



LIVING oneness

RESTORING WHOLENESS IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD



Since 2005 the Global Oneness Project has traveled across five continents and met over 200 individuals who live and work with the consciousness of oneness. We've witnessed and documented the powerful impact these people are having on their communities and the world, and shared their stories through films and interviews.

Impressed and deeply moved by how quickly and effectively an awareness of interconnection and the responsibilities it engenders helps bring innovation, compassion, and wisdom to the challenges facing our global community, we offer this study guide to help facilitate your own understanding and experience of oneness.

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Welcome!

We're glad you've started the *Living Oneness* study guide. Most likely you're reading this after watching one or more Global Oneness Project films. Stories about people living from the consciousness of oneness – the extraordinary generosity, ingenuity, wisdom, and courageous challenge to the status quo that they demonstrate – are some of the most important models for our time. It was always our hope that these individuals and their projects would inspire you to take the next step toward knowing and living oneness in your own community.

We'll provide lots of exercises designed to help you participate more consciously in these changes. And help guide you through the often confusing and sometimes subtle challenges of living oneness in a world still greatly influenced and determined by a mindset of duality, separation, and extreme individualism.

Who Can Benefit from this Study Guide?

We've designed the study guide to be used in a variety of ways, from individuals studying alone, to small groups that meet regularly, to students in a classroom setting. You might find it's more fun and enriching to explore the material in the company of other committed learners. You can play with more ideas, hear different perspectives, and get support for your work. If meeting in small groups, we suggest weekly or biweekly meetings of 5-12 members, in person. Reserve two to three hours for each chapter.

We encourage you to use the resources on the Global Oneness Project [website education page](#), where this study guide is available for download as a single file or by chapter, along with other educational materials, DVDs and discussion guides.

THE CHALLENGE

Writing, talking, and learning about oneness is not a straightforward endeavor, so this study guide might be a bit different from approaches that can promise results as long as you put in the time and study hard enough. Oneness is not always cultivated through facts, figures, and effort. The consciousness of oneness is fundamentally shared and grounded through direct experience – through “aha” moments when the mind shifts into new territory and something unexpected is suddenly present. These kinds of consciousness-expanding moments are not only difficult to predict, they are also not easy to maintain. The direct and dynamic relationship between your consciousness and life around you is a foundation for experiencing oneness.

Introduction

We live in one of the most precarious and exciting moments in history shaped by unprecedented pressures and opportunities. How we live with and relate to each other and the earth seems to matter now more than ever. The challenges facing us are rarely unrelated to the challenges of our neighbors, and solutions will have to serve not just a few, but many.

It has never been so clear that we thrive or die *together* – dependent upon each other and how we move into the future as a world community.

At the Global Oneness Project, we understand the urgency of our times to be a sign of great collective change, including the opportunity for humanity to create new socio-political, economic, and even cognitive structures with the enduring, universal, and unifying powers of peace, compassion, empathy, and reverence. Or, in a word: *oneness*.

Historically, the term oneness has most often been used to describe a spiritual experience – the revelation that our deepest human nature is essentially interdependent with the created world as well as the divine. In oneness, we understand the fundamental equality between all parts of life, that each part has a role to play in sustaining the whole, and that life is sacred. This deep and clear awareness engenders respect, humility, and a trust in the abundance and goodness of life and other people.

Today the principles and attributes of oneness are being acknowledged in unexpected places, no longer limited to spiritual circles. Innovators in fields from economics and ecology to environmental and social justice are discovering that many of our world's natural and created systems work most efficiently and sustainably when the powers of oneness are active and consciously engaged.

As omnipresent as it is, oneness and its qualities make themselves available to each of us in our own unique ways. We might come to sense the basic non-hierarchical nature of life through our use of the Internet, which models the possibility of infinite connections and free and egalitarian exchanges of information. By volunteering at a homeless shelter we might discover the unlimited

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nature of our own generosity, how even when we feel we have nothing to offer we find that there is more to give. Joining bartering networks makes us aware of the potential for greater equality of participation in our economic structures. Growing our own food can sanctify our relationships both to the earth and to our bodies, and help us know these two seemingly separate entities are intricately and mysteriously connected.

We can become aware that many of these insights and experiences are not isolated or entirely personal, but part of an expanding understanding available to humanity about our own nature and the nature of life itself—an understanding of oneness: how all life is interdependent, how responsible we are for each other and for our shared world, and how effective we become as we look past extreme self-interest with the aim to contribute.

DO YOU KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR?

As we move into the 21st century, we need new global structures to support and sustain our growing understanding of our global community. Not structures that allow one culture to dominate the world stage, but that support and even renew individual cultural identities and value their contribution to the whole. And, of course, support our increasing respect toward all the earth's resources.

Humanity will not go back in time to when individuals or independent communities could pursue their own interests regardless of the impacts of their actions. And we can no longer turn a blind eye to the suffering around us. Our vision has already expanded; we've woken up to the reality of interdependence and need to move forward establishing the relevant world structures that support this reality.

Working with oneness is the challenge of our time.

When Mother Teresa said, "I want you to be concerned about your next door neighbor. Do you know your next door neighbor?" she was pointing to the reality of oneness and the essential role of seeing beyond ourselves in order to discover and share the resources that nourish the world.

To live and work with oneness includes acknowledging the constrictions and basic *ineffectiveness* of attitudes that emphasize "me" and "mine" as we aim to support the flow of resources where they are genuinely needed.

As we cultivate the consciousness of oneness, we see that "me" and "mine" do not have to control life. There is an arena of experience in which these concepts have a place, but are not central – an arena in which deep meaning is found when we give ourselves to a greater whole, and when we develop courage and compassion to bring our deepest inner knowing into harmony with outer world structures.

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The intelligence and wisdom within this arena do not destroy or de-value “I” but rather help the “I” find the most potent and effective ways of contributing.

There are many roadblocks to aligning with oneness, especially in the West where an emphasis on individualism and personal success has created and supported so many psychological, cultural, and economic compulsions towards self-interest.

But many of these roadblocks are part of a world we can, and must, leave behind, a world of isolation from resources that we need in order to participate in life, powerlessness based on a sense that the world “out there” has little relationship with our deepest hopes, and apathy in the face of so many global challenges, are not impediments within oneness.

By aligning ourselves with oneness, we find ourselves in a very different world – a world in which our contributions matter, where we are given what we need in order to make a difference, and where we see outer life as more flexible, more accessible, more *part of us* than we thought.

In these ways, oneness is essentially empowering, helping us build communities that facilitate the flow of all resources – including the deepest resources of love and meaning – throughout the interconnected web of life.

As we come to know and value the qualities and attributes of oneness available through our hearts, like peace, empathy, gratitude, compassion, and joy, we step into an arena that by its nature draws us further and further beyond the limitations of “me” and what “I” can offer and even cannot offer. In oneness, resources that belong to the whole of life are available to those committed to serving this whole.

In so many ways, oneness truly empowers us to realistically and effectively live Gandhi’s imperative: *Be the change you want to see in the world.*

LIVING ONENESS

You might already want to ask – What, exactly, *is* oneness? This *Living Oneness* study guide will provide a few answers to that question, but more importantly we’ll help you see that those answers have a life of their own and are already shaping many of your thoughts and actions, as well as what’s going on in the world around you.

We’ll offer stories and models we hope will help you participate more consciously in these changes. And guide you through the often confusing and sometimes subtle challenges of living oneness in a world still greatly influenced and determined by a mindset of duality, separation, and extreme individualism.

At the end of each chapter are questions to help you reflect, individually or in a group setting, on

that portion's themes and ideas, along with suggested actions to help you begin integrating them into your life.

We hope you will be inspired, as we've been, by the role of oneness in innovative community initiatives – including the radical valuing of love and respect in a gang youth program in Ecuador; a project that offers urban residents of West Oakland, California opportunities to connect with the land through growing their own food; a recycling program in Delhi that reuses every scrap of donated urban waste to care for rural poor; and a young man who harnessed the genius of Silicon Valley in a volunteer network of thousands.

Many examples in *Living Oneness* reflect how individuals who are keenly attuned to the needs around them, and are willing to relate directly with others without the boundaries of “us and them” or “have and have not,” can harness powers and opportunities and respond in ways that are enduring, sustaining, and truly creative.

As inspiring as others can be, *Living Oneness* also emphasizes that oneness is unique for everyone, and becomes activated mostly through our highly individual and heart-felt intent to move beyond self-interest and make a genuine contribution to the world around us. These intentions might arise in response to needs around you, or to inner questions like, *Is there more to life? Where do I fit in? How can I help?* And, as one of our earliest film subjects asked: *How do I need to be in order for you to be free?*

All of us have access to oneness and opportunities to use it. On a daily basis we face situations calling us to respond with insights and actions that build mutual respect, support cooperation, and reflect the truth that we really do care for each other and the environment.

But there's also a decision we need to make – a decision to accept a new degree of responsibility for the world around us. In order to help transform world structures, we need to acknowledge that we are already part of these structures, sustaining and empowering them through daily choices like what we eat, where we spend money, how we relate to others, and how we treat ourselves.

Living oneness includes bringing our own lives into alignment with oneness through ensuring that all our activities and behaviors reflect our deepest principles and hopes. The most powerful people we've met do not just cultivate a vision of a more harmonious or peaceful world, they act on that vision – standing by it again and again despite difficulties or challenges. And this willingness to express our inner values also depends on our reaching to life from the depths of our hearts. Without the most profound and human heart-felt experiences – like trust, love, compassion and reverence for the sanctity of life – our visions and our actions won't be enough to bring about lasting change. This synchronization of our heads, hearts, and hands is a profoundly effective vehicle for serving life.

In *Living Oneness* we focus largely on Western culture, ideas, and values, which as we've said are particularly oppositional to the forces of oneness and are spreading so thoroughly across the globe. But the West, with its growing unease with itself, is also an expression of oneness at work.

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Within a materialistic setting we see how empty materialism leaves us. In the richest nations, we find the inner poverty of excessive acquisition. As we acknowledge how much we have, we also come to know how much we can give.

Transformation is taking place throughout the entire world, helping humanity become more awake to our global identity as well as global destiny. By understanding oneness, aligning with its many attributes and qualities, and learning where and how they are already at work, we step into the part of ourselves where we are connected through our own nature to what we need to help oneness play its part in the renewal of our shared world.

Attributes of Oneness – I

The whole is bigger than the sum of its parts

Throughout history, oneness has been called by many names – from the Vedic *web of light* to the Tibetan *wheel of time*. It's *the Way* of Taoism and the *One God* of Islam. We've become aware of oneness through ecological interdependence as well as quantum physics. And all the while it's been present in the simplest moments of intimacy and care when we realize the depth of our connection to life, how sacred life is, and how vulnerable – and powerful – we are as human beings in a vast universe.

Oneness is a life force, a power, a consciousness, and a dimension of existence in which all life is interconnected. It is alive within each of us, and also present throughout nature. What makes it different from the simple reality of interdependence? It's consciousness – it's how we know and feel interdependence. Empathy, gratitude, humility, peace, and even joy are some ways the consciousness of oneness can be lived through human experience. Oneness isn't static – it's not just how things are. It can grow and change.

Within human beings, oneness grows as we turn away from self-interest and consider how we can serve others and fit into life as a whole. Just as our sense of who we are can change the more we see how and where we are connected to the world around us, so does oneness continually draw us into wider, deeper, and more responsible relationships, always emphasizing the shared equality and inherent value within those relationships.

The conceptual understanding of oneness has been explored in philosophical systems for centuries, as individuals have tried to identify the unifying reality underlying life's particulars and reflect that reality in moral and ethical codes. It's been part of world political systems that struggle to protect universal human rights and freedoms. It's been active in our growing environmental awareness, as we come to know the true value of nature as something other than commodity. And it drives our psychological search for wholeness, and our spiritual quest to unite the one divine source of life.

Oneness is so much a part of our personal lives that we can easily miss it, unless we catch a glimpse in “special moments” when its impact is extreme. Like when we're given help in hard

times by someone who asks nothing in return, when we feel the suffering of others as if it were our own, when we are absorbed in a magical “flow” during a creative process or a sports event, or when we have an experience of beauty or peace that seems deeply intimate but also impersonal.

But oneness is not special. It’s special that we don’t notice it more often. We always have the potential to become more aware of oneness and work with it in our private and public lives. And it has a lot to offer us, especially at this time in history.

Many of the promises of our modern world – promises of infinite natural resources and promises linking material wealth with personal happiness – have distracted us from the potentials of oneness, which point away from exploitation and self-interest and towards the power of community. At the same time, contemporary challenges – challenges that compel us to protect the earth’s resources, create stronger systems of social justice, and re-discover the meaning in life – are drawing us back toward oneness.

As we align more and more with the qualities and principles of oneness, we can strengthen our lived experience of interdependence and renew inner and outer structures – cognitive, psychological, political, economic – that have been degraded by self-interest. This process is already taking place, as individuals and groups work for global changes that serve all of us – not just a few. But becoming more aware of oneness and more skilled at working with it can play a significant role in how quickly and effectively such changes come about. A good place to start is by examining up close how oneness works in ourselves and in nature.

Within and Beyond Each Individual Part

We’ve heard the phrase a thousand times: “The whole is bigger than the sum of its parts.” And we’ve been warned not to “miss the forest for the trees.” We know there’s a bigger picture but oftentimes we’re just not sure how to see it. The consciousness of oneness recognizes this bigger picture – the dimension of life that threads through all its specific parts and creates a unity beyond the particulars.

But how can something exist within individual parts and at the same time be so much more? You could just as easily ask, *how could it not?*

We’re so used to feeling like separate individuals that we don’t pay much attention to our everyday experience of a shared reality. But think of the most basic and ongoing necessity of life – the air you breathe. Air has no boundaries and no borders. We don’t own it, and we rarely capture it for ourselves. It can even flow from one part of the world to another across the ocean, carrying traces of where it’s been. Think of the last breath of air you took in. Where did it come from? Who – human and animal – did it sustain before it reached you? Which trees have purified it? Where will it go when you release it back to the atmosphere? Who will it give life to next?

Now, think about the food you eat. What part of the world did the seeds come from? Who baked your bread? Where does your food go after it passes through your body? Will it pollute the earth or nourish it?

Our most fundamental life systems are shared, linking us to each other and the natural world in infinitely complex relationships that allow us to live as individuals while at the same time making it impossible for us to live entirely alone. And yet so many of us think and feel separate. Most of us live within a mindset that is continuously at odds with how life is.

The more we align with the consciousness of oneness, the more we come to recognize an interdependent reality. We increase our capacity to see the whole of which we are only a small part, and feel connected to a bigger process. A sense of meaning often comes with this feeling of connection and helps us know a value in life that is deeper than appearances. In turn, we respect that others play an equally important part in the whole, even if we don't fully understand it.

If you're a musician, or an athlete, or work well on a team, most likely you're familiar with the remarkable leap from a sense of personal agency to the harmony of group flow. But we're making this leap all the time and just not noticing it.

There's always a part of us in direct relationship with life around us, and often we identify ourselves with this part. Consider how you belong to a family. As part of a "family" you acknowledge each member's qualities but also recognize how each individual is part of a larger identity. Many families have a certain gestalt that seems present in each individual but also identifiable throughout generations. A family is a reality that extends across generations, through time and space, connecting individual parts into a larger – but often unspecific and indescribable – whole.

This sense of a whole beyond individual parts can extend even further. It can include specific communities as well as entire nations. Consider someone from New York City and someone from a village in Burkino Faso, West Africa. There are qualities of being a New Yorker that are infused in most people who have lived in that city for a number of years, and yet they are often expressed uniquely through each individual. A person from Burkino Faso carries a very different set of attributes. Then consider someone from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, or Amsterdam in the Netherlands.

Depending on our interests and on the relationships we value, our sense of self can expand further and further, from identifying with a personal family, to a family that includes the animal world, to a family that is integrated into a particular ecosystem, to a family that includes people on the other side of the globe. In his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke about a "brotherhood" unlimited by racial divisions. And consider this excerpt from Maya Angelou's poem *Human Family*:

*We seek success in Finland,
are born and die in Maine.
In minor ways we differ,
in major we're the same.*

*I note the obvious differences
between each sort and type,
but we are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.¹*

And some don't stop there. The great physicist Stephen Hawkins encourages us to connect even further, beyond life on this planet. "To confine our attention to terrestrial matters would be to limit the human spirit," he says, suggesting it's up to us how deep and how far we want to acknowledge our belonging.

The consciousness of oneness is not a metaphor for connection, it *is* connection. It isn't a metaphor for sustenance, it *sustains us*. We are already whole, held, and part of something much bigger than ourselves. We just need to recognize it.

Everything Has a Part to Play

As we look at life through a lens of oneness, do we lose sight of individuality? On the contrary, just as a consciousness of oneness sees and values the patterns and needs of an entire system, it also recognizes the intrinsic value of each individual part. Nothing is excluded. Or, as John Muir said:

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything in the universe.

Juan Manuel Carrion, a biologist and ornithologist, has studied and painted birds for over 30 years. When we met him in Quito, Ecuador, he described how everything in nature has its purpose, and no single purpose is more important than another:

*There is a great lesson I've learned from nature, from the birds, the insects, from the ecosystems:
The awareness that everything has its reason to exist in nature, nothing is redundant; nothing is insignificant. A spider is as important as a dragonfly, an insect, a bird, a mammal, or a huge tree.
Perhaps a tiny plant has a specific and important function that makes it as important as a giant tree. This is the awareness that everything has its purpose and nothing is insignificant because everything has its own value.*

The natural world provides a powerful reflection of the realities of oneness. In fact, it was

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1 "Human Family, by Maya Angelou from: *I Shall Not Be Moved*. Random House, 1990, p. 5
(Listen to her read the entire poem online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCK6soirfmg>)

environmentalists in the nineteen-seventies and nineteen-eighties who ushered the term *interdependence* so strongly into our collective consciousness, using this ecological understanding as a foundation for a conservation advocacy. Natural resource management, it was made clear, had to take into consideration how integrated life is, how one extinct species can negatively affect an entire ecosystem, and thus affect human life as well. Few of us had heard the term “interdependence” (or heard of the northern spotted owl) before ecologists began talking about ecosystems, and the dangers of ignoring this holistic perspective.

Ideas about interdependence and the equal value of all parts of life ring true on a deep instinctual level. Equality is about inherent value, not achievement, skill-sets, or how much we contribute. Ask an ethicist how we should decide who lives and who dies, and the answer usually comes out in numbers – saving more people is more important than who, in particular, we save. Ask a mother to choose which of her children is more valuable than the others, and this fundamental equality is immediately evident. The founding fathers of the United States made sure that the Declaration of Independence clearly iterated this fundamental principle that “All men are created equal under God,” a direct rebuttal to the prevailing political theory that gave divine rights to a king, separating royalty from the rest of humanity.

But human value is not the only value relevant in oneness. From the perspective of oneness, equality and purpose are not human-centric. In his classic *Sand County Almanac*, conservationist Aldo Leopold explains how a holistic perspective recognizes the value of all the smallest parts:

Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land. By land is meant all of the things on, over, or in the earth. Harmony with land is like harmony with a friend; you cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left. That is to say, you cannot love game and hate predators; you cannot conserve the waters and waste the ranges; you cannot build the forest and mine the farm...

The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant: “What good is it?” If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the biota, in the course of aeons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.²

Our “tinkering” has largely lost its intelligence, and the world has lost thousands of plant and animal species in the last 500 years. But it’s not too late to bring back the wisdom Leopold’s pointing to.

There are many ways we can live with the awareness of life’s inherent value in the private and public sphere. Ecological conservation is an obvious arena. The way we choose food is also relevant – we might limit ourselves to eggs from free-range chickens, or beef from cows that are well cared for or grass-fed. Some spiritual practitioners stand against killing animals or using

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 2 Leopold, Aldo, *Round River*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, pp. 145-146

animal products, vegans eat no animal products at all, and animal rights activists struggle for changes in public policy that reflect a non-human-centric valuing of life.

In 2008, Ecuador became the first nation to grant rights to nature, guaranteeing that nature “has the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions and its processes in evolution.”³ And in 2009, the Spanish parliament even passed a resolution to grant Great Apes some human rights.

In these actions and approaches, you see the dissolution of boundaries and distinctions that separate out humans from other life forms and place humans higher in a value hierarchy. Oneness doesn’t demand these actions, but does compel us to look at boundaries we’ve erected between us and others and question their foundations and even their relevance.

SACRED

As we become less focused on boundaries and hierarchies, we open ourselves to the direct experience of beauty, timelessness, and sacredness within life itself. A lack of awareness of life’s sacredness keeps us feeling distant, and allows us to use the earth’s resources for our own ends. But the more we see and know through oneness, the less likely we are to shield ourselves from the natural and powerful reverence for the earth and the more likely we’ll recognize the sanctity of life.

This doesn’t mean we will become vegetarians or stop killing the weeds in our gardens. It just means that we carry the awareness of life’s sacredness with us and allow it to inform our lives. It might mean that we choose to boycott animal products, but it also might mean that every time we eat meat or put on our leather shoes we consciously acknowledge how we came to benefit from these animals, and perhaps express gratitude.

In this regard we can learn a great deal from indigenous cultures, many of which sustain a vision of life’s inherent sacredness while still benefiting from life’s many resources. Historical and current practices that express gratitude for game, or even request permission to use the earth’s resources, show that there are ways to benefit from nature and still maintain relationships of respect and gratitude. The Penan – a tribal people currently struggling to survive in a shrinking Borneo rainforest – live by the principle of *molong*, which means, “taking only what is needed.”

Humility, gratitude, and reverence are integrated into the consciousness of oneness. Such attitudes can help us enter into a direct relationship with life – a relationship of respect in which we are not higher or lower, but equal. And they help us relate to life with conscious recognition of how we are provided for by this planet and by the many people who have worked to feed us. Such attitudes keep us from feeling distant from the many ways life sustains us, and bring us closer to the real

3 See “The Emancipated Earth” by Kari Volkmann-Carisen in *Utne Reader*, May-June 2009, online: <http://www.utne.com/Environment/Emancipated-Earth-Ecuador-Land-Nature-Rights.aspx>

nourishment of life.

Small shifts of consciousness often help us wake up to vast new experiences. And remarkably, when we shift into these new experiences, many of the problems born from the old mindset become irrelevant or easily resolved.

Consider the impact if our global population were to suddenly live by this one simple principle of *molong* – to take only what is needed. How would it affect your individual life? How would it affect species extinction? CO₂ emissions? How would it alter the distribution of wealth in your community, country and the world?

Feeling Connected

Most of us hope to experience deeper and more meaningful connections with life. So why does this depth often seem so elusive? One of the simplest and most obvious reasons is that “feeling connected” has to do with *feeling*. And despite modern trends in familiarity and casualness (remember, hugging is the new handshake) most of us aren’t comfortable in the often-unsettling landscape of our feeling senses.

But whether we admit it or not, it’s usually the power of feeling that drives a lot of our life decisions, from romantic partners to career choices. And underneath the socially accepted cool that we bring to the office and put on social events, we’re fueled by the need for raw experience. We don’t want to understand love; we want to *feel* love. We don’t want to only study peace; we want to *feel* peace. We don’t want to see ourselves as part of a community; we want to *feel* part of a community.

As soon as we stop dismissing our feeling intelligence as weakness and neediness, we’ll be taking a step into the heart of oneness.

Feeling never lets us forget that we share the world. Compassion and empathy – our ability to truly feel for others – are some of the most powerful manifestations of the consciousness of oneness. When we are really touched by a person in need, our concern draws us into his or her world so quickly it’s as though we were never separate.

Credo Mutwa, a Zulu elder from South Africa, describes *ubuntu* – a deep philosophy found all over Africa – as a feeling experience linking all human beings together. Ubuntu is so fundamental, it is “simply the way of the human being,” he says. Mutwa explains:

When people feel for each other and feel with each other, when people are connected across large tracts of land in ways that one cannot put into English, that’s ubuntu. The feeling with each other,

the feeling for each other. It's not a mystery, it's something plain and simple.

It might be plain and simple in parts of Africa, but in cultures that have elevated reason, rationality, and social coolness above feeling, emotion, and instinct it's quite a leap to believe that our human nature is fundamentally linked to feeling.

We only have to look back on the 2009 hearings of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor and the controversy that arose over her emphasis on empathy as an aspect of judicial decision-making to see how uncomfortable American society is with the power of subjective “feeling.” Public outcry over Sotomayor’s suggestion that personal experience and cultural heritage might play a role in the Supreme Court pressured a quick and unequivocal retraction by Sotomayor, who then emphasized the court’s essential “objectivity.”

The episode reflected that many of us tend to juxtapose “objectivity” with “feeling,” and fear that the latter drops us into a morass of unintelligent and unproductive experience from which no clarity can ever emerge. But feeling is not the end of reason, or the emotional morass many fear. Feeling has a unique and direct intelligence that opens us to life, people, and events and can even help us remain clear-headed.⁴

Consider the origins of the word *empathy*. It was first coined in the 1880s by a German psychologist from the German word *einführung*, which translates as “feeling into.” Empathy refers to being *in* the feeling state of another. Yet, as Carl Rogers, a 20th century humanistic psychologist, explains, while this state mysteriously opens us to another we remain grounded in our own experience. Within the context of psychotherapy, he describes:

*To sense the client's private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the “as if” quality... To sense the client's anger or fear, as if it were your own, yet without your own anger, fear, or confusion getting bound up in it.*⁵

George Lakoff, cognitive science professor at UC Berkeley, and author of *The Political Mind*, links empathy to the heart of democratic society:

Empathy extends well beyond feeling to understanding, and it extends beyond individuals to

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4 See Psychiatric News, March 3, 2006: “Consciousness Continues to Baffle Psychoanalysts” by Joan Arehart-Treichel:

Feelings are not the same as emotions, but are rather composite perceptions about things, situations, or people. For example, a person might say, “I’m not feeling very well today” or “I just don’t feel that that house is the right one for us.” In fact, an individual can have a feeling about an emotion he or she has experienced. Also, “You have parts of the brain that lead to emotional states and parts of the brain that lead to feelings about these states,” and the two may be different.

View online: <http://pn.psychiatryonline.org/content/41/5/13.1.full>

5 See *The Carl Rogers Reader*, edited by Howard Kirschenbaum and Valerie Land Henderson. Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1989, p. 226

*groups, communities, peoples, even species. Empathy is at the heart of real rationality, because it goes to the heart of our values, which are the basis of our sense of justice.*⁶

Empathy cuts through the seeming boundaries of time, space, and “otherness.” If we are committed to becoming more aware of what is really going on around us, we need to value instinctual and emotional feeling and experiences – like empathy – that paradoxically allow the direct impact of events without compromising our capacity for distance.

GROUND FOR ACTION

Unmediated by reason or self-doubt, feelings guide us in actions that we know are important. In the imperative of feeling, we don’t need numbers, polls, or other evidence to assess our actions. Which is good, because often there’s no time for all the research to be completed.

Much of the wisdom we need in order to live more in tune with life around us presents itself through our feeling intelligence. Generally people feel good when they recycle, feel empowered through volunteering in their community, feel they are part of a community when purchasing local goods. And many are saddened by the meaninglessness of their lives, enraged over the injustices of the world, and shocked by the destruction of the environment.

Maybe you’ve seen that bumper sticker: “If you’re not enraged you’re not paying attention.” But what do you do after you become enraged? Are you willing to change how you live based on those feelings?

Feelings are so personal and so changeable that we tend to think they cannot support the enduring structures needed to guide our community lives. But some of our deepest feelings are so much the ground of our lives that to deny them a place in the “outer” world also seems inappropriate. Compassion, love, altruism, peace, for example, are so important to us and so much a part of who we are that we undoubtedly serve global society by our willingness to stand by them. Who of us does not deserve the opportunity to live in peace? To feel loved? To have the satisfaction of contributing to society?

Jeremy Rifkin, author of *The Empathic Civilization*, and president of the Foundation of Economic Trends, goes so far as to suggest that empathy is a critical aspect of our future – if we are to have one. In his 2010 article “The Empathic Civilization: Rethinking Human Nature in the Biosphere Era,” he points to recent advances in science that suggest empathy and connectivity have a lot to offer the future:

Biologists and cognitive neuroscientists are discovering mirror-neurons – the so-called empathy

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See Huffington Post, May 30 1990: “Empathy, Sotomayor, and Democracy: The Conservative Stealth Strategy,” by George Lakoff, online: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/empathy-sotomayor-and-dem_b_209406.html

neurons – that allow human beings and other species to feel and experience another’s situation as if it were one’s own. We are, it appears, the most social of animals and seek intimate participation and companionship with our fellows.

Social scientists, in turn, are beginning to reexamine human history from an empathic lens and, in the process, discovering previously hidden strands of the human narrative which suggests that human evolution is measured not only by the expansion of power over nature, but also by the intensification and extension of empathy to more diverse others across broader temporal and spatial domains. The growing scientific evidence that we are a fundamentally empathic species has profound and far-reaching consequences for society, and may well determine our fate as a species.

Rifkin holds that developing our empathic consciousness is what’s needed in order to deal with peak oil, climate change, and other global challenges. This isn’t an impossible task – we only need to look and see what’s really taking place in the world, allow ourselves to care, and articulate our feelings through behavior and policy changes. We need to acknowledge that life actually *matters* to us.

Feelings can be like a compass capable of directing our actions. And just as important, they give us access to many of the hidden qualities in our relationship to life that are not tangible through our intellect – like meaning, wholeness, and a sense of well-being.

When the Global Oneness Project traveled through Australia, we met Bob Randall, a Yankunytjatjara elder, whose appreciation and respect for the natural world was not a concept or an ideal, but a deeply felt experience, confirming for us that feeling can deliver the deepest sense of meaning when we let it. He sat outside his home at the base of Ayers Rock, watching the birds in the willows, the lizards step out of the shade, the clouds pass overhead. Despite being part of the “stolen generation” of children taken from their families and forced through a government school system, Randall has maintained a traditional indigenous worldview of respect for every part of nature and the cosmos. With wide eyes and an ecstatic chuckle, he describes how it feels to live so closely with the land:

If you’re alive, you connect to everything else that is alive... You feel that! You feel that so well! You can never feel lonely in that situation. You just can’t. How can you when all around you are family members? It is a beautiful way of being. It doesn’t push anyone out but it brings everybody in. And the completeness of being who you are, where you are, is a really good feeling. It’s a beautiful feeling!

Self-Organization

Discovering oneness can be a huge relief. It’s like trying to row a boat across a windy sea, and discovering one day that there’s a sail rolled up under the seat.

This is because there are forces in life trying to make life better. Life is actually working *for* the

changes many of us long for – a more peaceful world, social and political structures that better reflect equality and justice, and a more sacred relationship to the earth. And this makes sense, since when we see from a point of view of oneness, we see that we *are* life.

The consciousness of oneness shows us that life’s patterns shift and change, that harmony establishes itself with an ever-increasing variety of notes, and balance emerges out of imbalance. And it shows how humanity can play a part in these processes.

For centuries, various models have pointed to a dynamic interplay between life’s forces and human needs, and the ways they can be synchronized to bring about health, balance, and new growth. And not just religious models that require us to have faith in a remote or omniscient divinity – but models that have been tested through science and through experience, like Hippocrates’ system of natural healing that used simple methods to align with the body’s own power to restore balance and vitality. Or Taoism in ancient China, which developed a practical philosophy to help individuals – and governments – align with *the Way* of the universe to bring about the greater good.

Is it a stretch to think that in our modern world we can learn to sense and respond to energies already working toward balance and harmony? Not according to physicists and biologists who – like their ancient predecessors – paint a picture of life as self-organizing.

Self-organization is a term used to describe complex systems that naturally move toward higher levels of organization. Think of an ecosystem and the ways it maintains its own health. Consider any development in evolution, from sub-cellular to planetary, and you will see self-organization at work. Scottish moral philosopher and economics pioneer Adam Smith believed self-organization occurred under particular market conditions. He used the term “invisible hand” to describe how the power of self-interest can spontaneously and unintentionally bring about changes for the public good.⁷

Mysteriously, self-organizing systems can give rise to what scientists call *emergent properties*, new aspects of the system that are too advanced to be reduced to the sum of their parts, in the way that the light of a light bulb cannot be reduced to the three components of the bulb itself. Or the way the beautiful symmetry of snowflakes and crystals is not seen in their molecular bonds or electric fields. Or in the *Möbius strip*, a strip of paper that becomes mysteriously one sided after the ends are twisted and taped together.

