesty and that we are not trying to manipulate a situation or person in the name of honesty. Whatever is true or

real should not be mixed; honesty, with the self, in our words and in relationships, is very important.

No one can take what belongs to us and we cannot take what belongs to anyone else out of greed or fear. Gandhi's clothing was simple because he believed that if it were more than simple he would be guilty of taking someone else's share. When we learn to share then we are free from jealousy, and things seem to come to us.

Before most of us became spiritual seekers or practitioners, we experienced disharmony because of breaking certain laws of the universe. Once we learn to adopt honesty not only does disharmony dissolve, but there is never fear of what is going to happen to us. When we lack honesty, we live in fear. Lack of honesty creates sadness and insecurity. An honest person will always feel secure.

Respect is the essential core of humility and we should respect a person for whatever or whoever they are, while knowing that they need to change a few elements in their character. According to the respect we give others, that much respect will be given to us in return.

The converse of humility is ego. We can develop ego from having many things, or from having nothing at all. Inferiority is also considered ego. In order to destroy ego, the consciousness of being a trustee is necessary. Trusteeship means that we don't own something, but it has been given to us. No one has brought anything with them to this earth. When we came we were not wearing our clothes even, they were given to us. As much as we can be caretakers or trustees with honesty, that much we can experience abundance and then there is no need for arrogance.

We witness heaviness because we walk around in 'title consciousness': "I am this, I am that." This makes us feel burdened. If we perform our tasks as trustees, we can be very, very light. Another reason we experience a burden is because we do not have enough tolerance or patience and so we respond negatively in our relationships with others and we don't know how to forgive. Forgiving means for giving. We become so light when we give. Take what is useful, and don't create a file of anyone's negativity.

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Once upon a time...



Once upon a time, in ancient China, there was a very old Emperor who loved flowers. Knowing he had not long to live, and with no one to inherit the Kingdom, the Emperor decided it was time to select the future Empress. He sent word to a thousand towns and villages throughout the land to select one young girl to come to meet the Emperor.

High in the mountains one young girl called Mai Ling was selected by her village. She travelled for four days to see her beloved Emperor. Arriving in the capital she joined hundreds of other young girls in a large hall, and sure enough the Emperor arrived. He walked around meeting the young girls, and as he did so he gave them all the seed of a flower. At the end he announced that each girl should take their seed, plant it and grow the flower, and then to return in a year with the flower, and the one with the most beautiful flower would be the Empress.

Mai Ling trekked back to her mountain village. There, she planted her seed in a pot. And waited. And waited. But nothing happened. Her flower would not grow. She gave it more water. Nothing happened. So she changed to earth. Nothing happened. She changed its position. Nothing happened. And then the time came to take her flower to show the Emperor, but she had no flower.

Mai Ling loved the Emperor very much. And it was only because of that love that she decided to go. Maybe the flower would blossom on the way. Four days later she arrived in the huge hall. And sure enough there were the hundreds of other girls with their pots, all containing beautiful flowers of all colours and sizes. But still, Mai Ling had no flower to show. And sure enough the Emperor arrived. On seeing all the flowers in the hall he smiled greatly, and began to walk around looking at each one. At the very end of the line was Mai Ling. And as the Emperor walked up to Mai Ling he gave her the biggest smile of all.

And after a moment he looked down at Mai Ling's empty pot and said, "child you will be the Empress of this Kingdom". Mai Ling was stunned. "But your majesty", she replied, "I have no flower to show you". "I know", responded the Emperor, "all the seeds I gave out one year ago were roasted. And so for your honesty, and your humility, you shall inherit the Kingdom and be the Empress of all China"

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The Six Mistakes of Man

The delusion that personal gain is made by crushing others.

The tendency to worry about things that cannot be changed or corrected.

Insisting that a thing is impossible because we cannot accomplish it.

Refusing to set aside trivial preferences.

Neglecting development and refinement of the mind and not acquiring the habit of studying.

Attempting to compel others to believe and live as we do.



Creed for Optimists

*Be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.
Talk health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet.
Make all friends feel there is something special in them.
Look at the sunny side of everything.
Think only of the best, work only for the best,
and expect only the best.
Be enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.
Forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater
achievements of the future.
Give everyone a smile.
Spend so much time improving yourself that you have
no time left to criticise others.
Be too big for worry and too noble for anger.*

Christian Larsen

If You Have a Penny

If you have a penny and I have a penny and we exchange pennies, you still have one penny and I still have one penny. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange ideas, you now have two ideas and I now have two ideas.



A Short Course in Human relations

*The six most important words:
"I admit I made a mistake"*

*The five most important words:
"You did a good job"*

*The four most important words:
"What is your opinion?"*

*The three most important words:
"If you please"*

*The two most important words:
"Thank you"*

The one most important word: "We"

The least important word: "I"