Social scientists discuss emergence in the context of the stock market, the Internet, group activity and human consciousness, all of which show developmental leaps in how people interrelate. Today scientists, naturalists and mystics are using emergence theories to support the idea of a “global brain,” which reflects a collective intelligence leading the entire human and planetary

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7 See Smith, Adam, *The Wealth of Nations*, Book IV, 5th Edition, Edwin Cannan, editor. Methuen & Co., London, 1904

system toward growth.

Emergence appears to contradict one of the most fundamental laws of nature – the second law of thermodynamics, which states that the universe is basically running down or deteriorating. Emergence heads in the other direction, reassuring us that order comes out of disorder, and patterns are created from randomness.

Ideas of self organization and emergence make sense within the consciousness of oneness, which helps us know that growth happens naturally, and shows us how to interact with the forces of growth for the greater good. One of Hippocrates' fundamental methods of healing – methods that are also the basis of modern Homeopathy – was rest and immobilization. And Lao Tzu, the great Taoist, recommended a form of “non-doing” as the basis for human relationships with human and natural systems:

*Thus the wise man deals with things through wu-wei and teaches through no-words. The ten thousand things flourish without interruption. They grow by themselves, and no one possesses them.*⁸

Wu-wei is translated as “non-doing” but it’s not just “tuning out;” it’s the gentle work of bringing consciousness and actions into alignment with life’s own energies. But the key is to keep remembering that life is self-organizing – it doesn’t need our *over*-involvement, but maybe just the “intelligent tinkering” Aldo Leopold referred to earlier.

This subtle re-alignment is not terribly hard work – but it requires that we learn to relax, to open, to listen, and not-do. Maybe it requires that we un-learn some of the habits we’ve picked up over the last centuries – habits of over-involvement, or habits that demand from and dominate life.

In some cultures, self-organization is naturally a part of the understanding of how life works, and is especially respected as a part of sacred ceremony. Pansy Hawk Wing, a Lakota Sioux leader, describes how self-organization includes human participation during the Sun Dance ceremony:

At the Sun Dance there’s maybe three to four hundred people camped. Ten days before the ceremony nothing is done, nothing is started. We show up and people kind of know what they do best. And they go, and they get it done. There are people who chop wood, there are people who prepare the arbor, there are people who prepare the sweat lodges, people who get the food, people who get the stones. We don’t have a manager! We don’t have a director! Each component just starts happening, then it sort of comes together.

I know the structure of the ceremony, I know that, but when I go to do the ceremony I have no idea what direction it’s going to go... You allow things to open out, like a flower. And you don’t know what direction this petal’s going to go, or where that petal’s going to go. That’s the mystery, that’s

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8 Lao Tze, *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 2

the beauty...⁹

During spiritual ceremony of many kinds, individuals are aware that something beyond them is playing a determining role in what – if anything – emerges.

But the idea of ‘something beyond’ doesn’t have to be limited to special times or cultures. Ecologists and other scientists are pointing out that self-organization and emergence are simply aspects of how life works. What happens around us and even within us is not entirely up to us. It sounds so basic, but many of us have forgotten that we are not in control and we are not entirely alone.

Understanding and respecting life’s self-organizing nature is key as we align ourselves with oneness. Oneness is more than us; it depends on and can be nurtured by our attentiveness and our contribution, but because it works for the whole of life, it generally has a purpose beyond our own interests. Life circumstances always have the potential to include us, rather than be dominated by us, to reveal something new, rather than just deliver what we expect.

Chapter 1 Exercises

1. What does oneness mean to you? What other words would you substitute for “oneness” if this doesn’t characterize your experiences?
2. When have you been aware of oneness in your life? What were you doing? What made it feel like oneness?
3. Oneness includes everything, from human to non-human. How does it feel to be identified with everything that exists? Do you feel threatened? Diminished? Enhanced?
4. When we see life with the consciousness of oneness, do we risk losing anything? Our individuality? Our uniqueness? Or, are such things enhanced?
5. *Molong* – a way of life for the Penan tribal people in the Borneo rain forest – means “taking only what is needed.” In what ways would your lifestyle change if you lived by that principle? How might it feel? How different might your community or country look if the entire society lived that way?

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9 Hart, Hilary, *The Unknown She*, Chapter 2, In Relation, Golden Sufi Center Publishing, Inverness, California, 2003, pp. 90-91

6. What do you think of the statement, “Life is actually working for the changes many of us long for...”? Do you believe life has such a plan or will? Or, do you feel life is mechanical or random?
7. Science is finding life to be self-organizing in that complex systems are naturally moving toward higher levels of organization. Do you think it’s possible or plausible for individual and/or collective consciousness to also be increasing in such a way?
8. Do you consider the earth sacred? If yes, do you feel all of it is sacred, or only part of it? Can you identify those aspects or inhabitants that don’t feel sacred?
9. How far does your sense of identity extend? To your family? Ethnic group? Team? School? Country? World? Universe? What else?
10. *Ubuntu* implies feeling connected to all other human beings. Try spending an hour, or a day, practicing ubuntu. How did it feel? Was there any part of the experience that you want to incorporate into your ongoing life?
11. Try practicing *molong* (“taking only what is needed”) in your daily life – while eating out, shopping, etc. What is your experience?
12. Practice living in the moment with a feeling of complete gratitude. Do you notice any changes in your relationships to people and your surroundings?
13. Think of the last breath you took in. Where did it come from? Can you imagine whom it sustained before you? Where it will go after you exhale? Now think about the food you eat. Where did it come from? Can you think of all the people involved in getting it to you? Can you think back further to the water that fell as rain that sustained the animals, or the plants that grew the seeds? Can you imagine consciousness being connected in the same way as the water and air and food? What makes us feel separate?
14. Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist monk, uses the term *interbeing* to describe the interdependence of existence. He offers this teaching as an example:

Holding up a piece of paper in one hand, he asks us to imagine all of the elements that make up the piece of paper: the pulp from the tree; the soil, the water, and the sunshine that fed the tree; the glue and the dye and the chemicals that were used to make the paper. He explains how the piece of paper is the tree; it was in the tree all along; it was in the seed of the tree all along. It was in the soil and sunlight that nourished the tree.

If you could see deeply enough into the nature of things, you could see the piece of paper in the

river water that fed the roots of the tree. You could see it in the glue and the dye and chemicals that were mixed with the pulp to make the paper. Is the paper soil? Is it the tree? Is it glue, or dye? No, but without any one of these parts of the paper – stretching all the way back to the seed, the rain, the clouds, the sky, the sun – we would not have this sheet of paper. Even the person who ran the machine that mixed the pulp with the glue is in this piece of paper, and his parents, and his family, and his thoughts and feelings.

Then Thich Nhat Hanh lights a match and holds it to the paper. We watch it burn. He asks, “Where is the paper now? Where is the tree? Where is the sunlight? Where is the man? Have they become smoke? Are they these few ashes?...And now, where is the smoke? The air is clear. Is the smoke those clouds? Is the paper the blue sky? Is the tree the air we are breathing?”

Attributes of Oneness – II

The best things in life are free

Free and Abundant

When did we stop believing that “the best things in life are free”?

The part of us that is aware of the reality of interdependence never did. It knows that life is set up for us to give to it and receive from it continuously and unconditionally. This fundamental network of exchange is essentially nourishing – the earth has plenty of resources to support its members, resources flow naturally in response to need, and imbalances resolve toward balance and wholeness.

Abundance is not a utopian dream – it’s a reality. At the same time, it’s one of the most difficult concepts to accept in the context of the modern world. If there are plentiful resources, then why are so many of us poor? Why do people starve? How can it be that what we need is free, when so many of us can’t even afford food and shelter? It’s like asking – if our bodies really *do* know how to heal themselves, why don’t they?

In chapter 2, we will look a bit more closely at specific attributes of oneness, focusing on how we’ve distanced ourselves from some of the most basic qualities of life because we tend to see life through a lens of separation, conflict and duality. When we align ourselves with the consciousness of oneness, many of the shadows that darken our experience of life disappear and we can come to relate to life more realistically.

Abundance is a good starting point because few of us genuinely experience the essential richness of life. But is the problem in life or in how we relate to life? Just as abundance exists, so do many ways of thinking and behaving that don’t recognize or support it. As Gandhi said: “There is sufficiency in the world for man’s need, but not for his greed.”

Could it be as simple as that there are plenty of resources, that healing is natural, that life itself is a living network guiding what’s needed to where it can help – but it’s our own greed that inhibits these process?

Greed, self-interest, short-sightedness, self-indulgence, competition – there are many ways individuals secure more than they need or limit where resources would naturally flow. After all, how many of us really eat healthy food, exercise, and get enough sleep? Do we allow ecosystems space to re-generate? It might be greed or it might be laziness, or even evolutionary conditioning, but there are many ways humanity impedes a natural and creative evolutionary process.

It's not just our personal habits. In the West, we live within a complex multi-dimensional matrix of physical, cognitive and socio-political structures that work on a moment-to-moment basis to restrict the flow of life's resources and limit our capacity to receive what's available. Interdependence is a fact of life. But it's up to us to bring our individual energies and social structures into alignment with it.

Most of us allow our lives to be shaped and defined by models that stress scarcity, competition, and individualism. We live in housing that accentuates our personal space more than community space, making it hard for our neighbors to even know when we are in need, let alone help us, and vice versa. We throw excess food into the garbage in one part of the country and even our town, while people go hungry in another. Our market economy convinces us that what is most scarce is most valuable, and traps us into believing that what we need most is only available at the mall.

It's no wonder we don't believe that the best things in life are free. In a commercialized culture, there is little acknowledgment that what's "free" has value.

But just because we live in a polluted city, it doesn't mean that clean air isn't available in the village a hundred miles away. Living in smoggy cities contributes to our forgetting how clean the air can be. And we develop asthma, or other allergies that make simple breathing dangerous or problematic.

Similarly, the restrictions – cognitive, financial, social, political – that limit our capacity to know the abundance of life put up roadblocks to our giving and receiving of resources, and contribute to a deep inner malaise and feeling of lack. It's a vicious circle.

When we met Orland Bishop, a Guyana-born mentor and community leader who works in some of the poorest and most violent neighborhoods in Watts, near Los Angeles, he explained that slavery is worse today than it was in the 17th century because individuals are given rights to participate in society, but our economic system undermines these rights by pitting us against each other in a competitive struggle and granting the ability to accumulate resources to those who have them already. Bishop asked us to consider:

How many people live in a world where the world no longer matters because they have no money? They can't participate whether it's within a democracy or they can't participate because it's within any other form of economic process because they lack the basic means of participation...people expect to participate but can't. People expect to experience a world of oneness and can't.

Developing alternative economies that actually support equal participation and the flow of resources to the greatest need – as some are doing with non-currency systems like barter and trade (think about the speedy rise in popularity of *The Freecycle Network*) – is one way to live abundance. Others include things we can do on a daily basis, like making sure we recycle and don't waste what we have, giving excess away instead of throwing it into landfills, and spending time and money on community projects.

But we also need to shift to an abundance mindset, which offers its own guidance for problem solving. For example, in our current mindset based on competition and scarcity, we often see shortage and scarcity as a problem. But from a point of view of abundance, we might consider the over-abundance and uneven distribution of resources the real problem. Issues of shortage and lack will naturally be resolved when we look at where we have *too much*, and dissolve structures that allow the hoarding or blockage of resources at that location, in the same way that an acupuncturist might unblock an energy point on the body so energy can flow to the vulnerable spot where it's needed.

Or, as Gandhi suggested, we recognize greed as a problem and work to dismantle the systems that encourage and support it.

ABUNDANCE AND SCARCITY

Oneness helps us see that contrary to appearances, scarcity and abundance are not always in opposition to each other. In fact, they can exist together at the same time – remember, a glass can be either half-full or half-empty, depending on your point of view and maybe on what we are going to do with what's in the glass. While our world does have limited resources, and it makes sense to be aware of such limitations, often abundance and scarcity are labels we use to identify issues of need and opportunity. But many of our labels are subjective. What is scarce for one is sometimes abundant for another.

And sometimes what seems like scarcity can even help us become aware of abundance. Most of us take it for granted that “necessity breeds invention” and we've heard bosses telling us to “do more with less.” These are common reminders that limitations often inspire us to discover that we have more than we thought, or to find creative ways to work with what we already have.

This is one of the most important lessons we can learn from indigenous cultures, many of which have lived this way for centuries, surviving times of natural disasters like drought, or social upheavals such as war and forced relocation. Societies like the Pacific Northwest Coast Native Americans emphasize a continual exchange of resources designed to support all members. Sharing and giving are key socio-political structures, active despite how scarce resources become. Rebecca Adamson, a Cherokee and founder of First Nations Development Institute explains:

An indigenous system is based on prosperity, creation, kinship, and a sense of enough-ness. It is designed for sharing. Potlatches, give-aways – these involve deliberately accumulating wealth as a person or as a family or as a clan for the sole purpose of giving it away. The potlatch or the give-away takes place at very specific times of life – birth, naming ceremonies, puberty. Often, if you receive a gift during a potlatch, you are then obligated, at some point in the future, to give a gift. That puts in motion a continual, ongoing requirement for redistribution.

In many indigenous cultures power comes from giving, a reversal of a Western worldview. “You can’t get high status unless you give gifts,” explains Adamson. In such cultures, it is an obligation to share. “So you design an economic system with an emphasis on sharing.”¹

Asian countries like Japan and China, which have historically been much more collectivist than the West, rely on reciprocity as a means of maintaining social harmony and wealth distribution. In China, a common saying goes: “You honor me with one foot, I honor you with ten.”

Often we live this way only in our most intimate relationships within our small circle of friends and family, and within some tight-knit ethnic groups. In American Amish communities, for example, private and public insurance (like Social Security) aren’t allowed, because they would reduce community interdependence. And as with the Native American culture referred to by Adamson, individual success is tightly tied to service to family and church community.² In such groups, when times get tough individuals reach out to loved ones for help, and take care of others in return.

And in many groups – families or cultures – the greater the need, the more we are willing to sacrifice. It’s remarkable if you think about it – often the greater the need, the more we find to give. And when one community member will not offer to help, we often regard that person as being problematic, since it’s simply natural to give to others.

As we move through the 21st century coming to terms with the wide-scale loss of resources and the impending challenges of energy scarcity, it can help to ground ourselves in the often-untapped human capacity for generosity. This means fully acknowledging real-world limitations while at the same time strengthening our capacity to give.

As simple as it sounds, a great deal of change can take place with just a small shift in awareness. But this shift requires not only that we give up some things, but that we accept others – including a greater degree of responsibility.

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1 See Yes Magazine, “Age Old Wisdom for the New Economy” by Sarah van Gelder and Rebecca Adamson, online: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/the-new-economy/age-old-wisdom-for-the-new-economy>

2 Peterson, Anna Lisa, *Seeds of the Kingdom: Utopian Communities in the Americas*. Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 37

Responsibility

When we see life through a lens of oneness, our self-centered habits recede to reveal the many ways we are connected to and influencing life around us. These insights can be shocking.

Not only can we feel self-protective or afraid of losing what makes us safe and secure, but we're also intimidated by the responsibilities that come with recognizing how we depend on others and how others depend on us. And understandably so. Ask a parent about how things changes when a new life is in their hands and you'll hear some horror stories. But you'll also hear about how life has never felt so real.

Oneness is a double-edged sword. It gives us what we need, but it can ask a lot from us.

You might recall the 1989 Steven Soderbergh movie called *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* in which Ann, a principle character, begins contemplating – for the first time in her life – where all her garbage is taken every week. She tells her therapist, “All week I’ve just been thinking about garbage. I just can’t stop thinking about it...I’ve gotten real concerned over what’s going to happen with all the garbage. We’ve got so much of it. We’re going to run out of places to put this stuff eventually.”

This fundamentally new relationship with her garbage changes this character entirely, awakening an unsettling sense of responsibility. And the movie hit the collective consciousness of the United States at a time when it could make a big impact on others too, raising awareness and concern about otherwise unconscious daily habits that were fundamentally unsustainable.

In 2004, Brian Steidle, a 27-year-old former Marine Corps captain, went to Darfur as a U.S. military observer. As an “observer” he was only there to witness. But when he saw the wide-scale violence, he couldn't just watch any more. Witnessing the genocide up close changed his life-course:

I had gone hoping we could make a difference monitoring the cease-fire but there was no cease-fire at all. Our reports weren't getting to the right people. I was more and more frustrated with my inability to get things done. So, I quit and came home. I wanted to forget what was happening and just watch the coverage on CNN, but there was no one covering it. No one knew what was going on. No one had shared the information. It's become a mission of mine to make people aware.³

Responsibility is how we are moved and challenged. Without feelings of responsibility, we often stay concerned mostly with what we need and what we want. Accepting responsibility opens a door to life that is dynamic and changing, that draws us into deeper relationships and even reveals more of who we are by forcing us to discover qualities and resources we didn't know we had.

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3 Steidle, Brian, as quoted in the Idaho Mountain Express article by Dana Dugan, “Ex-marine brings attention to world crisis.” Wednesday, March 14, 2007, online: http://www.mtexpress.com/index2.php?issue_date=03-14-2007&ID=2005114493

Many of us long for more nourishing relationships, greater fulfillment, and a deeper sense of purpose and connection. But all these are inextricably tied to seeing past our self-focus and stepping into an arena beyond “me.”

“WE SEE YOU”

Opening our eyes changes our lives – and there’s a lot to see and change. It’s not only the big issues like genocide in Darfur that matter. We can participate more responsibly in every moment. This is what Orland Bishop teaches the kids he mentors in Watts, and he encourages them toward taking responsibility every time they meet another person.

Bishop explains that the traditional Zulu greeting *sawubona*, used in many areas of Africa, is literally translated as “We see you.” But this “seeing” is not a one-way-street; it is a dialogue that always encourages the response, *yabo*, “Yes, we see you too.”

It also implies the inquiry, “If we are seeing each other, why are we here at the same time? What has this moment of time given us to do?”

The possibility that every meeting has a purpose is more like common sense in cultures that recognize and emphasize interdependence. In cultures where autonomy, willpower, and independence are emphasized, we don’t instinctively look for meaning through daily or ordinary relationships, as we assume meaning comes from reaching the goals of our own directed actions.

But through the attitudes behind *sawubona*, every meeting carries the relevancy of deep connection with life itself. “Ultimately we are here to co-create a shared reality,” says Bishop. “A reality based on the initiative of giving – giving from ourselves to each other. Every moment brings an ability that helps us fulfill something in ourselves and to share something with others.”

Sharing with others is a reality of oneness. Nobody is alone. We all need, and we all give. It’s not just a way of seeing life, but how life is.

When asked how he encourages youth to be more available to each moment, Bishop emphasizes a four-fold approach, including the development of empathy toward others, the healing of wounds that inhibit our contributions, an increased awareness of our own gifts – which obligates us to give to the world – and the continual enhancement of our sense of possibility within each encounter.

While Bishop’s approach is grounded in Zulu principles, it has a lot to offer anyone wishing to step into more of an active and responsible relationship with life. At the core of *sawubona* is the understanding that we are greeting life continually. Our “hello” is already an opening and a responsibility for what follows. The more we consciously accept our responsibilities, the more engaged and effective we become.

Which brings us to the power of service.

Power of Service

Every time we step beyond the sphere of self-interest and extend our awareness across personal boundaries we are given access to otherwise unattainable ideas, attitudes, and energy. Which is critical, because we need them.

But this access isn't entirely without conditions. Attitudes and behaviors based on greed, extreme self-interest, and unwillingness to participate all create restrictions that divert resources back to one individual destination in the way a river eddy holds a pool of water from the larger flow. This is not a moral or ethical issue, necessarily, simply an aspect of how oneness works and doesn't work.

In contrast, when we are awake to the needs of others, we are more likely to be able to consciously serve a larger process. By "serve" we don't mean huge projects or un-ending generosity. As Mother Teresa said, "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one." You don't need to be a saint to engage the power of oneness; you just need to play your part.

Because it can be subtle and not usually the first tool we reach for in our individualistic culture, we often forget about the power of working with others. But there's a hidden power that becomes available when we take a step toward service. Even current research shows that real power has more to do with modesty and empathy – tools we need in order to cooperate with others – than with force and coercion. Often we really are much more effective in our efforts when we consciously work with people and life circumstances instead of against them.⁴

Brahm Ahmadi's story reflects the power of being of service. We met the 34-year-old native of East Los Angeles and co-founder of the "People's Grocery" in West Oakland, California, while he was distributing food packages to local residents.

When Ahmadi moved to West Oakland after college, it had 53 liquor stores and no grocery store and many people in the neighborhood lived in poverty, suffering from diseases related to poor diet. Ahmadi worked with two partners to develop a comprehensive food system including an inner-city community organic gardening and local cooking classes to bring people together, make connections with the land and the food-growing process, and encourage self-care.

In a short time, the changes appear deep and lasting. People are eating better, getting healthier, learning how to care for the land, themselves, and each other, and experiencing a stronger sense of community. A powerlessness that can limit so many is being undermined by the power of a good idea and people working together. A new organic grocery opened in 2009 in response to growing awareness of a basic need – the only one in West Oakland and the only grocery that is not also a liquor store or gas station. And it all started with a few people and an understanding of how change can take place:

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4 See Dacher Keltner's "The Power Paradox" from *The Greater Good Magazine*, Vol. 4, Issue 3. Winter 2007-2008

What we've found in just the few years of doing this work is that even people like us, who are just residents – we don't have power, we don't have wealth, we don't have a great degree of sophistication – we can make really meaningful change to ignite and to inspire a vision of what is possible. You never know where those seeds are that in 50 or 100 years from now will become a way of life.

And Nelsa Curbelo, a 68-year-old former nun, has harnessed the power of people working for a common cause through her efforts with gang kids in the most violent neighborhoods of Guayaquil, Ecuador. Trusting that “the opposite of violence isn't non-violence; it's humanity working together,” she's arranged loans to start small businesses where gang members can earn a living in a safe and productive atmosphere. The catch? Businesses must employ members from rival gangs, so the young people learn to cooperate and support each other, despite their history of opposition and violence. It's been a remarkably effective approach – dropping neighborhood murder rates from 30 murders a month to near zero and robberies rates by 70 percent.

Most of us have forgotten or never known just how much power we have to really support each other. Think about the word *contribution* – we're asked to make a financial contribution to one cause or another almost every day. And doing so is a powerful way to change lives. But there's power beyond just the funding. It's in the *contributing* – the act of expressing our basic care for each other.

Today, new non-profit organizations are using the power of contributing through linking donors in one part of the world to specific individuals or organizations in another through the exchange of photographs and even letters. And the international sister city program brings cultures together and enhances avenues for both financial and educational exchange. These programs depend on personal communication and experience to strengthen financial giving, and understand that the value of what's exchanged is often much greater than a monetary amount.

The support we receive when we serve others sometimes goes beyond the expected. We're not saying that people don't work hard or suffer tremendously – think of how much time Gandhi and Nelson Mandela spent in jail, or Mother Teresa's deep sorrow. But we're pointing to the seemingly miraculous way that resources can become available the more willing we are to serve something bigger than ourselves. As chapter 81 in the Tao Te Ching says:

*The sage does not serve himself.
The more he does for others, the more he is satisfied.
The more he gives, the more he receives.*

Chapter 2 Exercises

1. What do you feel about the statement, “The best things in life are free”? Does this characterize your experience? Why or why not?
2. Which do you feel most accurately describes today’s world: abundance or scarcity? Explain.
3. If the world has enough for everyone if we share, could there come a time when that is no longer true?
4. How does our modern economic system contribute to an imbalanced distribution of the world’s resources?
5. Orland Bishop says slavery is worse today than it was in centuries past. Why do you think he feels that way? In what ways do you agree or disagree?
6. What would it mean for you to “accept full responsibility for your life”? How might it feel? How would your life change if you did so?
7. Opening our eyes to the world can make us aware of painful things. Once we know about them, what is our responsibility, if any, to become involved?
8. Opposites aren’t always as they seem, and our choice of words can influence what we can envision is possible. Nelsa Curbelo says, “The opposite of violence isn’t non-violence; it’s humanity working together.” Do you recognize the difference? What about “peace is more than the absence of war”? How do you feel when you compare the two word choices? Do you sense a difference?
9. Spend an hour, or a day, giving to others more than you receive from them. Afterwards, reflect on your experience. How did it feel? Are you attracted to repeating it? What do you think might happen if more people did that?
10. Consider the following emotions or feelings and notice how each one can be limiting: greed, self-interest, short-sightedness, self-indulgence, competition. How can you “flip” each of these into its opposite and transform it into a positive?

Dimensions of Oneness:

Orienting ourselves in the vastness of oneness

As much as oneness is omnipresent and infinite, human beings often experience it in specific and sometimes even predictable ways. To orient ourselves within the vastness of oneness, three spatial categorizations can be helpful: the horizontal axis of oneness, the vertical axis of oneness, and integrated experiences of oneness.

The horizontal axis refers to the interconnectedness of everything in the world. The horizontal axis comes to mind when we think about the interdependence of all parts of an ecosystem, when we feel compassion or deep connection with another person, and it's behind much of our efforts to protect the environment, upon which we are dependent. By recycling, for example, we recognize that we are connected to the earth and have responsibilities to reduce waste and be good stewards. Through the horizontal dimension, we are aware of and present with life around us. The horizontal axis even connects us through time, as in the way we can learn from past experience and think about and act to protect future generations.

In contrast, the vertical axis does not draw our attention outward through the web of life, but draws us inward and often upward toward expansive feelings of peace or even love. Our imagination and detachment are also aspects of the vertical axis, through which our individual minds connect to often impersonal powers and possibilities. Feelings of oneness during which we feel unfettered by life and encounter vast unconditioned energies or powers take place along this axis.

It's rare to have a purely vertical or purely horizontal experience of oneness; often we find elements of the one infused into the other. We find expansive love showing up in our relationships with one particular individual. We feel peace as we stare at the ocean. We develop our imagination in response to pressing challenges. These are everyday experiences that reflect the coming together of the inner potentials along the vertical axis with the outer world along the horizontal.

When experiences along the two axes are profound and similarly weighted, we can feel the depths of sacredness that flows through life. And see life's interdependence as infused with the powers of love or peace, all creation vibrantly alive with numinosity and presence. We might call this

inspired and powerful state, “integrated oneness.”

Vertical, horizontal and integrated oneness are ways we can experience life. Why do they matter? Each offers its own insights and supports its own realm of possibilities. As we become more aware of the perspectives and experiences along these axes we can recognize when we are seeing life in a balanced way, and we can recognize when we need to expand our awareness in order to bring in another perspective. For example, too much vertical emphasis can leave us trapped in a transcendent world of unrealized potential that remains ungrounded; too much emphasis on the horizontal brings us into the world but depletes our inner resources and can leave us uninspired.

Ultimately, our most effective and most profound contributions find a way to be integrated, either within themselves or through partnerships with others who offer counter-balancing ideas and methods.

The Horizontal Axis

Along the horizontal dimension of oneness comes the awareness of interdependence. This awareness can come visually, as we start to see patterns and connections around us that might or might not have any specific point of focus or linearity at all. Or it can come conceptually, as when we connect the dots between events or individuals that we had thought were separate and isolated. Or it can be felt through the heart, like when we experience someone else’s suffering or joy so deeply that it feels like it’s our own. We might even sense it viscerally, as a deep instinctual understanding – as we gain information about the world through “our bones” and “our gut.”

With this awareness sometimes comes a stunning and often tender intimacy with the world. Nothing is separate from us or from anything else. People and creatures are not objects or instruments for our goals. They are, just like us, real beings with their own hopes, joys and pains. Along the horizontal axis, no one’s suffering is worse than another’s, and no one’s life is more valuable.

When we are aware of the horizontal axis of oneness, we don’t want to escape creation because there is no escape – everything is magically *here*, inextricably intertwined and present. In his poem *Interrelationship*, Buddhist monk and teacher Thich Nhat Hanh describes the depth of meaning and experience along this axis of oneness:

*You are me, and I am you.
Isn't it obvious that we “inter-are”?*

*You cultivate the flower in yourself,
so that I will be beautiful.*

*I transform the garbage in myself,
so that you will not have to suffer.*

*I support you;
you support me.*

*I am in this world to offer you peace;
you are in this world to bring me joy.¹*

In and of itself, the lived understanding of interdependence provides solid ground for almost everything we do. It gives a base of common-sense wisdom to our initiatives, and compels us toward actions and solutions that serve more than just our own interests. It's a tremendously effective ground for solving many of the world's challenges facing us today.

SOLVING PROBLEMS

When we are aware of this dimension of oneness, categorization and division can seem like a futile or even violent misperception, and solutions to problems that don't take into account interdependence seem like a waste of resources – impotent band-aids on a much larger wound.

Our modern world is waking up to this horizontal dimension of oneness in many ways. Quantum physics gave us a new framework for understanding reality through its descriptions of the interrelationships of matter and energy. Ecologists provided us with the critical perspective that one species depends upon another. Physicians warn us of all the health problems – and benefits – that depend on our relationship with the environment. And new technology and global networks tie us together in a virtually inescapable web of information exchange. Through international travel across open borders, through the Internet, and through mobile communications we are *living* along this axis of oneness.

We're even shown interdependence through the early 21st century economic crisis. Our individual jobs are tied to the local economy, which is tied to our national economy, which is tied to international banks, which are tied to governments, etc... etc... While to some extent it's always been this way, globalization makes it more so, and global communications make interdependence an unavoidable reality – we can't close our eyes to this aspect of society.

As the world gets smaller and smaller, interconnection is being revealed through difficulty but it's also the key to problem solving. We're learning that holistic solutions that take into account the many dimensions of a particular issue are much more effective than responses that focus on only one aspect.

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1 Hanh, Thich Nhat, *Call Me By My True Names: The Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hanh*. Parallax Press, Berkeley, 1999, p. 154

For example The GreenHouse Project in Johannesburg, South Africa, has established a holistic response to the city's issues around food, waste, community and sustainability through a multi-faceted inner-city garden and green living center. It puts people to work and reduces waste through its recycling project, brings people into community and improves health through organic food production, and empowers each human being by reminding them about the knowledge they already have about how to live sustainably in terms of managing their own waste, growing food, and cooperating with others.

“If we want to create sustainable communities we're going to have to look at things in a holistic way,” explains Dorah Lebelo, the Project's director. “You can't just come here and say ‘Oh, my responsibility is health and I'm just going to come here and only look at health and give people drugs and help them survive AIDS.’ You have to look and get – what is it they are eating? Where are they living? What kind of houses are they living in? What kind of energy are they using? Because if they are using coal and inhaling the smoke at night it's not going to be helpful.”

The horizontal dimension of oneness opens us to an intimacy with life that can be both beautiful and terrifying. We can feel held and cared for, and receive tremendous amounts of information about how to contribute to life around us. At the same time, we are required to take responsibility for ourselves in relation to others. If we don't relinquish self-serving ideas and actions, we will undoubtedly come face-to-face with the many ways these ideas and attitudes cause harm.

As we become more conscious along the horizontal axis of oneness, we see there is no hiding from our impacts on each other. There is no backyard that is not our own backyard, and there is even no such thing as “waste.” Everything in life is re-usable. If we are not consciously re-using, we will inevitably find what we have discarded eventually comes back to us, in the way that toxic waste eventually makes us ill, or our disregard for the environment leaves us feeling alienated from life.

The Vertical Axis

Experiences of the vertical dimension of oneness can sometimes seem to be a complete contradiction to those along the horizontal dimension. While in the horizontal dimension we feel our hearts and minds expand to include more of the world around us, along the vertical dimension we can enter states of consciousness that lift us above the ordinary world, connecting us with transcendent truths that distance us from life's concerns. Along the horizontal axis we identify with the outer world, while along the vertical axis it's an inner power that touches and inspires us.

A number of phrases describe some common experiences along the vertical axis – we call them runner's “high,” or we say we are “floating on air.” We are “in the zone” or “in the flow.” Along this axis we feel “above” or “beyond” ordinary life, which can sometimes appear un-compelling and even beneath us.

One of the great potentials of this dimension of consciousness is that we are able to distance ourselves from many of the limitations that shape and define much of our lives. We can feel a powerful peace and even joy as psychological, emotional, and even physical dynamics that would otherwise limit or define our experience are let go, put aside, or transcended. Through accessing this consciousness, we can stay cool under fire, find objectivity when we're overwhelmed, and stay focused in thought and action despite turmoil around us.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, Professor of Medicine Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, teaches people how to access transcendent consciousness through a simple mindfulness meditation in order to cope with illness, pain, stress and anxiety. "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf," he says of the potentials of detachment.²

The scientific method, which emphasizes objectivity and mental clarity, is another example of the vertical dimension of consciousness. This axis is also key in psychotherapy, where we learn to stay watchful and detached in order to endure and discuss powerful emotional experiences.

Athletes "in the zone" are transported to great heights along this axis. Bill Russell, the famous Celtics basketball player, describes such an experience:

It was almost as if we were playing in slow motion. During those spells I could almost sense how the next play would develop and where the next shot would be taken. Even before the other team brought the ball in bounds, I could feel it so keenly that I'd want to shout to my teammates, "It's coming there!" – except that I knew everything would change if I did.³

Often it's times of intense concentration or even isolation that contribute to a shift of awareness. In 1934, Admiral Richard Boyle spent four months alone in a cabin in the Antarctic during a period of 24-hour-a-day darkness. He described his experience on one specific day during this time of retreat:

The day was dying, the night being born – but with great peace. Here were the imponderable processes and forces of the cosmos, harmonious and soundless. Harmony, that was it! That was what came out of the silence – a gentle rhythm, the strain of a perfect chord, the music of the spheres perhaps.

It was enough to catch that rhythm momentarily, to be myself a part of it. In that instant I could feel no doubt of man's oneness with the universe.⁴

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2 Kabat-Zin, Jon, *Wherever You Go There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. Hyperion Press, New York, 1994, p. 32

3 Bill Russell quoted by Andrew Cooper's *In the Zone: The Zen of Sports*. Shambhala Sun Magazine, March 1993, online: http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2098

4 Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly and Csikszentmihalyi, Isabella, *Optimal Experience: Psychologi-*

Experiences like this show us that the world is not what we think it is. The laws of time and space that we usually take for granted are not as solid or dependable as we thought.

These insights and experiences can be so potent and so transformative they become addictive. Athletes train for hours to create the conditions that take them into the zone; artists long to get back to the studio in order to be immersed in the flow of their creativity; we can spend hours lost in the infinite possibilities of our imagination; and spiritual seekers spend a lifetime on a meditation cushion, striving to stabilize the detachment, clarity and freedom of transcendence.

SPIRITUAL STATES

At their most profound, these vertical experiences open us into a realm called by different spiritual traditions: pure consciousness, Brahman, emptiness, nirvana, and union with God the Creator. We become one with the vast creative forces within existence. We are one with the eternal. We are free and detached from the created world while, paradoxically, remaining embodied.

Julian of Norwich, the Christian mystic born in 1342, described her longing for this experience of transcendence, for union with a God who exists beyond this earth:

*Until I am really and truly oned and
Fastened to God so that there is nothing created between us
I will never have full rest or complete happiness.*

*For in order to love and have God who is
Uncreated, we must have knowledge of the
Smallness of creatures and empty ourselves
Of all that is created.⁵*

And the 18th and 19th century Buddhist master Ryokan writes about this state in a traditional Zen poem:

*Like the little stream
Making its way
Through the mossy crevices
I, too, quietly
Turn clear and transparent.⁶*

cal Studies of Flow Psychology. Cambridge University Press, 1988, p.177

5 Julian of Norwich translated by Brendan Doyle from *Meditations with Julian of Norwich*. Bear & Company, Inc., Santa Fe, 1983, p. 26

6 From *Dewdrops on a Lotus Leaf, Zen Poems of Ryokan*, translated by John Stevens.

William James, the “father of psychology,” extensively studied mystical experiences such as these along the vertical axis during the end of the 19th century. Validating them as fleeting but giving rise to genuine knowledge, he concluded that such experiences and insights are more available than we think: “Most people live...in a very restricted circle of their potential being,” he says. “They make use of a very small portion of their possible consciousness...much like a man who, out of his whole bodily organism, should get into the habit of moving and using only his little finger.”⁷

We’re used to living with our little finger – we do everything with it. But imagine that beyond our awareness of our little finger lies an entire hand, a body, and a mind with an infinity of ideas.

“Peak Experiences” and “Flow”

After James, a number of psychologists and researchers have studied these experiences of transcendence, mostly outside of a traditionally religious framework. Abraham Maslow, a founder of the school of humanistic psychology, was one of the first American psychologists to do so. He called these moments of transcendence *peak experiences* and noted that they occur in a wide variety of situations, are powerful to varying degrees, and are experienced by many people. Maslow even believed that if a person worked hard enough, he or she might reach *plateau experiences* – maintaining some of the joys and freedoms from the peak moment throughout time.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a Hungarian psychologist currently teaching at the Claremont Graduate University developed the term *flow psychology* in the nineteen-seventies, which has been applied to many areas, including educational settings, workplace productivity and sports psychology. A state of extreme focus, being in “flow” includes intense periods of intrinsic enjoyment during which a sense of separate identity or self-consciousness disappears. In other words, we become one with the experience itself.

Flow is possible for all of us, and there are even ways we can arrange the details of our lives to support it. For example, Csikszentmihalyi suggests finding a balance between the challenge of a task and the skill level of the performer, so one is pushed to just the right degree for engagement and achievement. Too much skill and not enough challenge lead to boredom. Too much challenge and not enough skill lead to apathy.⁸

Engaging our minds and our attention seems key to expanding our awareness along both the horizontal and vertical axes. Contemporary neuroscience, for example, has found that experienced meditators reflect brain changes increasing their capacity both for compassion and empathy – the horizontal axis – and expansive states of peace and calm – the vertical axis.

Shambhala, Massachusetts, 1993, p. 15

⁷ William James in a 1906 letter to W. Lutoslawsk. From *The Letters of William James, Vol. 2*. The Atlantic Monthly Press, Boston, 1920, p. 253

⁸ See Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Cambridge University Press, New York, 1988

In one study, brain scans of Tibetan monks and Franciscan nuns revealed heightened activity in the frontal lobes (indicating increased concentration) and lack of activity in the posterior superior parietal lobes. The parietal lobes control sensory input, and decreased activity here allows an individual to expand into an experience not regulated or defined by outer senses.⁹ Researchers believe that this kind of response can come from practice and focus, since they found the more experienced meditators showed more intense and lasting neurological changes.¹⁰

All this points to the fact that experiences of oneness along both the horizontal and vertical axes are a natural, but under-accessed and under-practiced part of being human. Oneness might be more often recognized in extreme experiences, but in fact every moment provides an opportunity for us to become more aware of how these two dimensions interrelate.

Integrated Oneness

In what ways do the vertical and horizontal dimensions work together? As two aspects of life, neither existing entirely independent of the other, they are never completely separate. It's just that sometimes we experience them as though they are.

As much as states along the vertical axis seem to lift us from this world, we always remain part of it. We are embodied, and thus physically embedded within our environment. And as interdependent as we are with the people and resources around us, we always remain uniquely alone and responsible for discovering – then living – the deepest truths of our life. “No man is an island,” said John Donne, and yet, Ralph Waldo Emerson is also right: “None of us will ever accomplish anything excellent or commanding except when he listens to this whisper which are heard by him alone.”

But the more conscious we become of the ways the axes relate and the less we see them as separate, the more power and wisdom we are given to affect life in extraordinary ways.

Consider this statement by Chicago Bulls basketball coach, Phil Jackson in his memoir, *Sacred Hoops*:

When players practice what is known as mindfulness – simply paying attention to what's actually happening – not only do they play better

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9 See “This is your brain on god” by Christine Farrenkopf, 2001, online: <http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/bb/neuro/neuro01/web3/Farrenkopf.html>

10 See “Prayer May Reshape Your Brain...and Your Reality” by Barbara Bradley Hagerty, transcript from May 21, 2009 radio broadcast on *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, online: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104310443>

and win more, they also become more attuned with each other. And the joy they experience working in harmony is a powerful motivating force...¹¹

Paradoxically, it's the cultivation and experience of detached awareness that helps players work together as a team. This is an excellent example of how the two axes can influence each other. In integrated oneness, experiences of what is higher and transcendent *enhance* the experience of what is already present, and vice versa. Our freedom makes us fearless in thoughts and actions; our compassion for others compels us to search for more powerful inner resources in order to serve others. Divinity is known not only in the privacy of the heart, but in all aspects of the world around us.

It's important to remember that we are not seeking to maintain or extend the experiences of the vertical axis through our ordinary lives to make our lives better – we are allowing them to become integrated with the equally valuable but very different qualities of the horizontal axis. Life is a natural process of contraction and expansion, of rising up and descending, of feeling big and feeling small. Oneness helps us surrender to these varied experiences, find meaning in them, and participate fully regardless of where we are.

Integrated oneness seems like a rare or specialized experience, but almost all of us know what it's like to commit to a powerful and timeless inner idea or ideal, and work to make it real in the outer world, through service or any creative process.

Or maybe we've had spontaneous experience in nature, when the light is just so, and time stops. We sense that we are part – not just of the eternal heavens beyond this world – but of this tree and this leaf, or that patch of moss, which so precisely reflect otherworldliness through their own specific color, shade, or gentle movement.

Or when we are intimate with someone we love – a child, a partner or a friend – and in a moment we know the love as timeless and also mysteriously and wholly involved in the particular nose or toe or radiant pair of eyes sitting right before us.

Even a momentary glimpse of this integrated state dissolves many of the boundaries we thought were important. Boundaries between the sacred and the ordinary, between humans and the earth and the earth and heaven, between the heart and the mind, and even between “you” and “me” are weakened in the simplicity and beauty of oneness.

SPIRITUAL BALANCE

In spiritual literature and practice, the relationship between the vertical and horizontal

.....
¹¹ Phil Jackson, *Sacred Hoops: Spiritual Lessons of a Hardwood Warrior*. Hyperion Press, New York, 1995, p. 5

dimensions is often described as an interplay between the transcendent and immanent aspects of the Divine. In Buddhism, reality is both emptiness and compassion, and practitioners live these dimensions through developing non-attachment (emptiness) as well as heart-based consciousness that serves all beings (compassion). In the Lakota tradition, Grandfather Sky is above and Grandmother Earth is below, and both are equally powerful. In Islam, majesty and beauty are two sides of God, representing a divinity which is both vast and awe-inspiring and also near and accessible. And in Hinduism we find Shiva and Shakti – the masculine energizing principle and the feminine world of manifestation – that unite to create all life. In Christianity, the life, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ reflects the immanence of a transcendent God – His son born fully into this world for a sacred purpose.

The relationship between the two aspects of the Absolute is one of the greatest mysteries of spiritual life. But many seekers long to realize something of this mystery, to achieve a state of consciousness in which separation between a distant reality and the world around us is no longer possible.

Hafiz, the 14th century Sufi poet, expresses this state in his poem, *No More Leaving*:

*At
Some point
Your relationship
With God
Will
Become like this:*

*Next time you meet Him in the forest
Or on a crowded city street
There won't be anymore
"Leaving."*

That is,

*God will climb into
Your pocket.
You will simply just take
Yourself
Along!¹²*

Of course each tradition offers its own methods and practices to realize this union, and yet the

.....
12 Hafiz, *The Gift, Poems by Hafiz*, translated by Daniel Ladinsky. Penguin Books, New York, 1999, p. 270

realization is similar. You can recognize Hafiz’s awareness of transcendence and immanence described quite differently in the following poem of Nisargadatta Maharaj, a 20th century teacher in the non-dual tradition and disciple of Ramana Maharshi:

*When I look within and see that I am nothing,
that is wisdom.
When I look without and see that I am everything,
that is love.
And between these two, my life turns.¹³*

And through reading Zen haiku, one often senses both forces at work – an emptiness that reflects the writer’s connection to transcendent states, and a wonder freed to appreciate the created world. From the 13th century Dogen Zenji:

*Midnight. No waves,
No wind, the empty boat
Is flooded with moonlight.¹⁴*

Integrated oneness is also reflected in the spiritual practice of service, or *seva*. Today, the rise in popularity of spiritual activism represents the longing to bring together the higher and lower, the immanent and transcendent.

Most spiritual traditions exalt the practice of service, but perhaps there is no clearer example than the Bodhisattva ideal of giving up the goal of “enlightenment” in order to be reborn again and again in service to all beings. Through the Bodhisattva model, we acknowledge that too much freedom, detachment, or “heightened awareness” could preclude effective action in this world. Hence, Bodhisattvas give up entirely transcending this realm in order to remain here and be present for others. Or, in other words, they don’t let themselves rise too far up the vertical axis before coming back down and serving life on the horizontal.

This principle is also reflected in Sufism’s emphasis on renunciation, with the great 9th century Sufi, Bayazid Bistami, declaring the fourth and final stage of renunciation as “renunciation of renunciation,” at which stage the seeker remains “in the world but not of the world.”¹⁵

And we hear a similar imperative in Hinduism’s *Avadhut Gita*:¹⁶

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13 See Nummi.net’s page on Nisargadatta Maharaj, online: http://www.numii.net/word_press/gurus/nisargadatta-maharaj

14 Mitchell, Stephen, *The Enlightened Heart: An Anthology of Sacred Poetry*. Harper and Row, 1989, p. 49

15 *The Light Within Me*, translated by Mustajab Ahmad Ansari. Islamic Seminary Publications, Karachi, Pakistan, 1991, p. 147

16 Chapter 4, verse 21

*Renounce, renounce the world, and also renounce
Renunciation, and even give up the absence of renunciation
By nature all-pervasive as space, knowledge absolute are you.*

INTEGRATED HUMAN BEINGS

Throughout history, we've known extraordinary individuals who seem to embody this integration. In leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Mother Teresa, we sense an unusual integration in which worldly life is continually enhanced and informed by transcendent power.

“Good works are links that form a chain of love,” is how Mother Teresa acknowledged both dimensions – the vertical axis that unites us with transcendent love, and the horizontal axis where we express that love through compassionate acts. And Martin Luther King Jr.'s “I Had a Dream” speech is a powerful representative of this grounding of the highest sacred principles of love, equality and justice in the structures of human society.

Such unique individuals have learned to *embody* spiritual truth. They seem to have *become* love, and *live* power. Perhaps this is the meaning in Gandhi's direction to “be the change you want to see in the world.” When both axes are lived fully, the sacred is reflected in and shaped by temporality. The harmony and integration within these individuals is so great, we see that their individual destiny and the destiny of the world itself are intertwined and reflective of each other.

No matter the hardship or even imprisonment experienced by these individuals, life seems less a restriction and more a reflection of ultimate possibility. In this state of oneness, service can become as natural as breathing, for there is no longer a distinction between one's own needs and the needs of the whole, and transpersonal power and love flow unrestricted through the individual into the world.

Chapter 3 Exercises

1. Thinking of oneness as being categorized into two dimensions, horizontal and vertical, is just one approach to orienting ourselves in the breadth and depth of life. Do you have other ways of doing so that better characterize your experience or make more sense to you? Describe.
2. Can you identify a time when you've experienced a powerful horizontal and/or vertical experience of oneness? What were you doing? Did it have a lasting effect?

3. When someone has a powerful spiritual experience, who is the “experiencer”? Their ego? Or perhaps something deeper? Is the ego right to take credit for it? Why or why not?
4. Do you recognize a part of yourself that simply observes? Is it related to the ego? Or to something else?
5. What do you make of soul and spirit? Do you believe in them? If so, how are they different? How are each related to the horizontal and vertical dimensions of consciousness?
6. Imagine living entirely with the consciousness of just one axis, horizontal or vertical. What would it be like? Is it even possible? Why or why not?
7. Can you recall a time when you experienced feeling “integrated oneness”? What was that like? Describe the circumstances and experience. Did it have any lasting effect?
8. If oneness is our natural state, do you think experiencing it should come more naturally? Why or why not?
9. Do you have a tendency toward one axis over another? How aware are you of this imbalance? How is this imbalance supported or undermined by the culture in which you live? Do you see a cultural/gender/racial prejudice for one axis over another?
10. In theory there is no limit to how far we can grow along each of the axes of oneness. What are some ways you might expand your capacity for experiencing life’s fullness by stretching horizontally or vertically?
11. Every experience we have in life – from the sacred to the mundane – has varying degrees of horizontal and vertical awareness. Try differentiating horizontal connections from vertical perspectives as you go through your day.
12. What gives your life meaning? Reflect on your most fulfilling activities or moments, and consider their horizontal and vertical dimensions. For example, are you most fulfilled relating to others or things (horizontal)? Or, when you are alone, say, in meditation or being creative (vertical)? How might you use this understanding to get closer to living in integrated oneness?
13. “You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn to surf,” says professor Jon Kabat-Zinn. Practice managing your positive and negative emotions by spending time in nature, exercising, or participating in a meditation group

Distortions of Oneness:

What oneness isn't

If oneness includes everything then how can there be something it *isn't*? Here, we're talking about becoming more and more aware of oneness. There are many degrees of seeing, knowing, and participating in oneness, but unfortunately there are also ways we misunderstand oneness or ignore oneness altogether. That doesn't mean oneness is absent; it just means we're not using the part of ourselves that can recognize and work with it.

The consciousness of oneness is like a muscle that we all have but aren't used to using. The more we use it, the stronger it becomes. The more we recognize hidden connections in life, the more likely we will see and work with the forces – like courage, kindness or compassion – that respect and strengthen those connections. Conversely, the less we recognize our mutual interdependence, the more likely we will perpetuate having experiences that accentuate our fear, selfishness, and even isolation.

In this chapter we'll look at some of the ways we ignore oneness either by choice, or by habit, or just because we aren't used to it. Acknowledging how we ignore or bypass the consciousness of oneness can help us learn when – and how – to use it.

The Paradox of Oneness

Oneness can be confusing. On one hand, experiences of deep connection and vast expansion can feel incredibly intimate and empowering. They can carry feelings of peace and convey meaning, they bring us mystery, and they engage us where we long to be engaged. They often encourage the best parts of us – the most resilient and the most giving. But on the other hand, oneness is about a lot more than just us.

This is the fundamental paradox of oneness: oneness is what many of us want, but it's not ours to keep. And it's this paradox that's behind many of the reasons we distort oneness.

In our modern world, we usually try to own everything we want; we try to make it ours forever. And we think that what's most important in our lives is a reflection of our own importance.

We try to hold on to oneness too. Unfortunately, that's just not possible. As soon as we define or limit an experience of oneness within a personal framework, it disappears. Consider what the Buddha said about desire:

*With desire
The world is tied down
With the subduing of desire
It's freed.¹*

You can try to tie down oneness, but it's just not in its nature to stay that way. Then all you're left with is an image or idea of what's already passed.

A good model for how to relate to experiences of oneness is how we appreciate nature. Think of the last time you took a long walk in the woods or worked in your garden. Often we feel deeply engaged with something that, at the same time, is oddly impersonal. Nature gives us so much and it gives to us on all levels – from the basics like food and water, to the depths where we feel cared for and whole. We're willing to be met in these ways and we're willing to not take things too personally. We rarely let a sunny day go to our head, and we don't feel personally insulted when the aphids attack our garden.

We need to meet oneness in this same way.

It's not easy, but we can learn to keep personal desires in check when it comes to these deep experiences. Think about what Neil Young said in a 2008 interview with Charlie Rose about creative energy:

That comes and goes through you. There's no way you own it. It's a gift that keeps on giving and it goes away and it comes back and if you're ready to accept it it's there.

The creative powers available to us along the vertical axis cannot be controlled or ordered. Generally, they come and go, often unpredictably. But there's value in learning how to allow such gifts into our lives without trying to use them for our own ends. And more pointedly, there's value in cultivating a deep respect for them. As Neil Young says in the same interview:

If I had an idea for a song or something, when it strikes me, I would leave right now... because I figure I wouldn't even be here in the first place if it wasn't for these ideas. I owe it to that. So I have a mentality that I'm working for this, that it's my boss...

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1 "Iccha Sutta: Desire" (SN 1.69), translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*, June 7, 2009, online: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sno1/sno1.069.than.html>

If we can't learn how to relate to oneness with deep respect and acknowledgment of its impersonal nature, if we try to hold on to it or make something out of it, we're left with a distortion that might look like oneness, but isn't.

Distortions along the Vertical Axis

Along the vertical axis of oneness, we're given experiences of vastness and space. We can feel free, powerful, and clear. Our imagination can run wild and we can be filled with creative energy. It can feel so restrictive returning to our ordinary daily tasks that sometimes we just don't want to do it. Instead, we fixate on these past experiences, or identify with images or ideas of how life should be instead of participating in life as it is.

In 1969, the extraordinary French sailor Bernard Moitessier played out his individual version of this basic human tendency. After 209 days at sea, somewhere in the South Atlantic, Moitessier was poised to win the Golden Globe Race and become the first and fastest sailor to circumnavigate the globe alone. But as he neared the point where he would navigate his sailboat, the *Joshua*, toward the finish line in England, he turned instead to open water and headed toward Polynesia. Giving up the chance at celebrity and financial reward, and choosing to stay away from his family alone on the sea, he wrote in his book, *The Long Way*:

*I have set course for the Pacific again...I really felt sick at the thought of getting back to Europe...
Does it make sense to head for a place knowing you will have to leave your peace behind?*²

Three months later, Moitessier finally left the peace and aloneness of the sea and returned to his family and his life on land, letting someone else win the race.

But others simply refuse to return. Instead of following a natural course back into the challenges and mysteries of ordinary life, we hold on to the transcendent, often recreating these experiences again and again based on an image or memory. Like the couple who can't build an enduring relationship through daily challenges after the all-encompassing romance has passed, or the high school football star who relives his glory days over and over because he doesn't know how to engage in life as an ordinary guy, or the spiritual seeker who stays in a monastery because he or she disdains – or fears – worldly life.

Holding onto or re-creating experiences along the vertical axis sometimes works – these experiences carry a bit of magic and sparkle that we can use to make our lives feel more exciting – for awhile. But sure enough, they lose their dynamism and creativity; and too often become just a way to make ourselves feel better. Which leads us to one of the most common distortions along this axis – inflation – using the vastness or grandeur of transcendent experiences to make us seem

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Moitessier, Bernard, *The Long Way*. Sheridan House, Dobbs Ferry, New York, 2003, p. 163

bigger and better than we really are.

INFLATION

We can experience incredible power and detachment along the vertical axis. We *are* transcendent, we *are* omnipotent, we see *so* clearly! Life's minutiae hold no relevance to us, because we are way beyond it.

Except of course, we *are* life's minutiae. When we forget this basic truth, we dissociate ourselves from the horizontal dimension of life and risk states of inflation, arrogance, depression and even psychopathology. And we separate ourselves from the mystery of how the vertical and horizontal work together.

During experiences of profound transcendence we are generally *not* arrogant. Arrogance and inflation only come later, if we look back at what we lost and identify with it to make ourselves feel better in its absence. In this process of identification, we are not just holding on to an experience of the past, we actually believe we *are* the experience!

Yes, there is often a great sense of empowerment during these experiences. Athletes "in the zone" know just what to do to win the game. Artists can feel the raw power of creativity flowing through their hands. Great scientists sense they can grasp the keys to the entire universe. But most often, along with these experiences of power comes a deep and sincere awe and humility. Sir Isaac Newton expressed this relationship:

If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants.

When astronaut Russell Schweickart orbited the earth in 1969, he was able to experience a perspective that's only possible when we look at the world from a transcendent stance, seeing the difficulties and arguments of the world below as small and trivial:

From where you see it, the thing is a whole, the earth is a whole, and it's so beautiful. You wish you could take a person in each hand, one from each side in the various conflicts, and say, "Look. Look at it from this perspective. Look at that. What's important?"

But Schweickart's experience did not come with arrogance. It came with humility:

And you think about what you're experiencing and why. Do you deserve this? This fantastic experience? Have you earned this in some way? Are you separated out to be touched by God to have some special experience here that other men cannot have? You know the answer to that is No. There's nothing that you've done that deserves that, that earned that. It's not a special thing for you.³

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3 Excerpt from the original article by Russell Schweickart in "Rediscovering the North

Arrogance and a sense of personal superiority rarely seem to show up during genuine experiences of expanded consciousness. How can they? In so much humbling vastness, we can only see ourselves as small. Within so much majesty we only feel awe.

It's afterwards, back in our ordinary lives when our ordinary consciousness – so used to focusing on what we can get for ourselves in a world that tells us to get the most we can – that we appropriate these experiences for our own ends. We remember how expansive we felt, and we to take it personally. We feel *we* are expansive, *we* are extraordinarily clear and detached. Compulsively, we identify with our experience and feel special, using it to construct a superior self to feel better.

James Hillman, an American psychologist who studied at the Jungian Institute in Vienna, explains that it's not easy allowing these experiences to remain in a non-personal realm:

*In the West, the mystic or artist to whom the extraordinary happens hammers the impersonal into personal form and presses his own vision upon archetypal patterns.*⁴

The first step in making sure transcendent energies and experiences remain free from a solely personal context is to acknowledge that not everything that happens to us is about us. This isn't an easy point of view to hold in our modern world. But it's been a spiritual principle for centuries. As the Buddha indicated, the world flourishes when we don't restrict it with possessiveness. Or as Nawab Jan-Fishan Khan, the 19th century Sufi sage mysteriously states, "The candle is not there to illuminate itself."

One has to ask, then, if the light isn't there to benefit the candle, what's it there for? How can what we experience not just be for us?

This is one of the greatest spiritual and philosophical questions of all time, maybe with as many answers as there are people asking the question. Later, we'll look at some ideas about what the role of the consciousness of oneness might be, what it can do – not just for you, but for the world. But for now it's important to remember that if we take oneness too personally, we're missing the deeper meaning in these experiences. We can become inflated – which might feel better for a while – but more likely than not, ultimately leave us feeling worse than ever.

DEPRESSION

What goes up must come down. And ignoring the "down" dimension of life has a terrible impact

American Vision" (IC #3), *In Context*, Summer, 1983, online: <http://www.context.org/ICLIB/ICo3/Schweick.htm>

4 Hillman, James, in his commentary to: *Kundalini, The Evolutionary Energy in Man*, by Gopi Krishna. Shambhala Publications, Boston, 1967, p. 149

on the immanent world and the part of ourselves embedded in it. We can hear this depression along Moitessier's journey, on a Christmas evening he spends alone at sea with a bottle of champagne:

*Calm...calm...I have the blues tonight. I think of my friends. I think of my family. I have everything I need here, all the calm, all the stars, all the peace. But I lack the warmth of men and I feel blue.*⁵

The peace of the transcendent does not always have to stay separate from the warmth of earthly connection. This is one of the potentials of integrated oneness.

Usually we just can't imagine how they could possibly work together so we hold on to what we have as long as we can. But too much focus on transcendence can lead to illness from ignoring or denigrating our physical bodies, loneliness from not valuing human relationships, and depression through self-rejection.

That depression drives us toward greater schemes of self-aggrandizement as though they could help boost our mood, perpetuating a self-destructive cycle in which we separate ourselves further and further from the ground of our own being, from the nourishment of the earthly world.

James Hillman recognized this dynamic and criticized the tendency of some of his colleagues, like Abraham Maslow, to over-value transcendent experiences. While Maslow emphasized the importance – and reality – of transcendent states, Hillman extolled the need to embrace the higher and lower equally.

Hillman, also using two axes as a model for consciousness, called the horizontal axis of experience a “valley,” which he said was home to the “soul.” The vertical axis that takes us into transcendent realms is the pathway of “spirit.” In his 1979 article, *Peaks and Vales*, he explains how it feels to the soul when the spirit heads out on its transcendent journey:

*From the viewpoint of soul and life in the vale, going up the mountain feels like a desertion... The soul feels left behind, and we see this soul reacting with... resentments. Spiritual teachings warn the initiate so often about introspective broodings, about jealousy, spite, and pettiness, about attachments to sensations and memories. These cautions present an accurate phenomenology of how the soul feels when the spirit bids farewell.*⁶

Hillman offers a simple and powerful image of how our search for “special” experiences found along the vertical trajectory leaves the horizontal part of us lonely and undernourished, which then contributes to more feverish and desperate searching and abandonment.

We're rarely conscious of the connection between the striving for vastness, clarity or detachment

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5 Moitessier, Bernard, *The Long Way*. Sheridan House, Dobbs Ferry, New York, 1995, p. 95

6 Hillman, James, *The Essential James Hillman*. Routledge, New York, 1990, p. 116

and the depression and ill health we too often create and perpetuate by that striving. We think we can rise like Icarus to the sun, or – if, like Icarus, we don't make it – at least we'll die trying. But from a non-personal point of view, such efforts to transcend seem futile; we cannot “self-destruct” successfully. In our self-destruction, too much is left undone, too many things left behind, and so much energy and creativity wasted.

CULTURAL IMBALANCE

Our attraction to the heights of experience is a widespread collective habit. In our global commitment to and fascination with the transcendent achievements of industry, technology, and even celebrity, we've left behind Hillman's “valley” of earthbound imperatives such as ecological sustainability, human development, and individual mental, spiritual and physical health.

Neil Armstrong articulated this imbalance in a 2007 *60 Minutes* interview during which he commented about the world's reaction to his trip to the moon. While he understood the collective appreciation of this “step for mankind,” he was disturbed by the extreme celebrity that followed. The public's appreciation for the Apollo 11 feat transitioned into enchantment and obsession, and Armstrong retreated from the public eye.

In response to a question about his discomfort over his celebrity, Armstrong responded: “I just don't deserve it. I guess we all want to be recognized not for one piece of fireworks but for the ledger of our daily work.”

Once you start looking, you can notice this imbalance almost everywhere. We see it in the billions of U.S. dollars spent fighting wars on foreign soil, while so many domestic challenges are given inadequate attention. Many of us remember 2007 images of mold, decay and rat excrement at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center during the Iraq War, indicating a federal blind spot for how to care for the down-to-earth, human dimension of war.

We see the same imbalance toward the transcendent in our culture's admiration of abstract higher education and financial services and lack of dignity afforded service-oriented vocational professions, and in the huge salary disparity between corporate executives and teachers and nurses. We might notice this imbalance in our own homes where we have fewer and fewer “family dinners” and rely more and more on distant, technology-assisted communication. Even the “American Dream” suggests an American focus on transcendence. But the “American Dream” stays a fantasy if we never bring that dream all the way down into mundane life.

Ironically, yet predictably, we can even see this bias toward the transcendent in some approaches to solving the problems created by our original focus on transcendence. While simply curbing resource consumption alone could have a profound impact on climate change and other environmental challenges, we hubristically choose instead to seriously consider grand schemes such as “Plan B,” which might include endeavors such as dumping iron in the oceans to spur the

growth of algae that destroys carbon, or creating a sunshade in the stratosphere out of millions of tons of tiny reflective particles to shade the earth. NASA has already spent \$75,000 dollars mapping out details of these so-called “environmental engineering” plans.

In all these cases, our attention veers towards technological heights or distant goals, sometimes faraway lands (perhaps high in the sky or deep in the ocean), bolstered by attitudes of achievement or acquisition, while day-to-day needs go unanswered, responsibilities in our home territory ignored, and destructive daily habits continue.

The result is symptoms that Hillman might link to our own cultural depression: high numbers of Americans and Europeans on anti-depressants, continually rising numbers of people suffering from cancer, diabetes, and other diet- and environment-based illnesses, and of course the many losses suffered through the recent economic crisis – its own transcendent house of cards built on dreams and deception with no solid foundation.

Globally, we see a growing gap between the rich and poor, widespread ecological destruction, and ongoing violence that is so often a last resort when resources that could help alleviate basic needs are unavailable or segmented in a distant part of the world.

Our transcendent drive has developed our science and technology, freed us from the restrictions of nature, allowed us to imagine and create innovations in every aspect of society. But until we learn how to balance this emphasis with attention to the “ledger of our daily lives,” as Neil Armstrong put it, we’ll continue to suffer the consequences of abandoning our souls and the soul of our culture for the next transcendent “high.”

Distortions Along the Horizontal Axis

Historically, we’ve had our eyes on the stars. For centuries, transcendence has had a magnetic pull, drawing human interest up and away from the earthly dimension. But recently, with the world’s tremendous advancements in technological communication and the dissolution of so many regional and international borders, we have been thrust outward into myriad networks of relationships along the horizontal axis. We’ve never felt so “connected” to people and places, so available to others and so invited into previously inaccessible territory.

But just as we can be caught in a transcendent no-man’s land, suspended above the earth, so too can we be stretched thin by or merged with any number of relationships along the horizontal axis without ever balancing these connections with the resources of the vertical axis. In these distorted experiences, we seem to be connected yet those connections fail to bring forth meaning. We seem to be involved in life beyond us, and yet that life is strangely lifeless. We are one with people and places in the world, and yet...we have lost ourselves in the process.

OVERSPENDING

*The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending we lay waste our powers...*

English poet William Wordsworth lamented in the early 1800s about humanity's tendency to ignore the nourishment of nature in exchange for an empty fascination with modern technology. Two hundred years later, his assessment still rings true as a description of how humanity can waste energy and distort meaning along the horizontal axis.

Wordsworth's "getting and spending" refers specifically to consumerism and distractions born from the industrial age, our non-stop hunger for and attachment to material goods that promise to transmit life's deepest value, but of course fall short. We all know this tendency to acquire material goods and financial resources in a never-ending process of commercial exchange, and how empty it can leave us.

But "getting and spending" takes us into every aspect of life along the horizontal axis, including material goods but also social experiences. We extend ourselves through relationships with people, places and things and if we do so with attitudes of greed, excessive need or psychological compulsion we easily become unbalanced and drained.

We hear this type of distortion in the common phrase, "You've spread yourself too thin," and in the directive to "re-group," "re-charge" or "pull yourself together." We recognize patterns of psychological over-spending in healing professionals who identify so much with those they serve that they remain "burned out" through numerous exhausting relationships. And in the person who falls in love and begins to identify so much as a "couple" that he or she neglects to develop his or her own identity.

The initial experience of oneness – awakening us to the revolutionary truth of how open, connected, and involved we can be in the life of another – can in time simply become a one-way expenditure of energy.

Here, the imperative is to retrieve over-extended resources – attention, finances, physical energy, or psychological expectations – from along the horizontal dimension. We do this through becoming more aware of setting limits and establishing personal boundaries, and balancing our relationships along the horizontal with the resources from the vertical dimension: the regeneration that comes from time alone, the peace and calm of inner silence, the empowerment we discover when we are extremely focused, and the charge of energy that comes when we align with our inner commitment or creativity.

Whenever our focus threads itself outwards into life and stays there in a permanent over-identification with something "other," we have solidified a distorted oneness along the

horizontal axis and lost touch with the greater potentials of balance and integration.

OPTING OUT

Another distortion along the horizontal axis occurs when our insights into the harmony and interdependence of life make us feel that we don't need to contribute. How does this happen? If we've glimpsed the multi-dimensional nature of existence and seen how so many aspects of life interact with each other to create a beautiful and self-sustaining whole, we also see that our part is just one small contribution of many. In light of the abundance of resources sustaining life, we can easily see our own part as insignificant.

We can lose our sense of individual power, and subtly start to opt out. After all, there's so much going on in life, how important could we be? Ideas about life's self-sustaining nature can be co-opted by our insecurities and confusion about where we're needed. We translate the Taoist "non-action" into "inertia." "Going with the flow" becomes an excuse to not be intentional in our actions. "Everything's perfect as it is" becomes code for "I don't know what to do, so leave me out of it." By withdrawing in this way, we solidify our separateness, and become less capable of contributing – and together it becomes a self-fulfilling dynamic.

Maybe we've asked a friend an opinion about something that we care deeply about just to hear her say, "It is how it is," as though the fact of *being* means nothing can ever be improved upon. Often this is a cop-out – a way to use our insight along the horizontal axis to protect us from the confusion and vulnerabilities of being available to life. But we can't really argue with it, since it's true – of course things are the way they are!

A momentary glimpse of oneness can have a big impact. But it's up to us to remember that *we're* also oneness, and our participation is always needed. We find out how we're each called to service by staying present and attentive – not by opting out.

Some cultures are aware of the demanding depths of engagement asked of us along the horizontal axis. Senegalese drummer Adama Doumbia writes in *The Way of the Elders* about *Nyama* and how complex and challenging it can be to work with it:

Nyama is the energy that emanates from Spirit and flows throughout the universe. It is the life force that links all of existence together; humans, animals, plants, and minerals... One may devote limitless time and effort to learn how to direct his energy... Our artisans spend their entire lives cultivating their relationship with this power.

We're a quick fix culture moving at incredible speed. But after all, life is a life-long commitment, asking us to play our part from beginning to end. There's a lot going on along the horizontal axis, but that doesn't mean it can go on without us.

SENSITIVITY

Just as we can resist participation in oneness because we mistake our own role as insignificant, we can also resist participation because we're afraid of becoming overwhelmed. It's natural to assume that as we enter a dimension of life that is intricately complex and abundant with energy that we'll be overloaded with too much information and too few ways to process it. But seeing life through the consciousness of oneness doesn't necessarily mean you'll suddenly become overly sensitive to life – it means you'll be more present in any particular moment, and more likely to discover the resources you need to participate.

Some might recognize the declaration: "I'm too sensitive for this world," as a way of justifying non-participation. But often, it's not sensitivity but fear or lack of confidence behind the withdrawal. Withdrawal is generally not the effect of aligning with the consciousness of oneness. Oneness more often than not encourages us toward greater participation in life, not less, and strengthens and empowers us. And while we indeed might in some ways become more sensitive through the consciousness of oneness, we can learn to trust that this consciousness itself will give us the energy and information we need to connect to – not withdraw from – whatever is happening in the moment.

Consider this description of heightened awareness from naturalist Barry Lopez who spent years studying wolves:

...After several weeks I realized I was becoming far more attuned to the environment we moved through. I heard more...and my senses now constantly alert, I occasionally saw a deer mouse or a grouse before they did... I took from them the confidence to believe I could attune myself better to the woods by behaving as they did – minutely inspecting things, seeking vantage points, always sniffing at the air. I did, and felt vigorous, charged with alertness.⁷

As we expand our awareness, we might become more enraged at the world's injustice, more saddened by poverty, more joyful at small kindnesses. And these responses might feel overwhelming at times. But if we stay aligned with the consciousness of oneness, we discover unifying powers that help us relate with these energies. Our rage can become tempered and guided by compassion. Our sadness can become energized by devotion or commitment. Our joy can bring sparkle and creativity into our efforts to help others.

We always have the opportunity to come back consciously – through an awareness of oneness – to every situation we are in, sensing the big picture from a balanced state of mind. Within the consciousness of oneness, sensitivity becomes a way to enter the fountain of energy at the core of life itself, as well as a means for working within it. It becomes a powerful tool.

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7 Lopez, Barry, *Of Wolves and Men*. Charles Scribner, New York, 1978, p. 282

Distortions of Integrated Oneness

We can hover above life, resisting our return to earth, and we can stay diffused and distracted through our many relationships in the outer world. And there is a way that we can get stuck in an entire world of life-*like* relationships that is both above us and beyond us, but not quite *with* us.

Post-modernists like Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrillard call this distortion *hyperreality*. It can seem like integrated oneness because we're involved in "magical" relationships that seemingly open us to endless expansion and infinite relationships, when in fact the magic is more like fantasy, and its relationships are more like we're just talking to ourselves.

Hyperreality describes what happens when the signs and symbols of our time take on a life of their own and become the world we live in. It's a consequence of our technological and media-driven age, Wordsworth's prophecy of an industrial drive life of "getting and spending" taken to the extreme.

In a media-maintained world, images of life are sold and bought as though they were life itself. For example, an advertisement for a clothing line promises a particular experience of happiness or confidence, and when we purchase and wear those clothes others who have also seen the ads relate to us as though we're living in that promised world. Consumerism becomes the way we participate in life. But it's just a manufactured life – a life Eco calls "the authentic fake."

In the United States, places like Las Vegas, Hollywood, and Disneyland are pinnacles of hyperreality. An especially illustrative example is the planned community of Celebration, Florida, created by Walt Disney Company as a place people can live within the Walt Disney dream. In 2007, the population of Celebration was about 4,000, and almost 90% white. In the fall, autumnal colored leaves are dispersed through the town center by forced air, and in winter, artificial snowflakes swirl through the town and cover the streets. The high-school hosts special clearance sales of Walt Disney merchandise.

In a promotional video for Celebration, a real estate company representative encourages house buying with a soft and futuristic voice: "It just feels familiar, and oh, so much like home."⁸ But it's not home, it's a marketing tool for a large corporation.

Celebration is in most of our homes already. Many of us spend more time with images than the real thing. We care more about how we look and how people see us than who we really are. We might have four hundred Facebook friends, but how many are genuine friends? We are seduced by images and then find ourselves living in an imagined world. As one Facebook friend recently realized (and posted): "I'm filling my virtual shopping cart with virtual clothing I already have."

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8 See "Orlando Avenue Top Team" real estate blog, online: <http://blog.orlandoavenue.com/category/celebration/>

Calling America “a dreamland” and a “non-culture of transcendence,”⁹ Baudrillard describes the ways transcendent inclinations and a need for relationships get co-opted into “orbital” circulatory relationships that neither rise up towards real transcendence nor enter into the depth of genuine human experience:

Everything which once aspired to transcendence, to discovery, to the infinite, has subtly altered its aim so that it can go into orbit: learning, technology, knowledge, having lost any transcendent aspect to their projects, have begun planning orbital trajectories for themselves. “Information” is orbital, for example – a form of knowledge which will never again go beyond itself, never again achieve transcendence or self-reflection in its aspiration towards the infinite; yet which, for all that, never sets its feet on the ground, for it has no true purchase on, nor referent in, reality. Information circulates, moves around, makes its circuits (which are sometimes perfectly useless – but that is the whole point: the question of usefulness cannot be raised) – and with each spiral, each revolution, it accumulates.”¹⁰

In descriptions of hyperreality, we find an accurate account of how modern distortions along both the vertical and horizontal axes work together to undermine our full participation in life. In a 2008 TED Conference talk, Philip Rosedale, developer of *Second Life*, a 3D computer virtual world, articulates exactly these vertical and horizontal dimensions as he likens virtual worlds to the transcendent experience of space exploration: “We all sort of dream about exploring space. Now why is that? Stop for a moment and ask, why that conceit...? If you went into space you would be able to begin again... [Virtual worlds] allow us to reinvent ourselves and they contain anything and everything, and probably anything could happen there.”

And he explains the drive for social interaction along the horizontal axis: “We inherently want to experience information together.” *Second Life* gives us both, a world of imagination and possibility that we share – and where we shop – with others.

But is it really “information” that we want to share? Or something that sounds less technical and feels more fundamentally human? Have we experienced our first life deeply and fully enough to warrant a second one? Have we put our capacity to imagine and invent to the best use in our relationships in the real world? Or do our virtual selves divert energy away from our real selves that are actually alive and present?

In a media-driven technological world, our lives might seem to have the magic of oneness as we are carried to new heights and develop infinite new connections. But if, in time, we fail to deepen and strengthen our experiences, we are not truly in oneness. More likely we’re in a dreamland of dissociated images relating to other dissociated images –sparkling but meaningless signs reflect-

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 9 Baudrillard, Jean, “Hyperreal America”, from *Modernity: Critical Concepts*, edited by Malcom Waters. Routledge, New York, 1999, p. 178

10 Baudrillard, Jean, quoted in *Postmodernism: local effects, global flows* by Vincent B. Leitch. State University of New York, 1996, p. 19

ing off each other in a hypnotizing trance as we wonder through a hall of mirrors leading nowhere.

And while we are caught in a theme park of our own making, real life is left behind to suffer the consequences of our distractions.

Chapter 4 Exercises

1. "Oneness is what many of us want; but it's not ours to keep." What is it about oneness that makes experiencing it so elusive and impossible to possess?
2. Can you identify a time when you had a powerful experience and then wanted to relive it so much you were reluctant to return to the mundane world of daily life?
3. Why does an ego inflate itself by taking credit for something that doesn't belong to it? What is the ego's goal in such a deception?
4. What are some perils of too much focus on the transcendent and not enough on the "groundedness" of everyday life?
5. How might our society's focus on the heights of new technological innovation and achievement contribute to our ignoring day-to-day, less glamorous problems close to home? What kind of imbalance does this signify?
6. What are some risks of too much focus on the complex details of our busy lives and not enough on the nourishing of our inner selves?
7. If the complexity of our modern society contributes to individual feelings of depression, anxiety, sadness and anger, what is a possible antidote?
8. What are your feelings about virtual reality technologies such as Second Life? Are you comfortable using them? What do you see as their risks and benefits?
9. Compare your experiences of high numbers of social network relationships with low numbers of neighbors and in-person friend relationships. What's the difference? Are you satisfied with it?

10. Why and how does personal desire inhibit our access to oneness? Which – if either – axis of consciousness would be more likely to be cynical of or disparaging toward desire?
11. “The candle is not there to illuminate itself,” said Sufi sage Nawab Jan-Fishan Khan. Think of a creative process in which you can participate – for example, playing a musical instrument, writing a poem, or singing in a choir. See if you can detect how the intimate nature of the moment can also be impersonal.
12. Spend time connecting with others in cyberspace (for example, on a social network, Second Life, etc.) and then spend time connecting with others in-person. Reflect on the differences you notice between these types of connections.

Fallacies of Oneness:

Oneness is uniformity, and other misconceptions

We've looked at some ways we distort experiences of oneness by either misunderstanding or misinterpreting them, or by holding on to them after they've passed. But mostly we've looked at individual responses to individual life experiences. A different category of distortions has to do with group dynamics, and the ways we confuse group experiences for the consciousness of oneness. It's easy to do, initially. But it's very dangerous.

Sameness – Unity without Diversity

In a world threatened by commercial globalization and religious and ethnic fundamentalism, and in which we've lost so much human diversity, it could seem problematic to extol the virtues of oneness. After all, the consciousness of oneness emphasizes similarities and reveals how much alike we all are. In addition to risking becoming a monoculture wasteland, isn't it a slippery slope to persecution of anyone who doesn't fit a collective ideal?

When we traveled through South Australia, we asked Basil "Mulla" Sumner, a Ngarrindjeri elder and community leader living outside Adelaide, to define oneness. He responded with his own questions: "Whose oneness are we looking at? Is it a White oneness or a Black oneness? Or a rainbow-colored oneness and unity? If there's a oneness thing there – all the people have got to gather to decide what do we mean by oneness and unity... It can't be all Johnny Howard's oneness or Georgie Bush's oneness or Tony Blair's oneness! This is a question for everybody."

Sumner points to a primary fallacy of oneness – that it has no room for diversity. Of course we can't risk any more loss of cultural diversity. Of the 7,000 languages spoken today, half are in danger of extinction and likely to die in this century. Two languages are being lost every month, taking invaluable indigenous wisdom with them.¹

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 1 See John Noble Wilford, "Languages die but not their last words", New York Times, September 19, 2007, online: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/19/science/19language.html?_r=1

But the consciousness of oneness doesn't deny diversity of any kind. It acknowledges how every minute part of life contributes to the whole of life. It sees the forest and it sees every species of tree and the part each particular tree plays. It can help us recognize the role diversity plays in the resilience of life's human and natural systems.

How can the whole depend on the diversity of its parts? Consider the concept of harmony. Harmony simply cannot exist without multiple individual notes. Harmony is created when separate notes are played at the same time. And when played together, the notes take on new properties. A *c* note paired with an *e* becomes a "major third." But when a *c* is paired with an *e flat*, it becomes a "minor third" – a very different sound. In each case, the *c* remains uniquely itself, but also reflects new qualities dependent upon its relationships.

Oneness depends on diversity just like the capacity for a species to adapt and evolve depends on its genetic diversity. And the way the strength and resilience of a particular ecosystem depends on its species diversity. The capacity of any ecosystem to adapt, endure or recover from environmental or human disturbance is tied to its many species and the variety of functions of those species. A fire in an alpine environment above the tree line can do more lasting damage than the same fire in a rainforest because a rainforest will be more resilient due to its biodiversity.

A good example of the power of diversity can be seen in the resilience of Krakatau, an Indonesian island decimated by an 1883 volcanic eruption after which no life remained. Yet today the island is teeming with flora and fauna. On the three islands destroyed by the eruption, there are now over 400 species of vascular plants, thousands of species of arthropods including 54 butterflies, over 30 species of birds, 18 species of land mollusks, 17 species of bats and 9 reptiles.² The island is dramatically changed, and the resident species are less stable due to decreased diversity compared to its pre-eruption state, but Krakatau has come back to life relatively quickly due to the biodiversity of the island rainforests surrounding it, from which new life arrived by air and by sea.

Diversity of species is a critical issue in modern agriculture, where monocultures promising high yields have dominated many markets. Consider the corn blight of 1970, when a southern storm carried disease spores to fields across the U.S. Unusually warm and moist weather contributed to the fungus growth, and in just four months the spores spread across the entire country. Ninety percent of U.S. corn, a hybrid variety, was vulnerable to the disease because they shared the same plant-cell cytoplasm. Almost all of America was growing the same species of corn. The blight cost farmers and consumers hundreds of millions of dollars.

In his 1992 classic, *The Diversity of Life*, Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson describes what happens when we lose species diversity:

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 2 See "Volcanic Violence". University of Wisconsin, October, 2004, online: <http://whyfiles.org/031volcano/6.html>

Eliminate one species, and another increases in number to take its place. Eliminate a great many species, and the local ecosystem starts to decay visibly. Productivity drops and the channels of the nutrient cycles are clogged. More of the biomass is sequestered in the form of dead vegetation and slowly metabolizing, oxygen-starved mud, or is simply washed away. Less competent pollinators take over as the best-adapted bees, moths, birds, bats, and other specialists drop out. Fewer seeds fall, fewer seedlings sprout. Herbivores decline, and their predators die away in close concert.³

Darwin was the first to suggest a link between species diversity and ecological stability, and the connection has been shown through scientific research since. But common sense says the same thing: “putting all your eggs in one basket” is rarely the best course of action. It’s true all the way up and down the food chain. The more species, the more ecological functions, and the greater the capacity to spring back from natural – or other – disasters. Just like the more resources we have as individuals – whether money, social support systems, psychological or cognitive capacities, or practical skills – the more likely we can weather hard times and assist others to make the best of difficult situations.

In the human world we see the importance of diversity played out in effective and powerful professional organizations and governments. The more diverse a group of people, the more diverse the pool of ideas and resources, and the more adaptable the group is. Diversity improves opportunities for cooperation and creative collaboration, enhances the capacity to identify and serve a variety of needs, and improves the likelihood that people can share the load in times of scarcity.

From the perspective of personal transformation, we know that we often build stronger and more resilient relationships when we struggle to find unifying qualities within a diversity of views or approaches. Either we uncover deeper connections than we ever thought possible, or we might simply “agree to disagree” – a very powerful stance.

Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher and physician, noted this somewhat confusing paradox in his declaration that, “The hidden harmony is stronger than the visible.” And, “That which is in opposition is in concert, and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony.”⁴

We might not fully understand what Heraclitus means as his surviving words are only fragments, but we get a sense that superficial togetherness can lack the depth and possibility discovered when individuals find ways to respect each other and work together despite differences.

As we come to see the world from a perspective that is not constricted around “me” and “mine” we are free to acknowledge and value the contributions of what’s around us. In this way, diversity is not a goal or an abstract idea, but it’s experienced as a natural foundation of stability, resiliency, creativity and growth in the larger society.

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3 Wilson, Edward O., *The Diversity of Life*. W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1999, p. 14

4 Tatarkiewicz, Wladyslaw, Harrell, J., Barrett, Cyril and Petsch, D., *History of Aesthetics*. Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, 2005, pp. 88-89

St. Thomas Aquinas, the great 13th century Italian philosopher and Catholic theologian, used the word *functional* to describe the dynamic and sometimes hidden purpose of diversity in unity. He uses the analogy of the natural world to reflect the role of individuals in the church:

So too, the diversity within the church reflects a certain beauty and order, and each member testifies to God and God's plan in the way set for it by God, and together all show the goodness of God. But, at bottom, the diversity is functional; different members, each with a role to play, are needed for the thriving and growth of the body as a whole.⁵

Fundamentalism and Globalization

There are many ways we destroy diversity through collective behavior. Two are worth highlighting because of their unique relationship and their current influence: globalization and a certain brand of fundamentalism. And while both seem to reflect ideas or concepts about unity, it's their fundamental disregard for diversity that makes them antithetical to oneness.

By "globalization" we're referring to a wide range of social, political, and economic changes related to the opening of borders and boundaries between countries or regions previously inaccessible, through which multi-national or Western corporations often gain the most, usually at the expense of local people and resources. And goods and financial capital are not the only commodity that is shared – so are ideas – that cross and infiltrate boundaries between countries and cultures.

And by "fundamentalism," we're referring to religious fundamentalism of any kind that supports absolute literal interpretation of scripture, strengthens an ethnocentric prejudice against the "other," and includes a strong emphasis on conversion.

What's the relationship between the two? A sometimes subtle and often overt current of domination and exploitation makes globalization and religious fundamentalism highly destructive. Neither tends to accept or work with existing indigenous or native social, economic, or spiritual structures; rather they impose their own methods and ideologies.

We've seen this trend in "market fundamentalism," the unrealistic faith in market capitalism to solve economic or social problems, as multinational corporations have moved into developing countries and contributed to greater poverty and socio-cultural deterioration. And we've seen this trend in religious fundamentalism throughout the ages as missionaries from varying Christian traditions have entered foreign lands and converted local indigenous people, often in advance of or in conjunction with Western industry. Not the least destructive being the decimation of native populations in Australia, Canada, and the United States through government-sanctioned church-

⁵ Wawrykow, Joseph Peter, *The Westminster Handbook to Thomas Aquinas*. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2005, p. 26

run boarding school systems.

Many are starting to acknowledge the destructive impacts of globalization on developing countries where local resources have been exploited by multi-national corporations under the guise of economic and political assistance. In Jamaica, for example, contractual conditions of World Bank and International Monetary Fund loans force local dairy farmers to compete with the cheaper imported European dried milk products, which they cannot do. Stores must sell the latter by government decree, and farmers must dump their excess milk. And because Dole bananas are cheaper to import and sell, the markets must buy them. Meanwhile local banana plantations become worthless and growers and pickers become unemployed.

Jamaica's story is not unique. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund and Inter-American Development Bank routinely make loans to developing countries as a means to providing stability and prosperity, but loan contracts force countries to open to international market forces that eventually undermine and destroy local human, ecological, cultural, and economic resources.

Joseph Stiglitz, who was senior vice president at the World Bank before he was forced to quit due to his growing criticism of globalization describes this dynamic:

The World Bank and the I.M.F. said they were doing all this for the benefit of the developing world... In the end, the programs...didn't bring the promised results. Incomes stagnated. Where there was growth, the wealth went to those at the top. Economic crises in individual countries became ever more frequent – there have been more than a hundred severe ones in the past 30 years alone.

Globalization has made us more interdependent; what happens in one part of the world affects those in another – a fact made manifest by the contagion of our economic difficulties. To solve global problems, there must be a sense of cooperation and trust, including a sense of shared values. That trust was never strong, and it is weakening by the hour.⁶

TWICE AS DESTRUCTIVE

Proponents of Christian and market fundamentalism often work together, if indirectly. Missionaries of Christian faiths often enter territory and convert residents to a mindset – religious and cultural – that undermines indigenous spiritual unity between humanity, nature and the sacred. Corporations then enter the same territory finding residents willing to adopt modern or Western methods of resource use or extraction that depend on a worldview of human separation from and domination over the earth.

Consider what's happening today in the Gamo Highlands, a densely populated remote region in southeastern Ethiopia with a wide diversity of plant and food crops as well as indigenous tribal

6 Stiglitz, Joseph, "Wall Street's Toxic Message". Vanity Fair Magazine, July, 2009, online: <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2009/07/third-world-debt200907>

people and an agriculture that has been stable for over ten thousand years.

“Evangelical Christian protestant organizations have moved in and really created a lot of turmoil in this region,” says Leah Samberg, an environmental researcher studying the biodiversity of the Gama Highlands, whom we met while visiting the area. “Every community has a Protestant church... A lot of people are converting, especially young people.”

“We Christians are committed to obey what the Bible teaches us...,” says the Ethiopian Protestant pastor, Samuel Otto, illustrating the importance of conversion in subsequent resource abuse: “You have a car, but the car is not God for you. So, trees, animals, rivers, this is not God... We have to use this for us. God created this for us!”

Using natural resources solely for a human purpose, rather than recognizing all resources – human included – are integrated into an ultimately sacred or divine purpose, is more a Christian than traditional indigenous ideology. And it’s an ideology that serves the co-modification and commercialization of an area’s resources, which generally serves the corporations that want to benefit from their sale.

Today in the Gamo, African Green Revolution methods are gaining momentum, attempting to bring bio-technology including pesticides, fertilizers and genetically modified seeds to small farms. Samuel Muhunyu, from the Network for Eco-farming in Africa asks:

Now who are these proponents of the green revolution in Africa? Does it have its origin in Africa? The concept in itself is foreign. It’s not like it’s supporting the farmers to develop their own and growing with their technology. It’s bringing in – grafting the foreign technology, grafting the foreign idea on the farmers.

“Grafting foreign ideas” onto local traditions is an old trick, and one we know fails in many crucial ways. Perhaps most important, it denies the opportunity for local wisdom to resolve modern challenges with its own sustainable methods. The development and application of indigenous wisdom to the changing human and ecological needs could help bring forth solutions that are particularly aligned with the needs of the land and people. But first we need to acknowledge – and respect – that there is an important interdependence between land, people, and the issues they face.

This is the point of view of Mburu Gathuru, a pioneer in the field of community ecological governance who serves as executive director of the international non-profit Institute for Culture and Ecology:

People here in Africa know the solutions to their most pressing problems, especially in the area of hunger and famine. But rather than being given the opportunities to harness their knowledge, what we are seeing is that quick fix solutions are being formulated out there like prescriptions for medicines and we are told “take this and we will deliver you!”

When we are aligned with the consciousness of oneness, we resist imposition and support the development of solutions born from cooperation and mutual respect. And perhaps most critically, we move away from seeing and experiencing life through a worldview that emphasizes separation between human beings, nature, and the sacred.

Group Dynamics

We all have a need to belong. Anyone who's ever maneuvered through a high-school cafeteria at lunchtime looking for a place to sit knows the great pressures we can feel to fit in. This pressure is often exploited by others – large groups or movements – but it's also exploited by the part of ourselves that would compromise our freedoms and responsibilities for the quick fix of temporary security.

When becoming aware of and developing the consciousness of oneness, it's very important to learn to discriminate between the belonging that comes through deep connections within ourselves and to outer life, and the belonging we gain through “fitting in” with a larger group. This latter belonging might look like oneness – but we encourage you to look again.

Sociologists have identified numerous motivations for giving up individual integrity to groups: the safety and security of group membership, the belief that others – especially authority figures – know better, the fear of consequences from opposing consensus, and the simple belief that someone else will do what's needed so we don't have to.

Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist born in 1858 used the term *collective effervescence* to describe the unique appeal of group energy and its power over individuals. Collective effervescence is not so different from “the bandwagon effect,” which refers to how quickly people jump onto a collective trend or fad, or from “herd behavior” which describes how people will naturally begin acting in sync with each other in crowds, or from mass hysteria, the psycho-physiological change that can take place in entire groups of people often without any rational cause.

In 1972, psychologist Irving Janis used the term *groupthink* to describe group dynamics in which individuals relinquish moral judgment and common sense for the sake of group cohesion. Groupthink includes subtle and powerful ways we create a sense of infallibility and superiority in groups and persecute those who don't fit the mold.

We can recognize collective effervescence, groupthink, and herd behavior in many situations like the peer pressure to drink or have sex, fan behavior at sports events, and the pressures applied against a dissenting juror at a trial. Groupthink includes a number of basic dangers, such as the illusion of invulnerability, in which group consensus creates a false sense of safety and optimism; collective rationalization, which rationalizes away dangers or dissenting opinions; self-censorship,

through which individuals withhold their different views; and the illusion of unanimity which convinces the group that each individual is in agreement.

The 1986 Space Shuttle Challenger explosion was an example of institutional groupthink: Instead of listening to warnings from a lone, knowledgeable engineer, NASA created an internal atmosphere of confidence and infallibility with no room for dissent and launched the faulty shuttle with disastrous results.

Perhaps nowhere has the phenomenon of groupthink been better illustrated than in Nazi Germany, in which delusions of grandeur and pressure toward consensus among German citizens and officials supported the atrocities of the Holocaust. Maoism and the Cultural Revolution in China, and more recently the ethnic cleansings and genocides from Bosnia to Rwanda are other examples of destructive group behavior. In the United States, perpetually reinforced ideas about where meaning and power come from supports cultural group focus on material wealth, which we often live out in our communities as expressed in the common American phrase: "Keeping up with the Joneses."

Group behavior is powerful and mystifying, and there can be a fine line between functional and dysfunctional. For all its power inherent in collaboration between and among individuals, in some ways it's an indirect reflection of oneness, because it easily plays on our deep need for identification, belonging, and understanding of wholeness, and allows us to live an inner sense of unity in an outer context.

As such, group behavior often capitalizes on our psychological weaknesses, and ends up undermining oneness by siphoning our personal confidence and independent thought into an ocean of collective experience that fails to benefit the entire group and only serves a few.

PSYCHOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Sigmund Freud was probably the first to describe the psychopathology of our tendencies to give ourselves to others in an unhealthy way, equating much of our longing for outer companionship with a desire to return to the infantile and narcissistic state of merging with our mother, where we were, ideally, continually fed at the breast. Falling in love, joining religious community, the belonging that comes from strong group identity, represented to Freud the ego dissolution that was our primal experience of closeness with our mother, a regression rather than a maturing of our identity.

Freud believed that all of us experience – and hopefully develop through – a stage of early narcissism in childhood. We move past it by surviving the childhood insult of not always getting what we want. Through the pain of loss or the violation that not everything is rightfully ours, we come to see and know that we are not the center of the universe, and others' needs are relevant as well.

Not all psychologists believe narcissism is a natural developmental phase, or even exists at all. But Freud was rightfully skeptical about the tendency of people to confuse experiences of oneness with regressive – not mature – psychological states. A narcissist carries with him a deep wound to his sense of self, marked by inner shame, emptiness and guilt. Defending against this pain is achieved by creating a protective bubble, an inflated sense of identity that is maintained by creating situations and responding to those things in the world that positively mirror or reflect back his own grandiosity. In this way, he is always and only relating to an image of life or a reflection of his own beliefs or experiences. But narcissism is only one of a few ways we can misinterpret inner, personal energies and unconscious content for the impersonal or transpersonal experiences of oneness.

Another is *projection* through which we put onto outer life our own inner unconscious energies and relate to them instead of what is really happening. Projection is very common, and we all do it.

The difference between a balanced and clear-seeing individual and someone engaged in a projection is like the difference between someone walking outside and feeling joyful at seeing a bit of sun piercing through an otherwise cloudy sky, and an individual who was just given a promotion at work walking outside on the same day and exulting in how much sunshine there is. This second individual with the promotion is projecting outwards an inner state of happiness and seeing the whole world as sunny. In contrast, the first person simply appreciates the small amount of sunshine for what it truly is.

Both might be joyful, but the first person's reaction is the result of the seeing and appreciating the actual tiny bit of sunshine, whereas the second person's happiness is brought with him, and projected onto the day. If this latter person is a narcissist, he might even take the sunshine personally, believing it's shining just for him, or that the world is giving him a sign of his own brightness.

Projection happens all the time, and can be a natural aspect of our development. The more that we learn to recognize our projections the further we step toward genuine connection – instead of the appearance of connection. We might live out this process when we fall in love and then work to build strong and respectful relationships beyond the infatuation phase. Or when we move past our fascination with material goods – like having the latest car or electronic device – and see them for what they really are. Or when we re-connect to what feels really right or true in our hearts, after identifying too much with the ideas or beliefs of an authority figure.

Narcissism and projection are not the experience of oneness, which is a genuine connection to life forces that is transpersonal, impersonal and shared. They can feel expansive and even magical, but though they do not usually last, and often leave us with an empty and lonely feeling because they were not based in reality.

Social theorists in the 20th and 21st century point to Western culture as both a reflection and

perpetuator of narcissistic tendencies,⁷ fostering the narcissistic character traits that many of us live out daily in the West, including a sense of extreme self-importance, inability to find meaning in personal relationships, repressed rage, fear of old age and dying, inner emptiness, and fascination with images and celebrity.

As human beings, we have tremendous energy and experience in our unconscious that we routinely project outwards onto others. Our loved ones can carry some of our most powerful and unconscious hopes and desires. Often, the more intimate we become with someone, the more likely we are to open the floodgates of unconscious content and allow it to color our relationships. Unfortunately, while dynamics based on projections can endure for long periods, they can't ultimately offer genuine nourishment, as they are not based on two people genuinely relating to each other.

The process of projection takes on a slightly different quality when it involves a group. Indeed, it's our unconscious tendency to project our inner needs onto outer situations that's the root of many dysfunctional group dynamics. Anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl coined the term *participation mystique* to describe the almost mystical quality that comes through intense identification with objects, as in cultures and traditions that believe totems or holy objects contain special powers, and Jung emphasized participation mystique as a force active in many groups.

When we are engaged in a participation mystique (also known as *projective identification*) we are projecting deep unconscious content onto the outer world and relating to it unaware of the real thing. This creates a certain type of spell or intense infatuation in which we seem deeply connected to others, or their ideas, but are truly only relating to our own deeply unconscious energies. This phenomenon accounts for many of the intoxicating experiences we feel when we identify strongly with a political group or a religious group.

In many ways, losing ourselves in a group is yet another version of an imbalance along the horizontal axis, when we give ourselves away in relationships and forget about the deep resources we have along the vertical axis. We unconsciously trade our own inner strength and autonomy for a less fulfilling and ultimately disillusioning outer connection; we sacrifice authentic power for the temporary fix of getting along or fitting in.

To be sure, engaging in a participation mystique is a common experience and not necessarily pathological. But like all forms of projection, it has costs and benefits, risks and rewards. Were it not for projection, people probably wouldn't take the necessary step of falling in love in the first place. And without projective identification, we might miss the opportunity of discovering in ourselves the power of our own unconscious. The key difference between function and dysfunction is determined by whether the projection remains unconscious or is ultimately brought to awareness.

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 7 From: Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, 1964; Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, 1977; Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in the Age of Diminishing Expectations*, 1979

If the former, then we miss the opportunity to discover the richness and authenticity of our own inner life. If the latter, then projection can be seen as just another step on the path toward wholeness.

As intoxicating and engaging as experiences can be when projection is involved, the source of such charged feelings is often elements of our own psyches projected outward. It may seem like oneness because it feels larger than life and reflects a dynamism that we know is possible but might not find on our own. But all too often remaining unaware of our projections undermines our sense of real power and participation by allowing us to let others manifest the energy and experience we need to honor in ourselves. In contrast, the consciousness of oneness helps us claim our own authentic power for the sake of life beyond ourselves.

There's a big difference.

Chapter 5 Exercises

1. In what ways does oneness feel different from sameness? How does it feel similar?
2. Mulla Sumner says the definition of oneness is something that has to be agreed upon by everybody. Does oneness actually vary? Could your oneness be different from, say, an indigenous person's, or a Western industrialist's sense of oneness? Why or why not?
3. What is it that makes a whole greater than the sum of its parts?
4. In what ways does the modern phenomenon of globalization support oneness? In what ways is it antithetical to oneness?
5. Identify times when you have projected parts of your inner self onto outer life – for example, idealizing a partner in an intimate relationship. What was your experience when you stopped doing so? How did your relationship or sense of self change?
6. Try to recall a positive group experience you've had. And a negative one. What made the difference? Can you identify ways in which groupthink or projection played a role in these or other group experiences?
7. Where in your own personal life or in the world today do you fear the power of group dynamics? Where do you respect it?

8. Diversity and unity seem like opposites, but are actually dependent on one another. Can you think of examples where unity in diversity is recognized and respected? And where it isn't?
9. Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "That which is in opposition is in concert, and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony." The next time you have a conversation with someone and disagree, think about how you can use this statement to get a bigger picture.

History of Oneness – I

Where has oneness been all this time?

Where has oneness been these last centuries? For all of Western society's emphasis on individualism, independence, and even alienation, you'd think oneness had been hiding under a rock. Actually, oneness isn't a new idea, concept, or experience – references to the power and consciousness of oneness have shown up in many aspects of Eastern and Western culture since the beginning of time. We can't possibly trace its appearances exhaustively here, but in this chapter you'll be given a glimpse of some of the key individuals and movements that have given us ways to understand oneness in the fields of spirituality, psychology, and philosophy.

During much of this chapter, we'll be focusing mostly on Western culture, because in many areas of the East, oneness is much more of a natural and integrated aspect of inner and outer life. It's in the West that we've generally lost touch with this fundamental consciousness, and where reminding ourselves of its presence is especially needed.

Oneness and Spirituality

Throughout written history, the consciousness of oneness has been explored, expressed, and lived through religious and spiritual systems more than any other particular area of society.

Oneness has expressed itself through the monotheistic belief in one God, Creator and Sustainer of all life, as well as through the pantheistic belief in many gods, working together to maintain divine order. Even the non-theistic Mahayana Buddhism, which does not recognize God, nonetheless recognizes "Buddha Nature," "suchness," or "dharmakaya," as an Absolute and conscious presence that threads through all sentient beings, and recognizes the universe is an intricate web of interdependent relationships spanning past, present, and future.

Similarly in Confucianism, the universe is seen as unified, interconnected, and interpenetrating, and the idea of microcosm and macrocosm – that the smallest part reflects and includes the whole – is primary. In Taoism, the seeker aims to become one with the Tao – the Way – which flows

through all parts and dimensions of life, preceding and encompassing the entire universe. And indigenous spiritual traditions around the world reflect a way of life that fully respects the sacred unity of the created and spirit worlds.

The idea of oneness has been introduced over and over through a wide variety of scripture and practice, but it has also been a controversial aspect of religious life. Seekers and mystics who experience oneness know that divine love, power, and knowledge are available directly, not through the mediation of Church officials. This fact has challenged Church authority and threatened Church coffers. Mystics have been burned at the stake and imprisoned throughout history for such heresy. Consider St. Teresa of Avila's spiritual instructions, translated by Mirabai Starr, and the power they might take away from the Church establishment:

This magnificent refuge is inside you. Enter. Shatter the darkness that shrouds the doorway... Be bold. Be humble. Put away the incense and forget the incantations they taught you. Ask no permission from the authorities. Close your eyes and follow your breath to the still place that leads to the invisible path that leads you home.¹

Despite religious persecution throughout the ages, the consciousness of oneness has thrived through deep inner experience as well as through written transmission. And perhaps nowhere has it appeared so strongly and directly as through humanity's simple, ongoing longing to return to what is real.

Like a thread drawing individuals along, one by one, a powerful yearning has been active throughout human history, awakening hope for deeper connections and bringing experiences of love, unity, and purpose. Ultimately, the longing for wholeness alive within us is the reality of oneness calling itself home. As Abhinavagupta, founder of non-dual Kashmir Shaivism, says:

*Oneness is our real Self.
Everything is an aspect of Oneness.
And our quest to know this comes from Oneness.²*

Psalm 42 in the Old Testament describes this longing:

*As the hart panteth after water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee oh God.
My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before my God?*

And from the Buddha:

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1 Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*. Image, 1972, p. 2
2 Abhinavagupta, on the teachings of Non-dual Kashmir Shaivism

*I, beholding all living creatures
Sunk in the sea of suffering,
At first do not show myself,
But set them expectant and thirsting,
Then when their hearts are longing,
I appear to preach the Law.³*

Paradoxically, as strong as our longing is for union, the great scriptures describe the divine as already here with us, mysteriously present in this world, along the horizontal axis:

Muhammad says in the Qu’ran 2:115:

Wheresoe’er ye turn, there is the face of God.

In Judaism:

If I [God] am there, all are there, and if I am not there who is there?⁴

From Bedagi Wabanaki, of the Algonquin tribe of North American Indians:

The Great Spirit is in all things. He is in the air we breathe. The Great Spirit is our Father, but the Earth is our Mother. She nourishes us; that which we put in the ground she returns to us.⁵

And from Zen Buddhism:

A monk asked Tozan, ‘What is Buddha?’ Tozan replied, ‘Three pounds of flax!’⁶

Not only can divine oneness be experienced in the outer world, knowable along the horizontal axis, the divine is already with our hearts, accessible through the deep inner turning that takes place along the vertical axis.

Part II of the Mundaka Upanishads – one of the most ancient scriptures of all time – describes the presence of God:

In the golden city of the heart dwells The Lord of Love,

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3 See the *Lotus Sutra 16*

4 See the *Talmud, Sukka 53a*

5 See United Indians of All Tribes Foundation online: <http://www.unitedindians.org/involved.html>

6 See Mumonkean – *The Gateless Gate, Verse 18*

*without parts, without stain.
Know him as the radiant light of lights.
There shines not the sun, neither moon nor star,
Nor flash of lightning, nor fire lit on earth.
The Lord is the light reflected by all.
He shining, everything shines after him.*

And many traditions recognize the relevancy of manifesting unity with other seekers as an aspect of realizing unity with God. The Talmud declares:

Israel's reconciliation with God can be achieved only when they are all one brotherhood.⁷

But the idea of community is not always humanity alone: from the Shinto tradition:

All ye under the heaven! Regard heaven as your father, earth as your mother, and all things as your brothers and sisters.⁸

And from the Zen tradition:

*In a moonlit night on a spring day,
the croak of a frog
pierces through the whole cosmos and turns it into
a single family.⁹*

REALIZING ONENESS

Most spiritual traditions offer practices and guidance to assist the realization of divine unity. But how does spiritual practice work? One of the first steps includes distinguishing between a “higher” or more “real” part of our self from a “lower” or “false” self. Depending upon the tradition, we might hear the words “Self” or “higher Self,” “soul,” “eternal,” or “divine quality” used to describe the part of us that is real or near to the absolute truth. In contrast, the “lower” self is our “ego,” our self-interest, or our vices, ruled by our desires – most notably our physical desires – that get in the way of our realization. This dual nature is described in Hinduism’s Chandogya Upanishad:

This body is mortal, always gripped by death, but within it dwells the immortal Self. This Self,

.....
7 Wu, John C.H. and Jingxiong Wu, *Golden Age of Zen*. World Wisdom Inc., Bloomington, Indiana, 2004, p. 284

8 See the Shinto classic, *Oracle of the Kami of Atsuta*

9 Wu, John C.H. and Jingxiong Wu, *Golden Age of Zen*. World Wisdom Inc., Bloomington, Indiana, 2004, p. 284

when associated in our consciousness with the body, is subject to pleasure and pain; and so long as this association continues, freedom from pleasure and pain can no man find.¹⁰

And Jesus says:

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.¹¹

Spiritual and religious training helps us realize oneness in part through cultivating or “waking up” the aspects of consciousness that are already attuned to the hidden truth of unity, like detachment, clarity, generosity, openness, compassion, and devotion. We use practices like prayer, meditation, contemplation, service, and remembrance to align our consciousness with what is already present and true. This path guides us through a process that strengthens our higher and deeper qualities, while destroying our pettiness or egoic qualities.

The Bodhisattva path in Mahayana Buddhism encourages service to all beings as a way to realize the truth of oneness. You can almost hear the re-alignment of consciousness taking place through inquiry, contemplation and attitude adjustment in the following treatise:

*Why should I be unable
To regard the bodies of others as 'I'?
It is not difficult to see
That my body is also that of others.*

*Only through acquaintance has the thought of 'I' arisen
Toward this impersonal body;
So, in a similar way, why should it not arise
Toward other living beings?*

*When I work in this way for the sake of others,
I should not let conceit or [the feeling that I am wonderful] arise.
It is just like feeding myself—
I hope for nothing in return.¹²*

.....
10 (8.12.1)

11 See Mark 8.34

12 Shantideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, translated by Vesna Wallace and B. Alan Wallace. Snow Lion Publications, Ithaca, New York, pp. 112-116

LIFE WITH ONENESS

What does the consciousness of oneness feel like for someone on a spiritual path? We've already been discussing these experiences in a secular context – peace, love, clarity, freedom and expansion (along the vertical axis) and compassion, interdependence, sacredness of life (along the horizontal axis) and it is much the same within a spiritual context.

And we've even suggested that oneness might not always be easy to accept or work with. We've shown how it can be confusing and compel us toward attitudes that actually undermine oneness instead of encouraging it. Bernadette Roberts, a contemporary Christian mystic, describes a fundamental discomfort in the experience of oneness:

[There is a] falling away of the ego-center, which leaves us looking into a dark hole, a void or empty space in ourselves. Without the veil of the ego-center, we do not recognize the divine; it is not as we thought it should be. Seeing the divine, eye to eye, is a reality that shatters our expectations of light and bliss. From here on we must feel our way in the dark, and the special eye that allows us to see in the dark opens at this time.¹³

Despite the confusion or sense of emptiness, the growing sense of oneness can include a variety of experiences as well. In Sufism the state of union has many flavors; it's experienced as longing – a painful emptiness – as well as overwhelming love and ecstasy. Paradoxically, both are aspects of the same oneness.

Whoever has fallen into the ocean of God's Oneness grows thirstier every day. His thirst will never be appeased because he has a thirst for truth that is only quenched by the real.¹⁴

Is this a similar oneness described by Machtilde of Magdeburg, a 13th century Christian mystic?

*God says:
My dove,
In your sighings
I soar in you.¹⁵*

Oneness is also often associated with the divine qualities of love, peace, and compassion. From Rumi:

.....
13 Bodian, Stephan, in his interview with Bernadette Roberts in *Timeless Visions, Healing Voices: Conversations with Men and Women of the Spirit*, Crossing Press, Freedom, California, 1991

14 Yusuf Ibn Husayn, Reprinted in *Traveling the Path of Love: Sayings of Sufi Masters*, edited by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee. Golden Sufi Center Publishing, Inverness, California, 1994, p. 176

15 *Meditations with Mechtild of Magdeburg*, edited by Sue Woodruff. Bear & Co., Santa Fe, 1982, p. 53

*Love has come and it flows like blood beneath my skin
Through my veins,
It has emptied me of my self and filled me with The Beloved.¹⁶*

And Jesus promises rest to those who come to him:

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you,
and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls; for my
yoke is easy, and my burden is light.¹⁷*

In his book *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, 20th century Trappist monk Thomas Merton describes the love present in the experience of oneness from a Christian and Buddhist point of view:

Such love is beyond desire and beyond all restrictions of a desiring and self-centered self. Such love begins only when the ego renounces its claim to absolute autonomy and ceases to live in a little kingdom of desires in which it is its own end and reason for existing. Christian charity seeks to realize oneness with the other 'in Christ'. Buddhist compassion seeks to heal the brokenness of division and illusion and to find wholeness not in an abstract metaphysical 'one' or even a pantheistic immanism but in Nirvana — the void which is Absolute Reality and Absolute Love.¹⁸

The consciousness of oneness can be so powerful that even duality can be understood and experienced as unity. From the Mahayana Heart Sutra, which identifies the inextricability of form and emptiness, to the Gospel of Philip that calls light and darkness “brothers of one another,” oneness has room for good and bad, suffering and joy, loss and fulfillment. Oneness as a lived experience is more a way of being than an identification. We come to allow all aspects of life to be as they are and learn to value their interdependence.

The Tao Te Ching, Verse 2 reflects this possibility:

*Under heaven all can see beauty as beauty only because there is ugliness.
All can know good as good only because there is evil.
Therefore having and not having arise together.
Difficult and easy complement each other.
Long and short contrast each other;
High and low rest upon each other;
Voice and sound harmonize each other;
Front and back follow one another.*

.....
16 *Traveling the Path of Love*, p. 200

17 See *Matthew 11.28-30*

18 *Pg. 86*

DOING AND NOT-DOING

What does life mean to the seeker after a profound realization of oneness? One task is to become comfortable with the paradox we have mentioned before – the bewildering state of living from higher consciousness and not as much through the desires and habits previously identified with “you.” After all, the “you” that had driven the search for truth has now shown itself to be not nearly as compelling (or real) as you had thought. Or, in Sufi terms: “There is no dervish. Or if there is a dervish that dervish is not there.”¹⁹

Life with oneness is truly mysterious. For Zen Buddhists, in many ways it goes on as it did before: Before enlightenment, chop wood carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood carry water. And yet things are different. Distractions caused by self-centeredness and conflict caused by desire have diminished with the “you” that perpetuated them. What takes their place, oftentimes gradually, are many of the experiences we longed for: unity, peace, love, presence, clarity and ecstasy – along with that sometimes unsettling awareness of emptiness. The Zen Haiku by Sodo Yamaguchi reflects this unique paradox of emptiness and presence:

*In my hut this spring
There is nothing –
There is everything*

Of course different traditions accentuate different aspects of life with oneness. In Zen, simplicity and emptiness are often highlighted. In Taoism, Lao Tzu describes an efficiency that comes with realization:

*In the pursuit of learning one learns more every day;
in the pursuit of the Way one does less every day.
One does less and less until one does nothing at all, and when one does
nothing at all there is nothing that is undone.*²⁰

“Nothing is left undone” and yet the “doer” is mysteriously doing nothing. This is the state of oneness with the Tao, which has its own intelligence and its own power, that the wayfarer is now capable of embodying. Lao Tzu’s efficiency comes from the truth that divine omniscience and omnipotence is now at work through the spiritual disciple. St. Teresa of Avila also describes how, in union, she becomes an agent for the will of God:

*I understood [union] to be a spirit, pure and raised up above all things
of earth, with nothing remaining in it that would swerve from the will*

.....
19 Vaughan-Lee, Llewellyn, *Signs of God*. Golden Sufi Center Publishing, Inverness, California, 2001, p. 21

20 *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 48

*of God, being a spirit and a will resigned to His will, and in detachment from all things, occupied in God in such a way as to leave no trace of any love of self, or of any created thing.*²¹

In Sufism too, the 8th century Egyptian Sufi Dhul Nun describes how union means the devotee serves God by becoming His senses in this world:

*When I love a devotee, I, the Lord, become his ear so that he hears through Me, I become his eye so that he sees through Me, I become his tongue so that he speaks through Me, and I become his hand so that he possesses through Me.*²²

And we hear from Dogen, the 13th century Zen teacher how through a shifting in human consciousness life itself becomes divine:

Handle even a single leaf of green in such a way that it manifests the body of the Buddha. This in turn allows the Buddha to manifest through the leaf.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have awakened to reality become a vehicle for *suchness*, another word for oneness. They live this energy of truth naturally, in service to life and those who seek liberation:

*The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas all desire to liberate all men, spontaneously permeating them with their spiritual influences and never forsaking them. Through the power of the wisdom, which is one with Suchness, they manifest activities in response to the needs of men as they see and hear them.*²³

How a being can “permeate” others is genuinely mysterious. At the same time, it seems highly plausible from a perspective of oneness, in the same way that our bodies are permeated by the food we eat and the water we drink, and how invisible toxins permeate our cells.

CURRENT ATMOSPHERE

Mystical experiences of oneness have informed a great deal of spiritual literature, from the earliest scripture to modern inquiry, and have inspired millions of individuals to pursue deeper understanding of what is Real. Today, you might find a Kabbala center, a yoga studio, a synagogue, a dharma center, a church for any number of faiths, a mosque, and even a place to practice Native American spirituality in your city or town.

.....
21 Teresa of Avila, *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus*, translated and edited by E. Allison Peers. Image Books, Doubleday, New York, 1960, p. 494

22 *Traveling the Path of Love*, p. 207

23 *The Awakening of Faith: Attributed to Asvaghosha*, translated with commentary by Yoshito S. Hakeda. Columbia University Press, New York, 1967, pp. 59 and 63

But oneness as a spiritual principle or experience is unique in that it is essentially free from dogma and tradition. It's available through many entry points, accessible from all perspectives, and present no matter where you are or where you want to be. It allows us to seek wholeness, love, or meaning without belonging to any church or center. It lets us long for and work for what is highest and best in all of us. If we trust oneness, it becomes our guide.

In our contemporary spiritual climate, oneness has special appeal because it can be an agent of action and change. Oneness is realized and reflected as much in the outer world as the inner, and it's the difficulties of the outer world that are calling forth the attention of so many of us. The renewed interest in indigenous wisdom as a means for understanding and living oneness is at a particular pinnacle because such wisdom contains a call and *method* for living as a community including earth and animals. While monastic traditions like Buddhism and Christianity have stressed renunciation of the world, indigenous traditions accentuate connection and responsibility to every aspect of life.

Trevor Moeke, a Maori elder from Hamilton, New Zealand describes how indigenous cultures today are still alive with a wisdom that could offer guidance to the rest of the world:

Part and parcel of the contribution the indigenous people can make is their connectedness – their connection – spiritually with their environment and their creators, whomever they believe that is. With the earth, with each other, and with the kind of paradigm that does not delineate one against another unnecessarily, that really calls for a greater more principled life that sees. We need to seek unity, and we need to seek achievement based on each other's strengths, not on each other's differences.

Other teachers, as well, are pointing to the importance of oneness in this particular time in the evolution of the world. Angel Kyodo Williams, a Zen teacher from Oakland, California stresses that the current spiritual task and opportunity in contemporary Buddhism is to realize the *Fourth Turning* of the wheel of Dharma. This Fourth Turning, unlike the traditional Three Turnings that have been historically recognized (Hinayana, Mahayana, Vajrayana) is characterized by the understanding that all life – human and natural – will move on a path toward enlightenment *as one*. “The new turning is about Maitreyana, or ‘spiritual friendship as the vehicle for awakening,’” says Williams. “It is not a ‘go it alone’ path. I think of the Fourth Turning as holding us all collectively responsible. The notion of spiritual friendship is the idea of collective – all of us and the world. This collective itself is the vehicle.”²⁴

Sufi teacher Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee holds a similar view, and has written extensively about how the power of oneness is available to us as a global community at this point in time, and can help resolve many of the problems and challenges we currently face.²⁵ We just need to overcome our

.....
24 From an unpublished interview with Angel Kyodo Williams by Hilary Hart, 2009

25 See Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee's *Working With Oneness*, 2002, and *The Light of Oneness*, 2003, both by Golden Sufi Center Publishing, Inverness, California (www.goldensufi.org)

self-interest in order to work with it:

Few in our Western culture acknowledge spirituality as a living, transformative force in the world. Instead, it is limited by fantasies of inner fulfillment, personal power or the image of enlightenment. Often we use spirituality to answer unmet needs rather than giving ourselves to its deeper calling: true self-sacrifice and service. There is little awareness or respect for real spiritual power and its purpose.

And Vaughan-Lee, a traditional Sufi, has a fairly untraditional point of view – similar to Williams’ – that oneness is no longer only accessible to seekers who have reached a particular stage on a spiritual path, but is available to anyone who has the attitudes that activate the consciousness of oneness – attitudes that take into account the challenges facing the whole world, not just our selves.

In other words, we don’t need to be “spiritual” to experience oneness.

Oneness and Western Psychology

While spiritual systems throughout the world have sought to explain, explore, and encourage experiences of oneness, we generally can’t say the same for the field of Western psychology.

One entry point into the attitude of traditional psychology toward the expansive, inclusive, and often mysterious realm of oneness comes through a dialog between Sigmund Freud and Romain Rolland, a French dramatist, essayist and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1915. Rolland studied and wrote about the great Indian mystic, Ramakrishna, and was friends with Gandhi. In 1927 he wrote to Freud, introducing Freud to the ideas of mystical oneness:

By religious feeling, what I mean – altogether independently of any dogma, any Credo, any organization of the Church, any Holy Scripture, any hope for personal salvation, etc. – is the simple and direct fact of a feeling of ‘the eternal’ (which may very well not be eternal, but simply without perceptible limits, and as if oceanic.). This feeling is in truth subjective in nature. It is a contact.²⁶

Freud had great respect for Rolland, but he responded to this idea of “oceanic feeling” directly in the first chapter of *Civilization and its Discontent*, which was published in 1930. Freud identified such an experience with the primitive, preverbal ego, an aspect of an infantile narcissism. Freud had made his opinion very clear – mysticism and religious search were not fundamentally distinguishable from the regressive state of union with the mother, nothing more.

.....
26 See Vermorel, Henri, and Madeleine Vermorel, editors, *Sigmund Freud et Romain Rolland Romain. Correspondance 1923-1936*. Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1993

NEW TERRITORY

Freud was perhaps the most influential psychologist of all time. When he first identified and wrote about the previously un-named unconscious *id*, here was a great opportunity for the growing field of psychology to welcome and explore this vast and uncharted territory. The discovery had an explosive influence on literature, the arts, and most areas of culture. Who would have guessed that *so* much was happening in our own selves and in the world, and we didn't even know it?

But instead of opening to the unconscious with curiosity and rigorous examination, Freud and his immediate followers largely saw it as problematic – the root and expression of pathology – and sought ways to keep it from influencing our day-to-day experience.

Freud described the unconscious id:

It is the dark, inaccessible part of our personality, what little we know of it we have learnt from study of the dream-work and of the construction of neurotic symptoms, and most of this is of a negative character and can be described only as a contrast to the ego. We all approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations... It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle.²⁷

Instead of creating bridges to and welcoming in the unconscious, Freud was more likely to build strong blockades, believing that rigid ego boundaries against the “cauldron full of seething excitations” were necessary for mental health and social functioning.

But some of Freud's students – most notably Carl Jung – sensed the creative and mystical potentials of the unconscious. Jung recognized the truly limitless and ultimately transpersonal aspect of this realm, sensing it was where individual psychic content interacted with the hidden energies and destiny of the world psyche. He gave this dimension the name *collective unconscious* and provided a way for future mystics, psychologists, and mythologists to explain – or try to explain – how individuals were both separate from each other and connected, how humanity is distinct from the land and from the spirit world, but also mutually interactive, and how time and space are not the only powerful influences in human development.

And Jung understood a deeply healing aspect to this hidden dimension. In a 1949 letter he says it is the *numinosum* – the energy of the archetypes – which offers “the real therapy, and inasmuch as you attain to the numinous experiences you are released from the curse of pathology.”²⁸

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27 See Freud, Sigmund, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1933

28 Jung, C. G., *Letters*. Edited by Gerhard Adler, Aniela Jaffe; translated by R. F. C. Hull. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1973

James Hillman, who trained at the C.G. Jung Institute, is well known for furthering Jung's work through *archetypal psychology*, which posits the existence of numerous realms and dimensions of transpersonal psychic forces and functioning, often expressed and experienced through mythology, dreams, and spiritual experience.

OPENING

In America in the 1950s, *humanistic psychology* was developed in part as a response to the reductionism of Freud's Psychoanalytical thought and to *behaviorism* – an even more mechanistic view of human development focusing on the power of reward and punishment in behavior modification. Humanistic psychology brought with it a respect for humanity's natural instinct toward wholeness. Influenced by Carl Jung, this new field led by Carl Rogers, Rollo May and Abraham Maslow returned to a more open stance toward the "inner world" and welcomed personal story and experience as a direct doorway to understanding human development.

Highly influenced by European Existentialism, which generally emphasized the subjectivity of experiences and the need to discover individual authenticity and freedom, humanistic psychology recognized a person's drive toward self-actualization and full participation in life. Rogers reflects a shifting orientation in the field of psychology:

In my early professional years I was asking the question: How can I treat, or cure, or change this person? Now I would phrase the question in this way: How can I provide a relationship which this person may use for his own personal growth?²⁹

Humanistic psychology gave voice to oneness in mainstream psychology. It took a big step toward undoing many of the structures – internal and external – that separated human consciousness from the unknown and possibly unknowable realms of the unconscious. It used non-linear processes like myth, dream analysis, imagination, and art to enter the unconscious and access its hidden energies that could encourage growth and transformation. And it also valued the powerful unitive experiences of love, creativity, self-actualization, and the search for meaning that give us a way to relate directly and realistically to life outside us. This emphasis on and valuing of relationship in our quest for a meaningful life was new in the field of psychology. Abraham Maslow wrote:

Self-actualizing people have a deep feeling of identification, sympathy, and affection for human beings in general. They feel kinship and connection, as if all people were members of a single family.

Oneness as a force of consciousness thrives and flows when there is an ongoing balance between individuality and relationships, between autonomy and openness to others, and also a balance

29 Rogers, Carl, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*. Houghton Mifflin Co., New York, 1989, p. 32

between intellect and feeling. Psychological stances that emphasize too much of one over the other will fail to support oneness as a lived reality. As psychoanalytic thought and the reductive behaviorism transitioned into a more expansive humanistic approach, which further evolved to recognize a transpersonal dimension, the field was working to support the experience of oneness in creative and healthy ways. This transition played a key role in all that came next in modern psychology, including a new awareness of how social and political structures create their own internal blockades to oneness.

A NEW VOICE

Humanistic psychology – like other areas of Western psychology – developed within a patriarchal environment shaped largely by male thinkers. And while it took a giant step toward oneness by ushering in a deep reverence for the mysterious powers of inner life and the role of relationship in human development, it was also part of a particular culture at a particular time. Humanistic psychology still emphasized such patriarchal values as individualism and autonomy as signs of psychological maturity, and it almost entirely ignored the power of socio-political elements like racial prejudice or gender bias in psychological health.

So when Harvard psychologist Carol Gilligan offered a feminist critique of contemporary psychology in the 1970s, and illuminated the many ways psychologists based ideas about mental health on male subjects and a patriarchal value system, another veil covering oneness was removed.

Gilligan's feminist offerings, elucidated through her groundbreaking work, *In a Different Voice*, pointed out that the field had unknowingly set up a value system in which women's psychological development and development of moral reasoning was seen as deficient. Using research with young boys and girls, Gilligan showed that women's instinctual ways of knowing – which were by nature less rational and detached, and more relational and feeling based – were not less mature than men's but rather "different." She posited that women develop along lines that stress relationship, and care, while men develop along lines that stress autonomy and logic.

Gilligan brought qualities and attributes that emphasized relationship and connection like empathy, feeling, and care up from the undifferentiated darkness of the id, into the light of new insight and appreciation.

Experiences of oneness thrive through feeling and the valuing of relationship, and naturally illuminate and work to destroy cultural injustices that might undermine human and social development. It draws us toward equality of opportunity and participation. In these regards, Gilligan helped the consciousness of oneness play a larger role in the development of psychological theory and practice, and in our own understanding of what it means to be balanced and whole.

CURRENT ATMOSPHERE

Today's psychology has embraced the reality of oneness more than ever. Its numerous specialty areas emphasizing the roles of relationship and interdependence span workplace behavior, family systems, spirituality and human/environmental health. Transpersonal psychology specifically studies self-transcendent and spiritual experiences. And many treatment modalities from gestalt, family therapy, biofeedback, bodywork and systems therapy offer a much more holistic approach to human development and healing than ever before.

Today's psychology even acknowledges that some psychopathologies – like trauma-related complicated grief – can be passed on inter-generationally, and that effective healing solutions might actually rest in *collective* healing – individual families, communities, and the community of the earth.

Patricia Hasback, a contemporary *ecopsychologist*, recently wrote a 2010 New York Times Magazine article, “Is there an Ecological Intelligence?” highlighting the role of ecopsychology in the history of Western psychology:

If you look at the beginnings of clinical psychology, the focus was on “intrapsychic forces” – the mind-bound interplay of ego, id and superego. Then the field broadened to take into account interpersonal forces such as relationships and interactions between people. Then it took a huge leap to look at whole families and systems of people. Then it broadened even further to take into account social systems and the importance of social identities like race, gender and class. Ecopsychology wants to broaden the field again to look at ecological systems. It wants to take the entire planet into account.

Ecopsychology is an example of how a modern view of interdependence can be applied to how we understand human development and treat human pathology. Founded in the early 1990s by Theodore Roszak, who first coined the term in his book, *The Voice of the Earth*, ecopsychology gave rise to a burgeoning field of study of the many ways human and environmental health are dependent upon each other. In his words we hear the consciousness and power of oneness, and sense the absurdity of separating human balance and wholeness from that of the earth:

If ecopsychology has anything to add to the Socratic-Freudian project of self-knowledge, it is to remind us of what our ancestors took to be common knowledge: there is more to know about the self, or rather more self to know, than our personal history reveals... the person is anchored within a greater, universal identity.

Salt remnants of ancient oceans flow through our veins, ashes of expired stars rekindle in our genetic chemistry. The oldest of the atoms, hydrogen – whose primacy among the elements should have gained it a more poetically resonant name – is a cosmic theme; mysteriously elaborated billions-fold, it has created from Nothing the Everything that includes us.

When we look out into the night sky, the stars we see in the chill, receding distance may seem crushingly vast in size and number. But the swelling emptiness that contains them is, precisely by virtue of its magnitude, the physical matrix that makes living intelligence possible. Those who believed we were cradled in the hands of God have not been so very wrong.³⁰

Oneness and Western Philosophy

Plotinus, the 3rd century Greek philosopher asked:

What could anything be if it were not one?³¹

In many ways, that same question has surfaced and resurfaced throughout the history of Western philosophy, from the Ancient Greeks, the Renaissance and Enlightenment to contemporary ethics. As have other questions pointing to the paradoxes of oneness: how there seems to be one fundamental reality expressed in so many forms, how something can be itself though it changes through time, how what we observe is both separate from and created by our perceptions, how societies can create or build upon universal laws and apply them within individual moments.

The early Greeks expressed great confidence in the fundamental unity of life, and expressed this confidence through a variety of theories. As Anaxagoras said:

Things in the one universe are not divided from each other, nor yet are they cut off with an axe, neither hot from cold, nor cold from hot.³¹

For some, the task was to identify the one substance that existed in all things. For Thales it was “water” and for Anaximenes it was “air.” Plato masterfully posited the idea of *forms* to account for the universal nature reflected in all particular parts of life. Outside time and space, a form is a blueprint of perfection, an ideal of any particular manifestation.

Plato offered simple and powerful examples to describe the relationship of form to particular. He said it was like eating a pie, in terms of how an entire pie can be cut into slices and yet, the “pie” itself is enjoyed by all. Cutting a pie doesn’t destroy the true pie, and each person’s piece is no less “pie” than another’s. He also used the example of the day – every individual can experience the day in his or her own location and time, and yet it is the same universal day.

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30 Roszak, Theodore, “Awakening the Ecological Unconscious”, in *Exploring Our Interconnectedness* (IC#34), In Context, Winter 1993, p. 48, online: <http://www.context.org/ICLIB/IC34/Rozzak.htm>

31 Anaxagoras fragment from Arthur Fairbanks, *The First Philosophers of Greece*. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., London, 1898, p. 243

For Plato, the world of forms was like a pure earth, where colors “are brighter far and clearer than ours...”³² Plato was aware that the notion of a world of forms could create and exacerbate a conceptual (and experiential) split between this perfect world and the “corroded” earth. To discourage this split, Plato wrote about the “soul of the world” – the *anima mundi*. The world soul, he insisted, is the one harmonizing the many, giving sacredness to life itself, bringing the eternal right into the bloom of a flower.

WONDER

In many ways, the Ancient Greeks set the tone for the future of Western philosophy with their pure joy of discovery and discourse, and in a commitment to explore reality beyond the visible world in a not always religious but deeply poetic and evocative way. As Plato wrote: “Philosophy begins in wonder,” and wonder is a direct doorway to oneness.

For Aristotle, wonder – and oneness – was expressed through a vision that all the particulars of nature were infused with the universals, the whole was reflected in the parts. Nature was not separate from a perfect world, as Plato suggested, but fully present in perfection: “In all things of nature,” Aristotle said, “there is something of the marvelous.”

And while the Greeks were rapidly developing tools of mathematics, logic and reason – tools of differentiation and separation – these great thinkers often used such tools to bring forth the wholeness of the parts they examined. The one was not sacrificed into the many, nor were the many subsumed into the one, and the mystery was not sacrificed to science. As the great mathematician Pythagoras described:

There is geometry in the humming of the strings, there is music in the spacing of the spheres.

And Aristotle expressed:

The mathematical sciences particularly exhibit order, symmetry and limitation; and these are the greatest forms of the beautiful.

Contemporary philosopher Peter Kingsley goes so far as to argue that a close reading of history reveals mysticism was not in contradiction to the logic and mathematics of the ancient Greeks, including the philosophy of Parmenides, the “father of Western logic.” “There’s nothing really more materialistic than you can get than the rules of logic. The hard, hard rules of logic,” Kingsley says. “But what we don’t know is that this man Parmenides brought these rules of logic from another world; he was given these laws of logic from a goddess. He used logic to prove

.....
32 Plato, *The Apology, Phaedo and Crito*. The Harvard Classics, 1909-1914, online: <http://www.bartleby.com/2/1/37.html>

oneness.”

Plotinus, a Platonist who lived 600 years after Plato, internalized oneness through positing a form of human intuitive intelligence called *nous*, which allows a person to see things as they are, uniting knower, knowing, and knowledge. In our previous model, the *nous* might be understood as the heights of transcendental oneness along the vertical axis. And yet this intelligence works through recognizing, in a creative process, the oneness of things in the world, along the horizontal axis. *Nous* pours from the eternal One through the human being, sees things as one, and returns to the One.

And what undermines *nous* and an awareness of the One? According to Plotinus it “has its source in self-will...and in the primal differentiation with the desire for self ownership.”³³

BRIDGES

Medieval philosophy looked at questions of reality and society from a predominantly theological framework, intermixing Christianity with influences from Islam, Judaism, and new translations from Ancient Greece, and finding innumerable ways to understand and describe unity with God.

When the period gave way to Renaissance philosophy a new emphasis on reason and mathematics ushered out a great deal of the magic and superstition of the Middle Ages, and began to undermine the powers of the Catholic Church. Science was becoming the new authority, and the scientific revolution supported tremendous enthusiasm for the hidden truths about the natural world and the cosmos. The sudden displacement of the earth from the center of the universe through Copernicus’s 16th century discoveries shook many to the core, forcing the development of a new worldview that allowed for a less human-centric vision of life. The poet and metaphysician, John Donne, described this search for a new orientation in 1611:

*The new philosophy calls all in doubt,
The Element of fire is quite put out;
The sun is lost and th’earth, and no man’s wit
Can well direct him where to look for it.*³⁴

Highly influenced by the Ancient Greeks whose science was infused with reverence and awe, the period was marked by a return to Platonism, and a new embrace of the world as a living organism imbued with an eternal soul.

But oneness in the West was only allowed to go so far because of the threat it posed to the Church. Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno (1548 – 1600) was burned at the stake by the Roman Inquis-

33 Plotinus, “The Three Initial Hypostases from the Fifth Ennead”. In *The Six Enneads*, online: <http://thriceholy.net/Texts/Plotinus1.html>

34 Clements, Arthur L., editor, *John Donne’s Poetry*. W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1992, p. 102

tion for heresy, including his belief that the oneness of God existed throughout nature, and was accessible directly by all human beings:

*The Divine Light is always in man presenting itself to the senses and to the comprehension, but man rejects it.*³⁵

In the 17th century, two philosophers played key roles in building and destroying bridges linking ideas of oneness in the Middle Ages and prior, to oneness in the Philosophy of the modern age – these were the Frenchmen Blaise Pascal and Renee Descartes.

Most of us know something of Descartes' dualism – the power of his declaration “I think therefore I am,” and his role in the development of the scientific method, which helped create the abyss between mind and body and subject and object that so marks our modern age. But at the same time that dualism was gaining strength, Pascal was speaking about oneness and unity.

A French theologian, physicist, mathematician, journalist, and social entrepreneur, Pascal invented the first calculating machine and founded the first corporation of the European continent as a service to the poor. Properties of oneness are revealed in many of his evocative sayings:

The least movement is of importance to all nature. The entire ocean is affected by a pebble.

We sail within a vast sphere, ever drifting in uncertainty driven from end to end.

In his philosophical aphorisms Pascal describes many of the main principles of oneness, like the interconnectedness of all the different aspects of the world, the impossibility of understanding one part of life or experience without the other, the impossibility of rationality as a means of understanding the whole of the universe, the fundamentally circular wholeness of the universe, and the heart as a powerful organ of consciousness.

Around the same time, two other European philosophers – Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in Germany and Baruch Spinoza from Holland – offered new ways of looking at oneness. For Leibniz, we live in a spiritual world consisting of infinite spiritual centers – *monads* – of equal value to the whole (which was God). Monads could be everything from individual rocks to individual people, were not in a hierarchy and did not interact with each other, but rather were harmonically attuned to the whole. This theory of microcosm and macrocosm – the assumption that the whole is somehow included in every individual part – had been a foundation in many Eastern cosmologies and spiritual systems, but was fairly undeveloped at this time in the West.

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35 Turnbull, Coulson, *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher, Martyr, Mystic, 1548-1600*. The Gnostic Press, San Diego, California, 1913, p. 69

Spinoza, educated as an orthodox Jew but excommunicated for his radical beliefs, didn't need strange new words to describe his views that all life, including matter and human beings, was an expression of one divinity, sometimes called Nature. The One was not only knowable through its attributes (think about seeing the divine nature of a tree, or a person, for example), but the One was knowable as *the One*. Also unique at the time was Spinoza's understanding of intuition – a particular form of human intelligence that could give us access to the truth. He had a strong sense of a path – he felt human beings could work on their perceptions, learn to control or transform their emotions, and come to see and know more and more of the One.

EXPANDING SPHERE

Oneness possibly never had so many supporters in one place as in Germany at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, a period when many leading philosophers, poets, and writers were discussing oneness. Many of these *German Idealists* (those who believed that ultimate reality is a world of ideas – not a concrete outer reality) were living either in the university town of Jena or in Berlin and they were all closely connected to each other. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, F.W.J. Schelling, Hegel and Hölderlin, the brothers Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, the romantic poets Novalis and Ludwig Tieck. Even Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was in close connection to these men. Many of them lived in shared rooms or houses.

But a particular mark of this period has to do with the expanding view of oneness to include the history of the world and the history of humanity. Society was becoming an important element in the ways oneness expresses itself and is known, lived, and shared by individuals.

During the Enlightenment era, ideas about oneness had most often been used to express and explain the unity between God and humanity and between God and nature. But a shift was taking place that was uniting oneness and society.

Not necessarily new, but Kant explicitly advocated, in his *categorical imperative*, a contemporary version of the Golden Rule: “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”³⁶ Kant described an ethics that never allowed for the treatment of another human being as a means to an end, and further included a duty to act as though creating a universal harmony, and a duty to *not* act in ways that create instability for others. He also believed we have a duty to contribute to society, and a duty to develop compassion, not just for human beings but for animals as well.

Oneness was catching on as a way of living in society, and more, as a way of viewing the evolution of society itself as part of a greater whole. F.W.J. Schelling wrote:

History as a whole is a progressive, gradually self-disclosing revelation

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 36 Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, 3rd Edition*, translated by James W. Ellington. Hackett Publishing Co. Indianapolis, Indiana, 1993, p. 30

*of the Absolute.*³⁷

From the philosopher and poet Novalis:

The individual soul shall consort with the soul of the world.

And from Fichte:

*In the human species, spirit constantly develops by means of this struggle of one spirit with another. Thus the whole species becomes richer in spirit. In the first crude attempt [at spiritual communication], the spirit of future ages is already preparing itself.*³⁸

In this trend, we see oneness alive not primarily in a transcendent role, or expressed predominantly through nature or pure intellect, but playing a role in the daily unfolding of human history and social behavior.

Hegel developed a comprehensive system of integrated – or integrating – oneness, through which the Absolute Idea expressed itself continually through seeming dualities in a dialectical progression that also included society and in which human consciousness played a key role. For Hegel, the medium of oneness was consciousness, and the context was society:

*That the history of the world, with all the changing scenes which its annals present, is this process of development and the realization of Spirit – only this insight can reconcile Spirit with the history of the world – that what has happened, and is happening every day is not only not ‘without God’ but is essentially God’s work.... Ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labor of its own transformation.*³⁹

This expansion of the understanding of a divine wholeness to include a broad evolutionary perspective was not limited to the German Idealists, but was taking place across the globe from Ralph Waldo Emerson in America to the great spiritual thinkers across Asia and India, like the Hindu sage Swami Vivekananda, who traveled to the United States and England at the end of the 19th century, and Sri Aurobindo who went to England for his education, both of whom brought Hindu ideas about oneness to the West.

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37 Schelling, Friedrich, Wilhelm Joseph, translated by Peter Heath, *System of Transcendental Idealism*. University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, 1978, p. 211

38 Fichte, J.G., *The Spirit and Letter within Philosophy*, 1794 and “Letter to Jacobi” 1795, quoted in Andrew Cohen’s article, “A History of Evolutionary Spirituality,” online: <http://www.andrewcohen.org/teachings/history-evolutionary-spirituality.asp>

39 See Hegel, G.W.F., translated by A.V. Miller, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1977

Some of these thinkers were expressing what's referred to as the *Perennial Philosophy*, mostly an Eastern or Hindu perspective that was also discussed by Westerners including Pascal and Leibniz and later Aldous Huxley. The Perennial Philosophy acknowledges the great evolutionary unfolding of divine oneness throughout the history of humankind. Hegel's "new era" might not be so different from our current "new age" that has been coming to consciousness in the last centuries and continually points to the potential of individual human beings to know and live oneness.

MODERN QUESTIONS

With modernity came fewer questions about ultimate reality and more about society and ethics. Modern life with its diseases, corruptions, crime and social conventions was separating and alienating individuals from the harmony that had been more evident in the society of Ancient Greece, and more present in the enthusiasm and romanticism of the Renaissance and Enlightenment. Philosophers were struggling with questions about how to live, how to manifest harmony or wholeness in a world that seemed unnatural and un-whole.

For most existentialists, the answers came through focusing on the subjectivity of human experience. The detached rationality that denies the subjective experience and separates individuals from the outer world seemed lifeless and useless in the quest to express the most authentic elements of being human. Wholeness for existentialists was going to be discovered in our lived response to the fractures and emptiness of the modern world.

Every philosopher had his or her own way of describing this new imperative toward living day-to-day in the face of horror, life in the face of death, creativity in the presence of absence. In this way, existentialism was a unique, if sometimes limited, expression of oneness. As Sartre wrote: "Life begins on the far side of despair," and this means life includes all the darkness or difficulty that objective rationality and transcendence had sought to free us from.

You could say oneness for existentialists was found – if it was found – solely along the vertical axis, through an emphasis on personal freedom and authenticity. In many ways, oneness as an experience was fundamentally unbalanced, with the horizontal element being ignored entirely – except as a motivation for turning inward.

Partly in response to this imbalance, post-modernism and deconstruction philosophies turned back toward the intersection of inner and outer, subject and object, and found a new space in that intersection through deconstructing – not turning from – the structures of outer life. This approach looked into and through outer realities, the signs and symbols – including language – that we use to define our experience. Showing that things are not as they appear, the process frees us to relate in new ways to each moment of interaction with the world. Contemporary American literary critic J. Hillis Miller points to the lack of solidity when we look through a lens of deconstruction:

*Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock, but thin air.*⁴⁰

These developments in philosophy emphasize a fundamental space within seemingly defined outer experience, and draws human attention into the void left behind when our assumptions and our attachment are let go. The new space for us to be and discover is not dualistic, but we cannot say it's oneness. But it could be. In many ways, deconstruction creates the opportunity for humanity to co-create what it wants and needs and take responsibility for this act of co-creation, always recognizing its relational and impermanent qualities.

In our vertical/horizontal model of oneness, space/openness is usually identified as an aspect of transcendence found along the vertical axis. But in many contemporary philosophical views, space also exists in and allows for life along the horizontal dimension. Just as modern physics tells us that most of what we see and feel is actually space, so too, some philosophy points out that space is right here in our moment-to-moment experience, allowing us to live free of duality and any separation from the “other.”

Similar to deconstruction, Martin Heidegger also developed a philosophy during the 20th century that fully acknowledged the potential for a unified experience of life. He even created a language that reflected a human capacity to live oneness. His basic philosophical term, *Dasein*, which translates from German to “being-there,” reflects both the existence of a human being and the world he or she lived in. According to Heidegger there has never been a subject separate and struggling to relate itself to the world, but only a “being-there,” an expression of human life as a “unitary phenomenon.”

By the end of the 20th century, the dualism between subject and object, between man and earth, and earth and heaven was being dismissed at every turn, in part influenced by advances in physics. In this new space of freedom and infinite possibility, humanity would have to find a way to live responsibly and deeply despite – or with – cultural divisions and inequities.

CURRENT ATMOSPHERE

Where is philosophy today? Ethics? Metaphysics? Science? Today, philosophy is greatly influenced by pragmatism, and any number of humanistic imperatives including the issues of war, social and environmental justice, and bio-ethics.

Philosophy of Science looks at assumptions and foundations of science and seeks to delineate science from non-science, or metaphysics, and put science into a historical and ideological context. Today's ethics points to our responsibility to others including the earth – through time and space. Feminist philosophers examine many of our historical and cultural assumptions about reality,

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 40 Miller, J. Hillis, “Stevens’ Rock and Criticism as Cure,” *Georgia Review* 30, 1976, p. 34

ethics and society from a feminist point of view – freeing us from “patriarchal” institutions that have imposed severe limitations on women and society. Religious philosophy re-forms questions and answers about God in an era in which religious belief can be a tool of tremendous destruction.

Philosophy today seems intent on discovering and working within a view of reality that is both deeply meaningful and outwardly effective, logically rigorous and deeply caring. In other words, like the other areas of culture we’ve looked at it’s coming closer and closer to integrated oneness.

English philosopher and social critic Bertrand Russell, who was influenced by Hegel, reflects a mature 20th century integrated oneness:

Love and knowledge, so far as they were possible, led upward toward the heavens. But always pity brought me back to earth. Echoes of cries of pain reverberate in my heart. Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people a hated burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty, and pain make a mockery of what human life should be.⁴¹

Chapter 6 Exercises

1. In what ways has oneness been hidden in recent centuries? In what ways has it remained visible (and perhaps even grown in awareness)?
2. “We don’t need to be spiritual to experience oneness.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?
3. Many religions have traditionally taught that only priests and monks can have direct access to God. Do you believe people who aren’t spiritual authorities can have authentic spiritual or mystical experiences directly? Have you experienced one yourself?
4. If oneness encompasses all things by definition, how do you reconcile good and evil? Is peace always good? Is violence always bad?
5. Do you distinguish in yourself a “higher” or more “real” part of yourself from a “lower” or “false” self? If so, how do you come to terms with this dual nature in your daily life?
6. Is living from the consciousness of oneness subversive to the status quo of our modern lives and society? Why or why not?
7. How do you differentiate what is true from what is not true? Do you rely upon others? Yourself? A combination? What is the role of critical thinking? Discernment? Intuition?

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41 From “What I Have Lived For” in the preface to Bertrand Russell’s *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 1, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1967

8. Plato spoke of the “anima mundi” or “soul of the world.” Do you believe the world has a soul? Why or why not? If so, how would the earth having a soul change your relationship to nature?
9. “In all things of nature,” said Aristotle, “there is something of the marvelous.” What parts of nature leave you marveling or in awe?
10. Pascal said, “The least movement is of importance to all nature. The entire ocean is affected by a pebble.” What would you do differently in your life if everything you do and touch really mattered? Do you think there is a demarcation point between where things matter and where they don’t? Where might that be?
11. “The collective itself is the vehicle.” Physicist Lynn McTaggart writes, “Human beings and all living things are a coalescence of energy in a field of energy connected to every thing in the world.” Think about yourself in relation to every living thing in this way. Do you feel differently or notice any changes after doing so?
12. Try a spiritual practice every day for a week. Which spiritual practices – such as prayer, sitting meditation, walking meditation, service – if any, are helpful in aligning your consciousness with oneness? Which are less so? What makes the difference? Overall, how was your experience? Would you like to continue?
13. Rumi said, “Out beyond the ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing there is a field. I will meet you there.” Experiment with looking at the world from a unified perspective beyond the dualities of right and wrong, good or bad. For example, look at something you consider “bad” and try observing it without judgment.
14. Many people are reluctant to quiet their minds for fear of wasting time, becoming vulnerable, or being absent-minded. In other words, they equate mental simplicity with lack of intelligence or vigilance. However, Oliver Wendell Holmes quipped, “I wouldn’t give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I’d give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.” What is the difference between these two kinds of simplicity? Do you ever long for simplicity but fear letting go of complexity? What draws us toward lives of complexity? What pulls us toward simplicity?

The History of Oneness – II

Finding oneness in the details

Oneness and Science

Like religion and philosophy, science has sought to discover the underlying truth about the universe. But all disciplines have their tools, and science has developed and adhered to a specific tool called the *scientific method*.

Science itself has come to understand that the tools we use often have a great impact on our objects of study and on us. And the scientific method has in part helped sustain a vision of the world in accord with its own principles and practices, which are often at odds with the vision and experience of oneness.

Consider being blind and studying color. Think about an ecologist who has never spent much time in nature. Or consider a man studying women's psychology. Now consider the possibilities of discovering and describing a reality of oneness with a tool that continually emphasizes duality – separating you from what you study and separating out the parts of what you study from each other. It wouldn't be adequate to the task.

The scientific method, developed during the Renaissance and Enlightenment in Europe, was an answer to a great chaos in all areas of European society during the Dark Ages. Like a beacon of light – the detachment, clarity, and rationality of the scientific method undermined the authoritarian, faith-based knowledge and power structures of the Catholic Church and the superstition that was an integral aspect of European experience. It mitigated the sense of being out of control in the disordered and dangerous world of the plague.

In the terms we've been using, it was a dramatic surge along the vertical axis, lifting humankind beyond the bonds of nature above and beyond the chaos of the Dark Ages. But as we've shown, any surge can lend itself to imbalance... and that's what happened in the centuries since.

SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Let's start by taking a closer look at the scientific method, which was developed as part of a great flourishing of scientific discovery and inquiry following Copernicus's revelations about the earth's relationship to the sun. Copernicus's revolutionary reordering of humanity's place in the center of the universe fueled an enhanced degree of participation in the task of creating a new vision of life on earth. And the primary tools in this process of creation were reason, rationality, and observation. This was formalized into the "scientific method" during the Renaissance primarily by Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626) and Renee Descartes (1596-1650).

Here are some presuppositions of the scientific method, which have so deeply shaped science as well as modern experience:

* The scientific method is based on empirical evidence, and presupposes that we can objectively observe and measure natural phenomena. As Galileo wrote:

The book of nature is written in the language of mathematics.¹

* The scientific method is reductive. It isolates a particular part – an object, a molecule, an atom, a body part – and examines it in terms of its own properties and relationships – not its outer context. From Francis Bacon:

Now what the sciences stand in need of is a form of induction which shall analyze experience and take it to pieces, and by a due process of exclusion and rejection lead to an inevitable conclusion.²

* Through mathematic equations and experimental testing, it then predicts the ways these specific parts will behave in future situations.

* Science quantifies. It relies on numerical data to describe the structures of reality.

Sir Isaac Newton's work is perhaps the best known product of this method – it describes nature in terms of predictable and uniform laws, like gravity. In a Newtonian universe, objects were solid within three dimensions – height, weight and depth – and fixed in a dependable framework of time. Classical physics was created by and based on a Newtonian universe.

But Newton himself understood that these new methods of science and the laws they revealed were only part of a bigger picture. Take gravity, for example. Newton said:

Gravity explains the motions of the planets, but it cannot explain who set the planets in motion. God governs all things and knows all that is or can be done.³

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1 From Galileo Galilei's *The Starry Messenger* published in Venice in 1610

2 Bacon, Francis, *The Great Instauration*, 1620

3 Tiner, J.H. et al, *Isaac Newton: Inventor, Scientist and Teacher*. Mott Media, Michigan, 1975

The scientific method developed a way of looking at and quantifying the visible and measurable world. But it misses a lot. Consider Newton's first law of physics: The law of inertia states that an object at rest tends to stay at rest and an object in motion tends to stay in motion unless it is acted upon by an unbalanced force. While this makes lots of common sense, it also misses a fundamental sense of oneness – that nothing is fully isolated, and that all things are continually acted upon by forces, seen and unseen, in a constantly fluctuating universe.

In its fervor and its flourishing, the scientific method often focused on what it could know, and largely ignored the power and relevance of what it could *not* know. As such, it only allowed for part of our consciousness to be in play – the part that experiences a definable, identifiable outer world reality. To know oneness, however, includes expanding our experience of reality to include what we cannot know or see, and to move past a dependence on reason and rationality alone.

ONENESS DESPITE SCIENCE

Since the enlightenment, the scientific method has been used in every scientific discipline from medicine and psychology to chemistry and physics. It describes the world we live in, but it describes that world in parts, leaving out the whole. Nonetheless, observation can never be entirely blind to oneness, which reveals itself in so many ways. For example, take Newton's third law of physics – that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. This simple truth reflects a reality of interdependence, a stepping-stone toward acknowledging oneness, for it draws our attention into an infinite web of relationships that exist throughout time and space.

It was the period after the age of enlightenment in the 18th century that gave rise to some of the greatest scientific discoveries of the century. John Dalton (1766 – 1844), the English chemist, developed the atomic theory of matter, and in the 19th century we catapulted into new worlds with the help of Michael Faraday (1791 – 1867) and James Maxwell (1831 – 1879) who put forward theories about electricity and magnetism, which were developed in the context of an *ether* permeating the entire universe. This ether was the medium for waves of light and was the universal, fixed frame of reference against which all things could be measured.

The idea of ether harkened to ideas from early Greece, where scientists and philosophers had often posited one essence that existed throughout the universe as a permanent context for all that existed and would exist. For Thales this essence was air. For Anaximenes it was water. Now we were looking again at an over-arching context for all life, something that would thread life together but was also separate from individual aspects. It was starting to look a lot like oneness.

Meanwhile, in the mid-19th century Charles Darwin was studying nature and discovering a world of continual interaction, competition and cooperation. His theory of evolution advanced the idea of interdependence and brought this reality home in an earthly, practical way. In contrast to the

Cartesian idea of independent observation, Darwin got down on his hands and knees and through observation and reflection opened his imagination to the great mysteries of the Galapagos. From this stance, he was able to see, understand, and marvel at the existence of interdependence and its role in the emergence of new life. This was a powerful new model focused on life and the patterns of life, not on distinct objects and movements. In chapter three of *The Origin of Species* Darwin highlighted the competitive aspect of interdependence in the development and survival of species traits:

...the structure of every organic being is related, in the most essential yet often hidden manner, to that of all other organic beings, with which it comes into competition for food or residence, or from which it has to escape, or on which it preys. This is obvious in the structure of the teeth and talons of the tiger; and in that of the legs and claws of the parasite which clings to the hair on the tiger's body.

In part because of Darwin, we've understood the intricate web of relationships in ecological systems for a long time. The idea of interdependence became a bigger part of our scientific understanding when Arthur George Tansley coined the phrase *ecosystem* in 1935, to describe a dynamic, complex whole functioning as a unit of many parts.

And in the psychological sciences, the vast new *inner* territory that could so dramatically affect outer experience, described and examined by Sigmund Freud, offered a new vision of psychic reality that undermined the solid, objective distance between objects in a distinct “outer” world and “inner” reason. While we had access to reason, Freud suggested, we were also largely compelled by unreasonableness. While there is a solid outer world, he confirmed, human beings often distort that world for their own preservation, and hence live in what we have come to know as fantasy.

The blurring of the subject/object distinction in scientific observation, the emergence of a vision of nature that was interdependent and whole, and the psychological discovery of an infinite and chaotic inner world that might create a false outer appearance, all began to undermine the clarity and detachment of the traditional scientific method.

And then came Quantum Physics and Albert Einstein, who in our language was expert at bringing the vast mystery of the vertical axis of life right down into the smallest, most grounded elements of the horizontal dimension.

GOING QUANTUM

If Newton inadvertently took the mystery out of the natural world, Einstein brought it back in. If classical physics gave a way for rationality and objectivity to push aside the magic in life, quantum physics made sure that the magic would never die again, as its theories seem to turn all our reasonable ideas about life as we know it on their head. As Einstein wrote to the family of a deceased friend:

People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.

Einstein rocked our stubborn illusions with his theories of relativity – which showed how mass and energy are really different manifestations of the same thing, and how space and time are not absolute, but are affected by motion and gravity. Theories of relativity provided ground for all sorts of mind-bending insights – like that time itself is finite, and that the universe is expanding; it had a beginning – the Big Bang. Or that black holes exist – objects so massive that nothing can escape their gravity.

Even the word *relativity* brought the power of a vision of reality that is not fixed or constant into the scientific – and societal – lexicon, changing forever how we think about reality and relationships. And of course Einstein's discoveries mirrored developments in philosophy and literary criticism that highlighted the flexibility and insubstantiality of our experience and the ways we describe and depend on it.

Other new and confusing offerings from physicists include the idea of dark matter – matter that makes up most of the matter in the universe but which is invisible and only measurable through gaps in other measurements. Dark matter comprises more than 90 percent of all matter, suggesting that what we perceive is quite different from what actually exists.

In this discovery alone, we see how modern physics returns to humanity a vision of the world that *doesn't* exist (at least to our senses), unlimited possibility, and un-knowing – all of which the scientific method originally seemed to have banished.

And the mystery continues when we move our observations from the vastness of the universe to the tiniest particles in creation. Now we're going *quantum*.

What exactly is quantum physics? It's a set of principles that describe reality at the atomic level of matter (molecules and atoms) and the subatomic level (electrons, protons and even smaller particles like neutrinos). Just as it does when we look at the big picture – like the creation and destruction of the entire universe – when we look at these very tiny particles, reality as most of us experience it simply breaks down. Reality at this level can be simultaneously described as both particles and waves, matter as well as energy. Quantum physics, you can see, is not afraid of paradox. Here are some basics:

1. *Uncertainty*. Properties of particles come in pairs. The *Heisenberg Principle* showed that measuring one attribute of a particle – its position, for example – will naturally diminish what at the same time can be known in another attribute – momentum, for example. The more precisely you can know the one, the less you can know the other. In other words, you just can't know everything at one time.

2. *Observation.* Observing a particle determines its property, either as a particle or a wave. As waves they have no precise location, existing instead as “probability fields.” When observed, these probability fields collapse into a specific time and space. In other words, observing particles and waves makes them what they are (to us!). The observer and object are *entangled*.
3. *Spooky Action at a Distance.* One of quantum physics’ counter-intuitive theories has to do with the fact that some information can actually travel faster than the speed of light and affect objects at a distance. In 1935, Einstein called this “spooky action at a distance” and wasn’t a fan of the idea, despite joining with two other physicists to describe how it works. But 30 years later *Bell’s Theorem* established a scientific basis for this phenomenon. In this case, the “entanglement” is between pairs of particles. This is also known as *non-locality*.

You can see oneness in many aspects of this vision of reality. The duality of subject and object dissolves in the power of consciousness. Nothing is truly separate from anything else. Things are tangled up with each other to the degree that disentangling them not only seems highly unlikely but also would be irrelevant in the search for what’s real.

And you can see oneness at work in the unity between scientist and worldview. Einstein, so critical to re-integrating mystery and wonder into our collective consciousness, was himself fundamentally intrigued and entranced by the mysteries of life. In his 1930 book, *What I Believe*, he wrote:

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom the emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed. This insight into the mystery of life, coupled though it be with fear, has also given rise to religion. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms – this knowledge, this feeling, is at the center of true religiousness.

Einstein lived an integration of science and religion, mystery and rationality, and he was thus capable of discovering elements of reality that also integrated these dimensions.

Quantum physics is so much a physics of connection and points to the existence of things that do not come into our perceptions that it wholly challenges the classic understanding of a determined, knowable, and predictable world of material objects. Quantum physics points to possibility and fluctuation, and it requires humans to use flexible and even imaginative thinking just to consider it.

The scientific method brought us quantum physics, but its many assumptions don’t seem to survive in a quantum world. Observers are no longer separate from their observations, what’s measurable is only half the story, and to trust the world described by physics might require as much imagination or faith as any religious idea.

When the number of factors coming into play in a phenomenological complex is too large, the scientific method in most cases fails.

– Albert Einstein

CURRENT ATMOSPHERE

The arrival of quantum physics in the beginning of the 20th century was like a chink in the scientific armor that guarded many in our science-based world from truly recognizing a variety of powerful forces like the imagination, personal experience, emotions, and faith. Once reason and objectivity were usurped from their centuries-long throne, an influx of ideas about connection, interdependence and new ways to experience the world around us surged into consciousness.

Here are just a few examples of recent scientific trends that undermine ideas about duality and a separate, fixed world, and accentuate the reality of oneness:

Human Genome Project Conclusions: The consciousness of oneness reveals itself in some of the most surprising places, perhaps none more surprising than in the conclusions of the *Human Genome Project*, which discovered very little genetic difference between human beings and, say, blowfish in terms of numbers of genes in each species. So where does human complexity come from? What makes human beings so different from lizards? No longer capable of reducing human uniqueness to our genetic makeup scientists are forced to direct their thinking towards the role of environmental factors. And it's not the "environment" as a separate entity, but our experience *of it* and *in it* that really matters in defining and shaping who we are. From geneticist Dr. Mae-Wan Ho:

Decades of sequencing and dissecting the human genome have confirmed that the real causes of ill health are environmental and social. It is not the genetic messages encoded in genomic DNA but environmentally-induced epigenetic modifications that overwhelmingly determine people's health and well-being.⁴

And from Dr. Bruce Lipton, Ph.D., author of *The Biology of Belief*:

Over the last number of years, science and the press' emphasis on the "power" of genes has overshadowed the brilliant work of many biologists that reveal a radically different understanding concerning organismal expression. Emerging at the cutting edge of cell science is the recognition that the environment, and more specifically, our perception of the environment, directly controls our behavior and gene activity.⁵

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4 See the article "Genomics to Epigenomics" in Institute of Science in Society, January 19, 2009, online: <http://www.i-sis.org.uk/fromGenomicsToEpigenomics.php>

5 Lipton, Bruce, from his February 1, 2007 blog entry, "The Human Genome Project," online: <http://www.brucelipton.com/biology-of-belief/the-human-genome-project/>

Systems Theory: Having originated during the mid 1900s, the inter-disciplinary study of *systems theory* has focused on the context of complex systems – not the separate parts. Systems theory seeks to explain everything from human behavior, ecology, mathematics, software and computing, economics, chemistry, or neuroscience within a framework of connection and interdependence. Systems theory recognizes patterns, behaviors and properties of complex groups, and searches out the unity of all science.

A major developer of systems theory, Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, an Austrian-born biologist, wrote:

*There exist models, principles, and laws that apply to generalized systems or their subclasses, irrespective of their particular kind, the nature of their component elements, and the relationships or “forces” between them. It seems legitimate to ask for a theory, not of systems of more or less special kind, but of universal principles applying to systems in general.*⁶

Gaia Theory: In the 1960’s our understanding of ecological interdependence expanded to include the whole planet when James Lovelock, a British ecologist studying the earth’s sulfur cycles, discovered intricate ways in which the earth kept regulating itself as if it were a super-organism. He named his theory the *Gaia Hypothesis* after the Greek earth goddess.

While it was a stretch for the scientific community to think of earth itself as a living system, and not just a rock hurling through space, it was far less demanding philosophically than what had been revealed in quantum physics a decade before. Lovelock was the first to recognize and identify CFCs – *chloroflourocarbons* – in the atmosphere, and in time, science has generally accepted Lovelock’s theories, especially in recent decades as environmental crises such as climate change have revealed threads of connections among the entire earth systems.

Anthropic Principle: Scientists are considering the odds of a universe supporting human life, and thinking there’s something more to the odds than meets the eye. They comment that if the rate of the universe’s expansion at the moment of its birth had been 10 to the 11th of one percent faster, it would have dissipated into a cloud of electron dust and the gravitational force wouldn’t have been strong enough for galaxies or planets to form. If it had been, on the other hand, 10 to the 11th of one percent slower, it wouldn’t have had the power to be a universe and would have collapsed on itself. The rate of the universe’s expansion that allowed galaxies, suns, planets, water in liquid state, jellyfish, and the Internet, rested on a razor’s edge.

The *Anthropic Principle* points out that we know that the chance of this happening is 100% because it did happen! But even so, the harmony and synchronicity between life’s needs and what the universe has given us to thrive and evolve creates a sense of being “wanted children.” Like a good parent, the universe has been permissive enough to encourage a plenitude of forms to emerge, but disciplined and firm enough to protect the playground when life was at stake.

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6 Von Bertalanffy, Ludwig, *General System Theory: Foundations, Developments, Applications*. George Braziller Inc., New York, 1969, p. 32

INTEGRATING SCIENCE

In every scientific field from medicine to metaphysics, holistic approaches to truth and meaning are naturally discovering realities known and experienced through the consciousness of oneness. Consider how new consciousness research on the effects of meditation undermine the solid boundaries between the body and mind erected by classic science. Or how holistic medicine understands the inter-relationship of body and mind, and of human beings and their environment. Medicine, especially, is turning to environmental factors in determining sources of disease and healing approaches.

New areas of inquiry are being developed at every turn, and new approaches to integrating different fields with science are prevalent. Consider the Worldwide Indigenous Science Network, an international organization that works to integrate the sciences of indigenous people into traditional Western science. Such movements reflect the deep and growing awareness that indigenous people and the harmony and reverence that are the base of their social, spiritual, and scientific understanding have a great deal to offer in terms of the challenges facing all of us.

There is a growing awareness in academia that interdisciplinary approaches are necessary to help understand and mitigate today's complex issues. For example, more and more research grants to, for example, UC Berkeley are designed specifically to encourage the sharing of information across disciplines. And within the field of science, we find educational movements like the STEM Initiative, teaching science with technology, engineering and math – not separate from these related disciplines. Other educational movements push to integrate science more fully into culture and the humanities and even religion.

In large part, the science we are now moving into is highly related to and determined by our need to find solutions to difficulties that are, themselves, reflective of oneness – global issues like climate change, environmental and human health, and computer and communication technology. The challenges of the modern age are holistic, and naturally their scientific solutions will be as well.

We are all linked by a fabric of unseen connections. This fabric is constantly changing and evolving. This field is directly structured and influenced by our behavior and by our understanding.

– David Bohm - Quantum Physicist

Human beings and all living things are a coalescence of energy in a field of energy connected to every other thing in the world. This pulsating energy field is the central engine of our being and our consciousness, the alpha and the omega of our existence. "The field," as Einstein once succinctly put it, "is the only reality."

– Lynne McTaggart – Physicist
The Field: The Quest for the Secret Force of the Universe

Oneness and Indigenous Peoples

As we consider the history of oneness throughout the world and particularly in the West, it's important to remember that oneness has historically not only been an aspect of individual religious experience or philosophical inquiry, but an enduring thread woven through the fabric of entire cultures.

For many indigenous communities throughout the world, oneness has been a way of life. Not an ideal or a goal, but a lived reality that has informed and maintained all aspects of society from spiritual to political.

With the advent of colonialism, and through socio-political and religious domination of European countries, many of these cultures were decimated. With them, the world lost rich awareness of how humanity can reflect the truth of interdependence and support balance and reciprocity within the human and earth communities.

From a modern worldview, it's almost impossible to imagine a lived reality in which culture, community, the earth, and the divine are absolutely intertwined. But modern worldviews have not always been prevalent. They are largely a product of Enlightenment thinking and its support of socio-political systems focused on individual freedoms and industry, and on scientific methods that emphasize reason, rationality, and separateness.

As the discoveries of the Enlightenment burgeoned into an all-encompassing worldview with ramifications throughout European/Christian society, the possibility of honoring cultures with different ways of living became less and less likely. Individualism, personal freedoms, industriousness, rationality, independence from the constrictions of nature, all were part of an emerging paradigm. Monotheistic emphasis on a transcendent God, and developing faith in and focus on heaven, put life on earth in the shadows, as did the belief in the expulsion of humanity from the Garden of Eden.

Historically, indigenous spiritual systems that emphasized nearness to and dependence on the land, and cultures with highly developed instinctual – and feminine – wisdom (many indigenous cultures are matrilineal or matriarchal) were seen as *less*: less civilized, less sophisticated, less valuable, and less, or not at all, divine.

In an 1888 report from then U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John H. Overly, to the Department of the Interior, we hear Enlightenment values used in shaping relations with Native

Americans:

The Indian must be taken out of the reservation... he must be imbued with the exalted egotism of American Civilization so that he will say "I" instead of "we," and "this is mine" instead of "this is ours."

In our current age when the world is facing the consequences of "American egotism" and is turning away from the power of "I" and toward the many potentials of "We," it's valuable to understand that cultures of "We" not only have been alive in the past, but continue to hold wisdom that can serve the future.

The danger is that we will not be able to heal, recover, or make whole the ways of living that have been destroyed. Vine Deloria Jr., a Standing Rock Sioux activist, lawyer, theologian and professor who died in 2005, wrote about this loss in his book, *For This Land*:

When the old circles or hoops of life were broken, thousands of years ago for most non-Indians and a century ago for most Indians, the possibility of recapturing that original sense of awe and respect [for the earth] was lost and could not be recovered. We have simply been playing out the logical possibilities of what the fragments of those original hoops made available to people.⁷

While it would be impossible for us to adequately examine world indigenous cultures in regards to their lived understanding of oneness in these short pages, at the same time it's critically important to acknowledge that ancestral wisdom about oneness is alive today, despite historical attempts at destroying it and the people who carry it. And through this acknowledgement we can perhaps contribute to the process of restoring and repairing the fragments of life's circles to which Deloria refers.

Here, we focus on the particular destructiveness of American policy toward Native Americans, as a window into a global process in which Enlightenment/Christian values overtook and destroyed indigenous values. What happened in North America is a microcosm of a larger genocidal phenomenon, with vast implications for a world attempting to align itself with growing emphasis on community and its many facets.

ONENESS WITH THE LAND

Indigenous peoples have always experienced and consciously maintained relationships in which human and place are intertwined and mutually dependent. In many cultures, the land itself is the birthplace of the people, as well as the center of the world. As Chris Peters, Yurok-Karuk leader and director of the Seventh Generation Fund told us:

Native folks – we understand a cosmology that we grew from this land; that we've been here forever

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7 Pg. 267

and ever and ever. That the relationship with place, the familiarity with the area, and knowing that this particular mountain or this particular rock is enshrined with our traditions and our legends and now stands as testimony to our existence and our identity.

Themes of identification with the land exist across native cultures. The Havasupai living in the Grand Canyon in Arizona understand that their people originated from that canyon and are guardians of it. Mt. Diablo in Northern California was known by the Volvon people as the sacred birthplace of the world. Mt. Fuji symbolized the female fire deity to the ancient Ainu people of Japan. The Agno River in the Philippines is the life giver to the Ibaloi. The Kikuyu of Kenya believe that Mt. Kenya was the first place God descended, as it was the most pure.

And sacred lands need not be as prominent as the mountains or rivers listed above – but land itself was home in the deepest sense of the word, a place of utmost belonging, harmony and care.

Arapooish, the nineteenth century Apsaalooke (Crow) chief, expressed reverence for and a sense of perfection about the land of his people, which at the time would have likely spread south of the Black Hills of South Dakota and included parts of Montana and Wyoming:

The Crow country is exactly in the right place. It has snowy mountains and sunny plains; all kinds of climates and good things for every season. When the summer heats scorch the prairies, you can draw up under the mountains, where the air is sweet and cool, the grass fresh, and the bright streams come tumbling out of the snow-banks.... And when winter comes on, you can take shelter in the woody bottoms along the rivers; there you will find buffalo meat for yourselves, and cotton-wood bark for your horses: or you may winter in the Wind River Valley, where there is salt weed in abundance.

The Crow country is exactly in the right place. Everything good is to be found there. There is no country like the Crow country.⁸

Mick Dodson, indigenous Australian of the Yawuru people, born in 1950, has expressed the aboriginal view of the land as fully integrated into all aspects of life:

To understand our law, our culture and our relationship to the physical and spiritual world, you must begin with land. Everything about aboriginal society is inextricably woven with, and connected to, land. Culture is the land, the land and spirituality of aboriginal people, our cultural beliefs or reason for existence is the land. You take that away and you take away our reason for existence. We have grown that land up. We are dancing, singing, and painting for the land. We are celebrating the land. Removed from our lands, we are literally removed from ourselves.

For many indigenous cultures, the power of place is so strong that to have land taken away is like a

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8 Calloway, Colin Gordon, *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground: Plains Indian Views of How the West was Lost*. Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, New York, 1996, p. 77

death. The language of the Navajo has no word for relocation. “To move away means to disappear and never be seen again,” said Pauline Whitesinger in response to U.S. government efforts to relocate the Dineh (traditional Navajo) away from their long-held homes in Black Mesa, Arizona.⁹

COMMUNITY

Land in Indigenous cultures is so interwoven with life that there is no separation of the two. Nor can human life or nature be separated from the divine. Life – human, nature, divine, is too much an inextricable entirety to be divided into parts, conceptually or behaviorally.

In his autobiographical poem, *The Delight Song of Tsoai-talee*, N. Scott Momaday, Pulitzer Prize winning Kiowa-Cherokee poet, exulted:

*I am a feather on the bright sky
I am the blue horse that runs in the plain
I am the fish that rolls, shining, in the water
I am the shadow that follows a child...*

*You see, I am alive, I am alive
I stand in good relation to the earth
I stand in good relation to the gods
I stand in good relation to all that is beautiful
I stand in good relation to the daughter of Tsen-tainte
You see, I am alive, I am alive.¹⁰*

Being alive itself is the entry to the sacred. In Native life, cultural norms, political and social organizations, spiritual practices, and even language all have reinforced, guided, and given expression to these various dimensions of oneness. “All my relations” say Lakota Sioux; “The sky is my Father and these mountains are my Mother” expresses a Crow prayer; and as Bob Randall, Yankunytajara elder told us, “To us [oneness] was just a natural way of being. Being part of all that there is was just the way it was.”

This lived understanding of life’s sacredness was noticed and disapproved of by Christian Colonists settling in early America. Wrote a Presbyterian missionary about the Yankton:

The Yankton are naturally religious. They formerly worshiped almost every object in creation... The

9 Pauline Whitesinger quoted in Walter Goodman’s New York Times review of the film “Broken Rainbow on April 11, 1986,” online: <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9AoDEFD1E3AF932A25757CoA960948260>

10 Momaday, N. Scott, *In the Presence of the Sun*. St. Martin’s Griffin, New York, 1993

sun worship has been prohibited by the government, and is seen no more. But there is a stone god on almost every high hill, where offerings of pipefulls of tobacco and kinnikinic were made tied in little packages. Then almost every family had its tutelary god, which was wrapped in a large bundle of cloth and generally hung on a pole back of the teepee. Then there was the general god. At every important feast the first act was to fill the council pipe and light it, when it was held for a minute on high, with the mouthpeice upward, for the deity to smoke, while the whole assembly were reverently silent...

These and other similar heathen practices, though not put under the ban of the government, have, under the influence of Christian teaching and the frown of civilization, almost entirely disappeared.¹¹

The recognition of sacred unity undercuts self-interest and supports the inclination toward community. Philip Georg Friedrich von Reck, a leader of the German settlement of Ebenezer, Georgia, wrote in his 1736 journal:

They are very courteous, friendly, and hospitable towards strangers, with whom they quickly become acquainted. Their table is open to everyone, and one can sit at it uninvited. When an Indian want to assure someone of his friendship, he strikes himself with his right hand on his left breast and says, my breast is like your breast, my and your breast is one breast – equivalent of my and your heart is one heart, my heart is closely bound with your heart, etc.¹²

This sense of communal living has always been emphasized in the Tlingit culture of southeast Alaska, says Freda Westman who currently lives in the small fishing village of Hoona with approximately 850 residents:

There's a collective ownership of things. A collective ownership of stories and songs. And if there was ever something that happened like a murder – the clan of the murderer would make reparations to the family and the clan of the victim. It was not just the individual person that would get punished; there was an understanding of collective responsibility.

Or, in the act of marriage – as like in other societies from ancient and modern times – there is a collective responsibility about that too – a couple getting married they are also joining their families.

In Indian way, it would be that you would be joining forces – you would be stronger because you would have a bigger family to rely on for war – or future hardships.

Community often extends to include both members who have died, and those who are not yet

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11 *The Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the year 1898.* United States Office of Indian Affairs, p. 292

12 Hvidt, Kristian, editor, *Von Reck's Voyage: Drawings and Journal of Philip Georg Friedrich von Reck.* The Beehive Press, Savannah, Georgia, 1980, pp. 47-48

born. In some African spiritual traditions, those who have died return to be integrated into the family and society – the dead need the living and the living need the dead. This ceremony of return is *ukubuyisa* in Zulu, and *kurovaguva* in Shona.¹³

And future generations are likewise understood as integral to community, as reflected in the great law of the Iroquois to bear in mind the impacts of our present actions on the unborn of generations to come.

Across the globe indigenous wisdom supports behaviors – individual and collective – that maintain harmony between all aspects of life and society. As Kapo Kansa said to us about the Gamo Highlands, the fertile land of the African Rift Valley where sustainable farming is part of an integrated way of life:

There was a superstructure here already thousands of years ago that we exercised. A command system to use land, for farming, for grazing, for forests, to manage conflict, to make the market and everything, whatever we need in our lifespan is in this system... It is not permitted among Gamos to take out whatever he likes from the ground. There is a limit. You are taking grasses, which you need. You don't destroy others. You are taking trees for your consumption. Not to destroy others. You want to pass a resource on for the coming generation.

OPPOSING WORLDVIEWS

As we've discussed in chapter five, the Gamo Highlands are currently being threatened by a major push for modern agricultural techniques that would destroy these traditional sustainable methods. And the story of the Gamo Highlands is not uncommon. Western forces have traditionally imposed "solutions" onto "problematic" indigenous practices.

Much of this historical and on-going destruction is born from a coming together of Enlightenment principles with a Christian worldview that separates heaven from earth and emphasizes the transcendent – not imminent – divine. A mindset that separates divinity from a present and earth-bound life and emphasizes the hierarchical place of humanity above and separate from the earth, whose resources exist for its benefit, fragments the sense of wholeness struggling to remain alive in many indigenous communities today. And this rift between civilizations began centuries ago.

In the mid-to-late 1800s, the community dimension of Native American life was seen as deeply problematic, backwards, and uncivilized. "Civilization" was highly tied to individual power and determination, private property, and competition for resources. Wrote one Sioux agent and government official, Joseph R. Brown in 1858:

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13 Kunnie, Julian and Momalungelo Ivy Goduka, editors, *Indigenous Peoples Wisdom and Power: Affirming our knowledge through Narratives*. Chapter: "African Indigenous Worldviews and Ancient Wisdom: A conceptual Framework for Development in Southern Africa" by Vimbai Gukwe Chivaura. Ashgate Publishing, Farnham, United Kingdom, 2006, p. 215

*Give a man a separate tract to cultivate and he does not hesitate to labor in the common field... The common field is the seat of barbarism; the separate farm the door to civilization.*¹⁴

And in the 1898 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs:

*Traditional prejudices must be overcome, the language learned at the mother's breast discounted, and a new character and habit developed. The process is slow and the difficulties many, but with a commendable patience and missionary zeal great results are accomplished in transforming the wild Indian of the plain into a quiet everyday average citizen.*¹⁵

“Missionary zeal,” which included the assessment that many Native spiritual practices and ways of living were sinful and in some cases evil,¹⁶ when mixed with national political and economic interests that sought to acquire resource-rich lands, played a large role in widespread destruction and degradation of Native peoples and their wisdom.

The practice of European political and Christian forces working together in the decimation of entire cultures was perhaps most explicitly formalized in 1452, when Pope Nicolas V issued to King Alfonso V of Portugal a declaration of war against all non-Christians across the globe. This document, the bull *Romanus Pontifex*, offered legal justification for Portugal's conquest of lands in West Africa. The following pope, Alexander VI, extended the rights to Spain to claim all lands that were being discovered by Christopher Columbus. These Papal orders allowed Portugal and Spain to subdue and enslave non-Christians and take all that had been theirs:

... [W]e bestow suitable favors and special graces on those Catholic kings and princes, ... athletes and intrepid champions of the Christian faith ... to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and ... to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate ... possessions, and

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14 Nichols, Roger L., *The American Indian: Past and Present*. McGraw Hill, New York, 1998, p. 201

15 *The Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the year 1898*. United States Office of Indian Affairs, p. 10

16 The word “evil” is used in *The Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1867*, on numerous occasions. For example, on p. 278, in an assessment offered by Chas. H. Whaley, U.S. Indian Agent in charge of the Pawnee Indian Agency in Genoa, Nebraska:

Their habits of idleness, and their ideas that labor is degrading, and ought only to be performed by women, become too firmly fixed to be eradicated by any degree of diligence on the part of their teachers. But these children who are early taken from the village and its evil influences and put under the exclusive control of those having the charge of the schools and grow up surrounded by good influences, and little by little become impressed with the superior manners and customs of civilized life.

*goods, and to convert them to ... their use and profit ...*¹⁷

Since these early times, the Doctrine of Discovery, as it is called, has been routinely applied and upheld. In 1823, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the U.S. government had free title to all Native American lands in that country, and therefore Native people could not sell land to anyone other than the Government. Again in 1831, in the case Cherokee Nation vs. Georgia, the highest court ruled that Indian nations were “dependent nations” not free of government control. The Doctrine of Discovery has never lost its influence.

In the U.S. as in other parts of the world, Indian policy was a function of both ideology and economics. Waging war against the Indians, it was determined, would be costly, while educating them would be less expensive. In the early 1880s, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Henry Teller said it would cost 22 million dollars to wage war against Indians over a ten year period, but would cost a quarter of that to educate 30,00 children for a year.¹⁸

Native cultures across the world have been systematically destroyed through aggressive relocation and assimilation programs including government-run Christian boarding schools in Australia and New Zealand, Canada, Latin America and the United States, Africa, and parts of the Arctic. In the U.S., founder of the first Indian boarding school – Carlisle Indian Industrial School – Richard H. Pratt declared his mission to: “Kill the Indian and save the Man,” understanding that they were distinguishable and separable.

Government-run schools destroyed families through separating children from parents, changing children’s names, prohibiting the use of traditional language, forcing Christian prayer and practice, cutting hair and prohibiting any native cultural and spiritual practices. Physical and sexual abuse in these schools was elevated far beyond society at large, as was poor medical care and general neglect. In 1909, Dr. Peter Bryce, Canada’s general medical superintendent for the Department of Indian Affairs, reported that he believed children’s health was disregarded, that children with infectious diseases were admitted to fill attendance quotas necessary for continued funding, and that 24 percent of all native residential school students had died of tuberculosis alone.¹⁹

The Christian delineation of what is sacred and what is not sacred and its drive to destroy the latter, combined with economic considerations, cultural prejudices, and extreme confidence in Enlightenment philosophy across the globe, worked to sever native peoples from their roots – external and internal.

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17 Excerpt reprinted in *American Nations: Encounters in Indian Country, 1850 to the Present* by Frederick E. Hoxie, Peter C. Mancall, Hart Merrell. Routledge, New York, 2001, pp. 487-488

18 See *Indigenous Peoples and Boarding Schools: A Comparative Study*, online: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/IPS_Boarding_Schools.pdf

19 Bryce, Peter Henderson, *Report on the Indian Schools of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories*, online: <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/mark-cherington/oh-canada>

Vine Deloria Jr. articulates the destructiveness of the Christian view of separation in the context of the Native American experience of oneness:

The Christian religion was able to overcome tribal beliefs because of its ability to differentiate life into segments, which were unrelated. When a worldview is broken into its component disciplines, these disciplines become things unto themselves and life turns into an unrelated group of categories each with its own morality and ethics...

Religion formerly held an important place in Indian tribal life. It integrated the functions of tribal society so that life was experienced as a unity. Christianity has proved to be a disintegrating force by confining its influence to the field of formula recitation and allowing the important movements of living go their separate ways until life has become separated into a number of unrelated categories... Religion today, or at least Christianity, does not provide the understanding with which society makes sense.²⁰

Representing small but important steps toward the reversal of the above injustices, the mid-to-late twentieth century saw meaningful global shifts in understanding, which included a growing appreciation of diversity (ecological, cultural, and spiritual), an increased respect for the earth as a living entity and traditions that have always understood it as such, and socio-political movements towards equal rights and freedoms for minorities and minority cultures.

In Canada, the last government-run boarding schools were closed in the 1980s and 1990s. In March of 1998, the Canadian government apologized to Canada's First Nations people, offered financial restitution for abuse victims – the amount of funds dependent upon degree of abuse – set up hearings to establish these degrees, and initiated a reconciliation process. In 2008, Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd issued a formal apology to aboriginal peoples for laws or policies that “inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss.” The United States has not issued any apology to America's native people.

CURRENT ATMOSPHERE

In 2009, during its 76th General Convention in California, the Episcopal Church adopted a resolution to “Repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery,” citing the Doctrine's destructiveness toward indigenous peoples and their ways of life. The resolution asked the Queen of England to disavow the Doctrine, and asked the U.S. to review its policies that continue the colonization of Indigenous Peoples.²¹

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20 Deloria, Jr., Vine, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma, 1988, pp. 105, 106, and 119

21 See the August 2007 article in Indian Country Today, online: <http://www.indiancountry-today.com/home/content/51572857.html>

In 2007, during a Mass at the Church of St. Raphael in Marin County, California, retired Bishop Francis A. Quinn apologized to the native Miwok people for the imposition of European Catholicism that destroyed their ancient traditions. Greg Sarris, who heads the tribe, accepted the apology.

As the world recognizes the need for diversity in all its forms for a healthy future, it is also acknowledging the need to repair some of the damage that has been done in the past through assimilation policies. New partnerships among tribal cultures and between tribal peoples and Western fields of science, ecology, and conservation, and new resolutions like the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are working to protect indigenous peoples and the values and wisdom they hold.

But around the world, the stories of ongoing destruction sound a dissonant note. The sacred Niyamgiri Mountain of the Khondh tribal people of eastern India's Orissa province is threatened by a British mining operation. Logging in the Peruvian Amazon threatens the Mashco-Piros, Amahuaca, Yaminahuas, and Yora tribes. In Brazil, the Jururei tribe, a small group of un-contacted people, are also threatened by logging. In the Philippines, the Manobo tribes and Bangsa Moro communities face threats of being drowned or displaced from their ancestral land by the giant Pulangi V dam.

With few or no written records of land ownership, indigenous peoples around the world have few corresponding legal rights to the land they've lived on for hundreds if not thousands of years.

Current threats abound, and some are caused by past traumas and policies. In the most recent 2006 study, life expectancy rates for Native Americans was found to be lower than any other group, with men dying at the average age of 71; and Native American babies were dying at a rate 44% higher than a decade prior. The rate of suicide among Native Americans is 1.5 times higher than the national average.²²

Efforts to stop logging, mining, and other resource extraction practices that destroy native lands is one tack in protecting indigenous people. Others aim at curtailing alarming rates of language loss. Educational programs or "immersion schools" attempt to renew language and native worldviews both. In the United States, an "apology" petition is available for signatures to encourage government recognition of and regret for abuses at government-run boarding schools.

But despite increased awareness of past wrongs and current dangers, indigenous peoples – and their wisdom – remain threatened.

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22 Statistics from Vanessa Ho's "Native American Death Rates Soar as Most People are Living Longer", a March 12, 2009 Seattle Independent article, online: http://www.seattlepi.com/local/403196_tribes12.html

See "Mental Health: Culture, Race, Ethnicity Fact Sheets," online: <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cre/fact4.asp>

WISDOM FOR THE FUTURE

The death toll of the December 2004 tsunami caused by the Indian Ocean earthquake with an epicenter off the coast of Sumatra, Indonesia was near 230,000. But the Moken people, the 2,000 – 3,000 indigenous sea gypsies who reside where the tsunami was most destructive, survived with only the death of one boy. These ancient people know the sea, and spend seven or eight months a year living on their boats – which they identify as extensions of their own human bodies. It was their intimate relationship with the sea and its life that alerted them to the coming tsunami and inspired a retreat to higher ground or out beyond the waves that saved their population.

The story of the Moken captivated the imagination of many. How did they know the tsunami was coming? What wisdom do they draw upon that alerted them? What sense perceptions were at work?

At a time when our shared earth faces destruction and depletion of resources, wisdom that is born from deep intimacy with the earth could be extremely helpful. Not only in the discovery of solutions and responses to natural disturbances, but in developing sustainable habits and methods of working with the earth that benefit the entire earth/human relationship.

Of course a first step in finding solutions is in seeing the problems perhaps even before they arrive – as with the Moken. It is from people with intractable ties to the natural world who are currently sensing the depths and meaning of the many crises we are facing. This is not an abstract, scientific knowledge, but meaning that is experienced in the minds and hearts of those who love, care, depend on, and identify *with* the land.

A people used to experiencing oneness with the natural world are the first to feel the pain of the destruction and disease of its family members. Winona LaDuke Native American activist and environmentalist of the Mississippi Band Anishinaabeg from northern Minnesota, articulates this response:

*The protection, teachings, and gifts of our relatives have for generations preserved our families. These relations are honored in ceremony, song, story, and life that keep relations close – to buffalo, sturgeon, salmon, turtles, bears, wolves, and panthers. These are our older relatives – the ones that came before and taught us to live. Their obliteration by dams, guns, and bounties is an immense loss to Native families and cultures. Their absence may mean that a people sing to a barren river, a caged bear, or a buffalo far away. It is the struggle to preserve what remains and the struggle to recover what has been lost that characterizes much of Native environmentalism. It is these relationships that industrialism seeks to disrupt. Native communities will resist with great determination.*²³

Solutions emerging from a vision of life that sees all aspects of life in relationship with each other

23
LaDuke, Winona, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*. South End Press, Massachusetts, 1999, p. 2

will serve the world as a whole. In stark contrast to American egotism, Te Taru White, the leader of Te Papa, Aotearoa, New Zealand's national museum explains how an indigenous wisdom works from this shared dimension of life:

We are guardians, observers of the past, receivers of the gifts of the past, and translators for the future. And we pass on what we have to the future, so we don't own, we guard. We guard, we nurture, and we pass on.

When you start arguing matters of possession, ownerships, matters of law – “I own,” “law prescribes,” “my title,” “mine,” then you begin to lose sight of the fact that you are here on this earth for a determinant period of time....

Further, indigenous peoples' worldview often includes the recognition of sacrifice as an integral component to earth/human relations. Recognizing that animals and plants sacrifice themselves to be useful to humans, humans in turn must find ways to make sacrifices to maintain relationships of reciprocal harmony. Ceremony and ritual in which individuals fast, give up possessions, or sacrifice body parts, as through piercings, abound in indigenous traditions.

The idea of sacrifice is largely foreign to our Western mindset, unless in the context of family life in which a parent makes sacrifices for a child's well-being or success. But the balancing of the human/earth relationship might call us toward sacrifice – toward having less so others can have more, toward giving up our exploitation of the earth so that the earth has energy to renew itself.

Many are understanding that the extreme egotism of the Enlightenment period and its emphasis on individual will and fulfillment must become – finally – balanced with the wisdom held for so long by native peoples that emphasizes in so many innumerable ways the community of life.

Maori elder, Te Taru White, describes a unique opportunity facing all humanity to realize a new partnership between both these mindsets:

They are two different systems. The issue is about how do you respect those systems, how do you give respect and honor and not put one down? But believe that each have relevance? That's where oneness begins to happen.

Oneness and Social Change

As our shifting relationships with Indigenous peoples and their wisdom shows, humanity has throughout history become more willing to value experiences and worldviews of oneness both as ideals and as a way of life. And perhaps nowhere in Western culture has the values of oneness been so effectively harnessed as in the arena of social and political change ushered in by individuals who recognize the fundamental unity within life and have worked to create the structures that

can hold and reflect the truth of who we are and who we can be.

We're referring to opportunities for education and societal participation, the destruction of barriers between peoples and nations, the moral call against racial and gender prejudice and the structures that perpetuate them, the protection of liberties and freedoms so all individuals can participate in the development of society, and the explosive awareness of environmental interdependence. And we're also referring to more recent advances in computer technology, which have dramatically changed how most of us experience the world and each other.

Individuals like Mahatma Gandhi, who led India's non-violent Independence movement in the mid 20th century; Martin Luther King Jr., leader in the American civil rights movement; Nelson Mandela, who fought against Apartheid and became South Africa's first democratically elected president; Mother Teresa, who devoted herself to India's poor; and leaders in the environmental and women's movements; all illustrate how the energies and intelligence of oneness have brought about radical developments in how we live together as a global society.

For these innovators of change, oneness is a fact of life. As Gandhi said:

*I believe in the absolute oneness of God and therefore, of humanity. What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul...I cannot, therefore, detach myself from the wickedest soul nor may I be denied identity with the most virtuous.*²⁴

From Martin Luther King Jr.:

*All life is interrelated. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality; tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. As long as there is poverty in this world, no man can be totally rich even if he has a billion dollars.*²⁵

And from South African activist and 1984 Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together.

The moral and ethical imperatives of the consciousness of oneness are profound. As Mother Teresa says: "It is not enough for us to say, 'I love God but I do not love my neighbor.'" Mother Teresa understood that God was present in all people, and she inspired millions with her commitment to love all people as God.

Whether we see life as an expression of divine presence, or simply recognize the profound truth of

24 Gandhi, Mahatma, *All Men are Brothers, Autobiographical Reflections*. Continuum International Publishing, New York, 1980, p. 72

25 King, Martin Luther Jr., from *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington. Harper Collins, New York, 1991, p. 210

human connection, we are seeing with a consciousness of oneness that for hundreds of years has been compelling our world community toward peace, unity, and human development.

INNER TO OUTER

Through a number of powerful social change movements we can see the full expression of oneness – the integration of deeply personal experience along the vertical axis, where we know our intimate and essential connections to peace, love, and freedom, with the outer expression of those truths through socio-political structures that support liberty, opportunity, compassion, and a peaceful society. When we work for social change in this way, we help integrate these two fundamental dimensions of life into one lived reality.

Gandhi understood that inner realities need to find their expression in expanding social spheres. He felt that peace and love – aspects of our most intimate relationships – must be part of society as a whole:

Family disputes and differences are generally settled according to the law of love. The injured member has so much regard for the others that he suffers injury for the sake of his principles without retaliating and without being angry with those who differ from him.

I feel that nations cannot be one in reality, nor can their activities be conducive to the common good of the whole humanity, unless there is this definite recognition and acceptance of the law of the family in national and international affairs, in other words, on the political platform.²⁶

And Wangari Maathai, 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner for her work organizing rural women to reforest parts of Kenya, describes a similar imperative to integrate human experience with socio-political reality:

The world needs a global ethic with values which give meaning to life experiences and, more than religious institutions and dogmas, sustain the non-material dimension of humanity. Mankind's universal values of love, compassion, solidarity, caring and tolerance should form the basis for this global ethic which should permeate culture, politics, trade, religion and philosophy. It should also permeate the extended family of the United Nations.

But establishing harmony between personal and social experience is a multi-dimensional work that continually expands one's experience of interconnection. Nelson Mandela's recounting of his lifelong commitment to freedom offers a detailed description of how the consciousness of oneness expanded to include more and more of life. He describes his early awareness of his own freedom:

I was born free – free in every way that I could know. Free to run in the fields near my mother's hut,
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²⁶ Gandhi, Mahatma, "Congress Report on the Punjab Disorders", Volume 20, p. 40, from the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, online: <http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOLo2o.PDF>

free to swim in the clear stream that ran through my village, free to roast mealies under the stars and ride the broad backs of slow-moving bulls.

But as he grew, he understood this freedom could be undermined by cultural restrictions. It was then his hunger for outer freedom developed:

At first, as a student, I wanted freedom only for myself, the transitory freedom of being able to stay out at night, read what I pleased, and go where I chose. Later, as a young man in Johannesburg, I yearned for the basic and honorable freedoms of achieving my potential, of earning my keep, of marrying and having a family – the freedom not to be obstructed in a lawful life.

But the consciousness of oneness expands beyond borders – not just borders between inner experience and outer expression, but between self and other. Soon Mandela longed for even more freedom:

I slowly saw that not only was I not free, but my brothers and sisters were not free. I saw that it was not just my freedom that was curtailed, but the freedom of everyone who looked like I did... It was this desire for the freedom of my people to live their lives with dignity and self-respect that animated my life...

Mandela's awareness did not stop there. He was imprisoned for his opposition to Apartheid, and while in jail his understanding of freedom grew:

It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity.²⁷

We see in Mandela the power of the consciousness of oneness, which does not stop when an individual gains expression of his or her own deepest nature, but continues to push outward through ever-expanding circles to gather more and more of life into its vision and experience of wholeness, until ultimately we know in the depths of our being that our own happiness is the happiness of others, and the suffering of others is our own suffering.

The more we allow it to guide us, oneness dissolves the cognitive structures that allow us to think and feel that we are separate from other people, and drives us to express this reality of harmony in all areas of our life. Gandhi expressed this harmony:

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27 Mandela, Nelson, *A Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*. Little, Brown & Company, New York, 1995, pp. 543-544

*My life is one indivisible whole, and all my activities run into one another and they all have their rise in my insatiable love of mankind.*²⁸

The process of integrating inner reality with outer world structures is a process. The work exhibited by the most inspiring leaders is to continually come back to justice in a world of injustice, to re-align with what is free in a world that denies freedom to so many and puts a price tag on the fundamentals of life, to act out of love in a world filled with so much hatred.

But as Gandhi explains, this process shouldn't be seen solely as hardship – but instead accepted as a natural means for deepening our realization that what is true within the human being is true throughout creation. Echoing Lao Tzu's declaration in the Tao Te Ching: "The sage clasps the Primal Unity, testing by it everything under Heaven," Gandhi says:

*Without inter-relation with society [man] cannot realize his oneness with the universe or suppress his egotism. His social interdependence enables him to test his faith and to prove himself on the touchstone of reality.*²⁹

UNIVERSAL RIGHTS

Historically, one of the most powerful means of holding and expressing oneness in a socio-political context is the acknowledgement of *universal rights*. The word "universal" indicates that some things are eternally true, and harkens to the great philosophical challenge to identify what endures despite changing circumstance. The drive to determine and uphold universal rights in society is one of the most powerful expressions of oneness in our daily lives.

And what are these rights? If you live in the United States, you've probably heard them hundreds of times. The U.S. Declaration of Independence says:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

More recently, in 1948 the United Nations offered its own Declaration of Human Rights, acknowledging:

Whereas the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

The notion of universal rights was initially developed through enlightenment philosophers and their understanding that certain rights were divine gifts – sacred aspects of our own nature. For

28 Gandhi, in *All Men are Brothers: Autobiographical Reflections*, p. 4

29 Ibid. p. 108

many – including the founding Fathers of the United States – equality and liberty were not just political ideals but absolute rights granted by a divine source. In a legal argument, Thomas Jefferson described personal liberty as given by “the Author of nature.”³⁰ Liberty and equality are inherent, unearned and independent of human effort or achievement, and society has an obligation to uphold this truth.

Thomas Paine, revolutionary, founding father of the United States, and one of the first advocates for minimum or guaranteed wage, expressed this historical trend to integrate deep spiritual values with society:

The world is my country, all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion.

Almost a hundred years later, addressing the socio-political inequities of her time, the great suffragette Susan B. Anthony articulated the imperative to make sure these ideals were brought further into social reality:

*It was we, the people; not we the white male citizens; nor yet we the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union.*³¹

And in a 1963 speech to American University, President John F. Kennedy Jr. reiterated the natural and universal qualities of peace and justice, linking them to a human being’s capacity to breathe:

And is not peace, in the last analysis, basically a matter of human rights – the right to live out our lives without fear of devastation – the right to breathe air as nature provides it – the right of future generations to a healthy existence?

The idea of inalienable or natural rights is highly linked to the idea of human spiritual nature. As an ex-slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass said:

*The soul that is within me is a soul no man can degrade.*³²

You don’t need to believe in a “soul” or that our rights to freedom and justice are gifts from a divine source to know, deeply and intuitively, that human beings are *all* essentially free and equal, and that therefore our social structures should protect and reflect this truth. This is the consciousness of oneness at work, recognizing how deep inner realities are *shared*, and therefore must find their expression in outer community.

In the following passage from *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela explains how the principles

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30 See online: <http://etext.virginia.edu/jefferson/quotations/jeffo100.htm>

31 Susan B. Anthony, *Speech After Being Convicted Of Voting in The 1872 Presidential Election*, online: <http://gos.sbc.edu/a/anthony.html>

32 Quoted by Booker T. Washington in *Up From Slavery*, Doubleday, Page & Co., New York, 1901, p. 100

of democracy offer one method of facilitating the fundamental equality and freedom of individuals. He describes a tribal meeting in his South African village:

Everyone who wanted to speak did so. It was democracy in its purest form. There may have been a hierarchy of importance among the speakers, but everyone was heard, chief and subject, warrior and medicine man, shopkeeper and farmer, landowner and laborer. People spoke without interruption and the meetings lasted for many hours. The foundation of self-government was that all men were free to voice their opinions and were equal in their value as citizens.

FORCES OF ONENESS

Love, peace, and freedom – these are not only qualities of our deepest selves and who we are becoming as a global society, but also how we are going to get there. The forces of oneness are creative energies of change, the unifying powers that *express, create* and *sustain* our basic human nature in a social context. When Gandhi said, “Be the change you want to see in the world,” he was stating this fundamental possibility of oneness – that who we are can become the world itself.

Gandhi’s use of non-violent resistance is one of the most potent examples of how we can use the forces of our inner nature to reflect and create outer reality.

Through *satyagraha* – or non-violent resistance – individuals use a power that is fundamentally beyond the self-interest of the ego. Gandhi called *satyagraha* “*love force*” and “*soul force*,” indicating its origins in the depths of our spiritual nature. And Martin Luther King, Jr. reiterated this same message in a different time and place – Washington, DC in 1963:

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

Non-violence is not the only force of oneness. Love, freedom, imagination, cooperation, justice, and compassion, are other powers that come from the depths of our being and drive us to create harmony within and outside us.

But while the greatest human beings make it seem easy and natural to live these powers, it seems few of us can follow their example. When Mother Teresa says: “It is not the magnitude of our actions but the amount of love that is put into them that matters,” we know she is right. So why don’t we think it can apply to us?

Of course it’s not easy work to access and live the powers of oneness; and it’s sometimes hard to believe in them. It might mean we go for years without recognition for our efforts, because love and peace are not always our most visible contributions. And it might mean we never fully realize our goals: The great conservationist, Aldo Leopold once said:

*We shall never achieve harmony with the land, any more than we shall achieve absolute justice or liberty for people. In these higher aspirations, the important thing is not to achieve but to strive.*³³

And just as there are forces that strengthen and empower oneness, there are also attitudes that strengthen the belief in and experience of separation – like hatred, violence and prejudice. When we indulge these forces in ourselves, we manifest them in society. Explains King:

*Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. Hate destroys a man's sense of values and his objectivity. It causes him to describe the beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful and to confuse the true with the false and the false with the true.*³⁴

And Nelson Mandela also addressed the presence of opposing forces in *A Long Walk to Freedom*:

I would venture to say that there is something inherently good in all human beings, deriving from, among other things, the attribute of social consciousness that we all possess. And, yes, there is also something inherently bad in all of us, flesh and blood as we are, with the attendant desire to perpetuate and pamper the self.

From this premise arises the challenge to order our lives and mold our mores in such a way that the good in all of us takes precedence. In other words, we are not passive and hapless souls waiting for manna or the plague from on high. All of us have a role to play in shaping society.

If we want to shape society to become more and more supportive of oneness and unity, a good place to start is to recognize that oneness and unity are available to us – not just as ideals or hopes, but as effective forces of change.

CURRENT ATMOSPHERE

As a global community, we're beginning to feel that it's simply not acceptable for some to thrive while others suffer. We're seeing the ineffectiveness and absurdity of believing that we are good and the "other" is bad. We're coming to the point in time when many of us know that, as Martin Luther King so clearly stated: "We may have all come on different ships, but we're all in the same boat now."

In his book *Earth in Balance*, Al Gore articulates this modern situation and the sense of responsibility that comes with it in the context of environmental health:

The struggle to save the global environment is in one way much more difficult than the struggle

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33 Leopold, Aldo, *Round River: from the Journals of Aldo Leopold*. Oxford University Press, New York, p. 155

34 King, Martin Luther Jr., *Strength to Love*. Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1981

to vanquish Hitler, for this time the war is with ourselves. We are the enemy, just as we have only ourselves as allies.

During the 20th and early 21st centuries, social and political change was to a large degree ushered in through leaders with extraordinary courage and vision who inspired and guided humanity towards a greater understanding of the powers and realities of oneness. But as King and Gore suggest, today we are mostly left with ourselves.

The consciousness of oneness is expressing itself not as much through individual leaders with great prescience, but through widespread collective shifts in understanding, expectations, and day-to-day choices. In many ways this is oneness more as itself – more egalitarian, more communal, and lived more fully through individual responsibility and awareness of others' needs.

From the collapse of the Berlin wall and the creative power of the Internet to what will really impact our global environmental health, social change is occurring through collective patterns and needs. No single leader tore down the Berlin wall and united the East and West, but a collective unwillingness to live with oppression finally undermined its foundations.

And the leaders that do inspire us are not experts in one field, but generally crossover between many fields. Our environmental advocates are political leaders; our women's rights workers are bringing about economic stability. Wangari Maatthai points to this new attribute of modern change:

In a few decades, the relationship between the environment, resources, and conflict may seem almost as obvious as the connection we see today between human rights, democracy, and peace.

Tied to our world's rising connectivity is the growth in computer technology and specifically the Internet. As a powerful expression of and tool for social change, the Internet has achieved more in a few years than most of us could have imagined even fifty years ago – not simply through the dissolution of boundaries between people and between people and information, but in the ethos and the basic workings of the technology itself, the kinds of relationships that this technology lends itself to – relationships that are immediate, free, and non-hierarchical. The Internet is changing how we live from the ground up, connecting us through mobile devices and computers to the rest of the world with amazing speed, and creating new economic, educational, and social networks that bring power directly to individuals without intermediating authorities.

The Internet's explosive rise suggests we have been waiting for a way to live our natural understanding of oneness, our understanding that information, art, music, film and news can and sometimes should be free, that there are more economies than currency, that sharing with each other is key to being human.

More and more we are realizing that social change belongs to all of us. Slowly, the delusion that change is dependent on the "other" – whether they be spiritual saints or super politicians – is

eroding, and we see how powerful we are as individuals if we use our deepest qualities and creativity to serve the needs of the community, no matter if it's the world community or a city neighborhood.

The Global Oneness Project has witnessed this again and again – from Medha Patkar, who fights for the rights of India's farmers, to Titkie Plaatjie's soccer program which educates fellow South Africans about AIDS, from Penny Livingston who teaches permaculture gardening in northern California to Rabbi Menachem Froman who organizes dialogues with Muslims to bring peace to the Middle East.

All over the world, a consciousness of oneness is helping create peace in areas of conflict, restore abandoned neighborhoods, and offer opportunity to those who have been marginalized. It's deepening our understanding of ourselves, and encouraging us toward greater degrees of responsibility.

For many, these changes and the consciousness driving them seem surprising, while for others they're natural and even expected. Consciousness doesn't stop growing, and relationships are always changing. How humanity relates to and cares for others is bound to expand beyond past norms and patterns.

The consciousness of oneness has been present since history began, but our awareness of its potentials has grown throughout time. In fact, many believe that we are only now entering a period of history in which oneness will have its greatest impact.

Chapter 7 Exercises

1. How might we view the world differently if we kept in mind that what we observe depends on who is observing it?
2. Why does the scientific method not suffice when it comes to understanding the world of quantum physics?
3. What are some shortcomings of the scientific method? What vital attribute(s) of existence are lost in the process of observing and separating into component parts?
4. Genetics research is finding evidence that our environment, and even our thoughts, control our behavior and gene activity. What implications might this have for how and where you spend your life?
5. Do you agree with the Gaia hypothesis that the earth is alive? Why or why not? If the earth has a soul, would that change how you see and treat the world or cause you to make different decisions about lifestyle or consumption?

6. Why do you think modern societies emphasize “me” over “we”? Why do indigenous cultures maintain the opposite emphasis? Could there be a middle ground that reconciles both? What would that middle ground look like?
7. For many indigenous cultures, identification with the land is so powerful that “to leave it is like death,” yet Western people freely move from place to place without concern for the land beneath them. Why do you think this difference in cultures exists? Is there a downside to our moving around so much? What might we learn from native culture about identification with the land?
8. As modern trends reinforce individual freedom we are at risk of losing traditional community relationships. Can you imagine ways of preserving individuality while restoring and revitalizing community integrity?
9. “The common field is the seat of barbarism; the separate farm the door to civilization,” said a U.S. government official in the mid-1800s. Why do you think working communally was so threatening and working separately seen as civilized? Is this still believed today?
10. What aspects of indigenous wisdom do you recognize as being important for Western cultures to adopt? What aspects would you like to integrate into your own life?
11. Do you believe in the possibility of Universal Rights for all people across all societies? What about Universal Rights for all animals? All living things? How far would you go? Do water, trees or rocks have rights?
12. The scientific method excels at separating the world into parts and pieces, but isn’t equipped to recognize that “the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.” What is that quality or characteristic that makes a whole greater than simply the pieces comprising it? Take an assemblage of everyday things – from a forest ecosystem to a sports team or a handheld device – and use your analytical mind to separate it into its component parts. Now, stepping back and contemplating the discrete pieces, do you feel everything is accounted for? Or is there an overarching quality or characteristic that is missing when it is no longer whole?

Oneness and the Future:

A revolutionary – and evolutionary – shift

Visionaries in fields ranging from science and technology to religion and social change have long been calling attention to the role of oneness in the evolution of the cosmos. Leading us out of many of the difficulties brought on by attitudes of duality and separation – attitudes that have alienated humanity from the earth, from the divine, from one other, and from our own deepest nature – the powers of oneness are bringing us into a future that is much more unified than it's ever been.

This isn't a futuristic utopia we're considering. We might recount some compelling myths, but we're not talking about a fairy tale. Increased awareness of oneness doesn't mean an end to pain or suffering and it's not an elixir for personal happiness. After all, working with oneness requires us to face the truth of where we've been and where we're going, and take responsibility for our choices that shape the future. But it does bring lot with it – mystery, meaning, and the hidden powers of unity, and of course cooperation and peace.

Along the way it provides a larger perspective that can hold and contain all of us as we move into the future. It puts the natural and ongoing struggles of life into a new context – a context that knows we are all in it together, and knows solutions to difficulties will be born from acknowledging the reality of unity, not from denying it.

Already we have the beginning of that larger perspective. If people starve, it is not because we don't know that they are hungry. It's because we can't find the solutions necessary to ease hunger or because we choose to do nothing. If war or oppression is harming individuals on the other side of the world, it is not for lack of global awareness but for lack of our moral wherewithal or practical solutions. In the future, the reality of the whole will be our fundamental framework.

This is a revolutionary – and evolutionary – historical shift in consciousness, unimaginable to many, even now, but foreseen by a few.

Oneness and the Evolution of Consciousness – Pierre de Chardin and Thomas Berry

Two individuals deserve particular mention as we consider those who foretold oneness as a powerful force in the creation of the future – Catholic priests, from different orders – Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, born in the late 19th century, and Passionist Thomas Berry, born in the early 20th century.

Teilhard was one of the first Westerners to describe – in great detail – the evolution of human consciousness as part of a universal trend towards unity. For both Teilhard and Berry, who was greatly influenced by the former, life itself was a divine unity on a trajectory toward greater and greater consciousness of oneness. Humans evolved from the earth, and therefore all aspects of the earth share the same potential for consciousness. The universe, they agreed, was a whole created by various elements moving together in communion toward increased complexity.

Teilhard projected that the cosmos will eventually reach a maximum level of complexity in which all layers of consciousness converge into a god-like state, called the *Omega Point*, at which life will be aware of its divine nature. This evolutionary perspective allows for a vision that recognizes how all life is connected, through time and space, playing a part in a much larger process. From this big picture view, value differences between species or peoples diminish into irrelevance.

While both emphasized the inherent equality of life's separate parts, they also acknowledged the unique and important role of human consciousness and its ability for self-reflection. Berry explained:

It would be difficult to overemphasize the magnificence of this evolutionary doctrine. It provides a grandeur in our view of the universe and our human role in it that is overwhelming. Indeed, in its human expression the universe is able to reflect on itself and enjoy its grandeur in a special mode of conscious self-awareness. The evolutionary vision provides the most profound mystique of the universe.¹

Self-reflection is, according to Teilhard, like a kind of spark, creating a web of consciousness that spreads across the earth uniting all human beings, assisted by the growth of technology and global communication. He called this web the *noosphere* – named from the root *nous*, which we discussed in the previous philosophy section. (*Nous* is Greek for “mind”, and for many philosophers includes a special component linking nous to divine intelligence, or self-awareness.)

Teilhard's cosmology includes three levels or leaps in evolution, of which the noosphere is the highest. The *geosphere* (inanimate matter), the *biosphere* (biological life) and the *noosphere* are ultimately connected in the evolutionary trajectory toward the Omega Point. Teilhard describes:

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¹ Berry, Thomas, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*. Bell Tower, New York, 1999, p. 169

A glow ripples outward from the first spark of conscious reflection. The point of ignition grows larger. The fire spreads in ever widening circles till finally the whole planet is covered with incandescence. It is really a new layer, the thinking layer, which has spread over and above the world of plants and animals. In other words, outside and above the biosphere there is the noosphere.²

Calling the noosphere a “fantastic spectacle, staring us in the face, of a rapidly rising collective Reflection, moving in step with an increasingly unitary organization,”³ Teilhard believed it could help individuals become more and more aligned with our/its self-reflective intelligence. Meaning, we can and will all be able to recognize how connected we are to each other and to different life forms, and we will realize that we are part of a divine whole. The increase in world population and technological and geographical advancements in communications have accelerated the power and growth of the noosphere. In 1947, with great prescience, Teilhard wrote:

No one can deny that a network of economic and psychic affiliations is being woven at ever increasing speed which envelops and constantly penetrates more deeply within each of us. With every day that passes it becomes a little more impossible for us to act or think otherwise than collectively.⁴

THE ECOZOIC ERA

Berry concurred with much of Teilhard’s cosmology, but resisted its seeming unconditional tone, as though life was bound and necessarily moving toward the Omega Point. Berry felt more of an urgency for humanity to participate, to wake up, and to change its thinking and behaving. He emphasized respect for the earth as the most pressing, palpable and common sense need of the time. It’s in relation to the earth that humanity can take a leap in awareness and can transition away from human-centered attitudes of exploitation and disregard into relationships of deep resonance and unity.

Berry calls this evolutionary turn, the Ecozoic era, and it follows the current Cenozoic era, which has reigned since the destruction of the dinosaurs. The Cenozoic era has been marked by human technological advancement and increased alienation from nature. With its effects building over time in proportion to its growing capabilities, humanity’s attitudes and actions have been exploitive and dominating, with no basis in intimacy or reciprocity:

The governing dream of the twentieth century appears as a kind of ultimate manifestation of that deep inner rage of Western society against its earthly condition as a vital member of the life

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2 Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre, *The Phenomenon of Man*, Bernard Wall, translator. Harper and Rowe, New York, 1961, p. 182

3 Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre, *The Heart of the Matter*, René Hague, translator. Harcourt, New York, 1978, p. 38

4 Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre, “The Formation of the Noosphere” from the book *The Future of Man*. Harper and Row, New York, 1969, p. 170-174

community. As with the goose that laid the golden egg, so the Earth is assaulted in a vain effort to possess not simply the magnificent fruits of the Earth but the power itself whereby these splendors have emerged.⁵

In contrast, to the Cenozoic era, the Ecozoic is grounded in care, reverence and shared intimacy with the earth. For Berry, it's humanity's capacity to feel awe, wonder and reverence toward the earth that offers the most direct entry point to unity:

*The human venture depends absolutely on this quality of awe and reverence and joy in the Earth and all that lives and grows upon the Earth. As soon as we isolate ourselves from these currents of life and from the profound mood that these engender within us, then our basic life-satisfactions are diminished.*⁶

MORALITY AND CHANGE

For Teilhard and Berry, the current evolutionary shift toward unity includes a revolution in how we treat each other and the earth. In keeping with his inward vision, Teilhard describes how an inner shift of attention is key:

*The peak of ourselves, the acme of our originality, is not our individuality but our person; and according to the evolutionary structure of the world, we can only find our person by uniting together. There is no mind without synthesis. The same holds good from top to bottom. The true ego grows in inverse proportion to "egoism." Like the Omega which attracts it, the element only becomes personal when it universalizes itself.*⁷

Humans have the capacity to look past self-interest to discover who they really are – part of an inter-connected whole. This process of "universalizing" is often brought about through outer trials, and Teilhard saw humanity being pushed toward a shift in consciousness through crisis and need. Writing from the trenches in France during WW I, he asked, "After every crisis Mankind is more differentiated and at the same time more one whole. What then can we expect from this crisis?" And foreseeing increasing discord, he later wrote:

*If we are not as yet witnessing today the last outburst of discord, then we shall be doing so tomorrow; for the last act in the drama is rapidly approaching. It will not be long before the human mass closes in upon itself and groups all its members in a definitively realized unity. Respect for one and the same law, one and the same orientation, one and the same spirita, are tending to overlay the permanent diversity of individuals and nations.*⁸

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5 Berry's *The Great Work*, p. 165

6 Ibid., pp. 166-167

7 Teilhard's *The Phenomenon of Man*, p. 263

8 Teilhard's *Heart of the Matter*, p. 184

As Teilhard made clear, we are all part of the changing world. Our consciousness, not separate from the whole, is moving in accord with life around us, supported by others taking this step into unity. The more deep we go, the more we access the forces that emphasize our unity and help us to unite— forces like peace or love, which others, like Gandhi or Mother Teresa, have also identified as forces of change in the world. “Love one another, or you will perish,” Teilhard wrote in *L’Energie Humaine*. He also described a future time when we, as a collective culture, access and work with such forces consciously:

*The day will come when, after harnessing space, the winds, the tides, and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire.*⁹

Berry, with his somewhat more practical focus, emphasized the shift in attitude toward our earth, but also in how we educate our children, run our businesses, share our resources. He foresaw the dualistic division of political parties becoming subsumed into the more pressing division between those who hold a human-centric view with a development and extractive agenda, and those who have switched over to the new story in which the world community – including the earth – is at the center.

David Korten, a contemporary economist who continues Berry’s work, recognizes how the principles of the Ecozoic era are translated into societal life:

*In the world we want, the organization of economic life mimics healthy ecosystems that are locally rooted, highly adaptive, and self-reliant in food and energy. Information and technology are shared freely, and trade between neighbors is fair and balanced. Each community, region and nation strives to live within its own means in balance with its own environmental resources. Conflicts are resolved peacefully and no groups seek to expropriate the resources of its neighbors. Competition is for excellence, not domination.*¹⁰

New Partnerships

Teilhard and Berry were visionaries with a deep mystical understanding of the sacred unity of life and the connectedness of the universe through time. Part of the future they predicted was the coming together of a variety of seemingly disparate entities and energies, including mind and matter, male and female, sacred and ordinary, earth and heaven. Other individuals and traditions offer similar visions of the future, in which new partnerships emerge to bring balance and innovation

9 Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre, “The Evolution of Chastity” (February 1934) in *Toward the Future*, Collins, London, 1975, pp. 86-87

10 Korten, David, in Yes Magazine’s “Why This Crisis May Be Our Best Chance to Build a New Economy.” June, 2009, online: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/the-new-economy/why-this-crisis-may-be-our-best-chance-to-build-a-new-economy>

both to our experience of the world and to existing world structures.

Don Alverto Taxo, a Quichua elder and community leader from the Cotopaxi region of Ecuador speaks of an ancient prophecy about a time when indigenous wisdom and Western science will complement each other:

The prophecy says that the Eagle and the Condor will fly together. That means that technology, which the Eagle characterizes, would be in service to a harmonious relationship with nature that indigenous people have developed. So the Eagle represents technology, and the Condor symbolizes life in harmony with nature. To fly together means that technology will be in service to indigenous people so that they can preserve and communicate to others this way of life based on harmony.

The scientific point of view that has dominated Western civilization is based on a fundamental framework of difference and separation, a framework and worldview antithetical to oneness. The earth and its resources are separate from and of less value than human beings – and they are separate from and of less value than God, which is not as much here on earth as in a heaven. Working in tandem, these deep-seated attitudes allow for science and technology to play a destructive role in the use and abuse of earth's resources, which in turn destroys our potential for a spiritual relationship with the earth and contributes to further alienation and degradation.

Chris Peters, Pohlik-lah/Karuk leader and director of the non-profit Seventh Generation Fund for Indian Development explained the connection to us when we met in Northern California:

The absence of a spiritual relationship to the land renders the land without a soul, with something that can be commodified, can be abused, can be destroyed because it has no relationship to humans.

Humans have their heavens... Upon death you're going to leave. The forecasting of a time of Armageddon – where the Earth is going to end anyway, and we will be saved, salvation will happen and we will continue a better life somewhere else – renders Euro-Americans no obligation to protecting where you live today. It's a spiritual and a religious concept that is very destructive.

In contrast to a Western industrial view, indigenous wisdom resists the commodification of the earth's resources because the earth is not devoid of sacredness. It is neither separate from the divine, nor is it separate from humanity, for the divine and humanity are not separate either. Says Don Alverto Taxo:

We are part of the cosmos and the cosmos is part of us. There's no division. We are one manifestation of life. We have different external forms but we are a manifestation of the great cosmos that lives inside of us and we live inside of it.

Because of this fundamental view of an interconnected reality, the sciences and technologies developed by indigenous peoples work with natural conditions and powers, rather than against them. They work with and for the earth instead of for something – divine or human – that is dis-

tant and separate. This is how they maintain and sustain harmony.

Interestingly, more and more Western scientists see the need for taking relationships and interdependence into account. Ian Goldin, director of Oxford's 21st Century School explains that with technology's tremendous advancements one of the future's greatest challenges is the fragility of interconnectedness – the *systemic risk* that one disaster quickly affects the whole. Citing climate change, ecological collapse and financial crisis, he highlights the truth that a disaster in one area impacts everybody. And he says:

A new awareness will have to arise of how we deal with these – how we mobilize ourselves in a new way and come together as a community to manage systemic risk.

As true as this is, there is also a fundamental blind spot in his discussion, evident when he asks:

How do we think about complex systems in new ways? That will be the challenge of the scholars and all of us engaged in thinking about the future.¹¹

Rather than rely solely on “new ways” of looking at systems and communities, and relying on “scholars” to uncover these ways, we might serve this need more quickly by turning to those who *already* think and act from an understanding of community, who cannot help but live with the knowledge that success of one is the success of all, and that we move ahead together as an earth community or none of us succeeds. Indigenous wisdom already contains this depth of understanding and might be a true source of information and innovation to help manifest the future.

Consider the Hopi tradition of growing corn in desert conditions where no modern corn species could survive. Hopi corn seeds can be planted six to ten inches down in the sand, where moisture from winter months builds up in the silt. The depth of roots of the Hopi corn allows it to find this moisture and flourish in places – and times – commercial corn could never do.¹²

Or the way indigenous tribes of the Amazon basin sequestered carbon by burying animal by-products with charcoal in their fields, creating carbon-rich fertile soil. Scientists are now considering basing new ideas for reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide and increased soil fertility based on this ancient practice.¹³

Winona LaDuke, explains other practical implications of native life in her book, *All Our Relations*:

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11 Golding, Ian, giving a lecture titled “Navigating our Global Future” at the July 2009 TEDGlobal 2009 conference, online: http://www.ted.com/talks/ian_goldin_navigating_our_global_future.html

12 See Gary Nabhan's December 13, 2003 article in YES! Magazine: “Bringing Back Desert Springs,” online: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/whose-water/693>

13 See “Brave Thinkers” from The Atlantic Monthly, November, 2009, online: <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/11/brave-thinkers/7692/4/>

Wherever Indigenous peoples still remain, there is also a corresponding enclave of biodiversity. Trickles of rivers still running in the Northwest are home to the salmon still being sung back by Native people. The last few Florida panthers remain in the presence of traditional Seminoles, hidden away in the great cypress swamps of the Everglades. Some of the largest patches of remaining prairie grasses sway on reservation lands. One half of all reservation lands in the United States is still forested, much of it old-growth. Remnant pristine forest ecosystems, from the northern boreal forests to the Everglades, largely overlap with Native territories.

For a future based on harmony and for a future in which technology will serve the relationships within life, indigenous wisdom is key. It will offer many of the tools we need to build the future and sustain it. And feminine wisdom, predominantly lived through women, and often incorporated into indigenous values, will have an increased role.

THE RETURN OF FEMININE WISDOM

The great 20th century Hindu mystic, Sri Aurobindo, said: “If there is to be a future, it will wear the crown of feminine design,” and more recently at the 2009 Vancouver Peace Summit, the Dalai Lama surprised much of the crowd by declaring: “The world will be saved by the Western woman.” Such declarations reflect the imperative that society recognize and put to use a base of knowledge and experience that has largely been restricted and undervalued, but has a key place as we move into the future.

“Many prophecies in many indigenous traditions say that feminine spirit is resurging,” says Sobonfu Somé, from the Dagara tribe of West Africa. “We’re not going to solve our own problems or the problems of the world the old way. The masculine ways, the ways of the warrior, of violence, don’t work. This is a historic time for women and for the feminine.”¹⁴

Many agree. During the *Great Turning*, a term coined by Joanna Macy, a Buddhist teacher and deep ecologist, and used by others including economist David Korten to describe “the epochal shift from an industrial growth society, dependent on accelerating consumption of resources, to a sustainable or life-sustaining society,”¹⁵ women’s intelligence will come more and more to the fore. In his book, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*, Korten writes:

Perhaps the most significant single contribution to the cultural turning of the past fifty years has been a spreading rejection by women of Empire’s definition of their social roles. The re-ascendance of women may be one of the most significant human social developments of the past five thousand years.¹⁶

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14 Hart’s *The Unknown She*, p. 236

15 See Joanna Macy, online: <http://www.earthlight.org/jmacyessay.html>

16 Korten, David, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*. People-Centered Development Forum, Kumarian Press, Bloomfield, Connecticut, 2006, p. 323

The future holds the promise of greater integration and unity, not just between peoples but between values and between levels of life – the world of matter and the world of spirit, for example, or the worlds of the individual and the worlds of the community, between the inner feeling-based world and outer society. This capacity to build connections between seemingly disparate realities is one aspect of feminine power.

“The feminine” encompasses a breadth of intelligence, power, and experience that comes naturally to women and is also an essential – but often hidden or under-developed – aspect of men. Historically, the valuing of feminine qualities and attributes has been relegated to a very small corner of Western (and global) civilization: family concerns in the home, some service industries like nursing or the teaching and care of young children (or the elderly), or in the artist’s studio. But women’s instinctual intelligence, which is highly connected to the world of creation and to values and experiences related to the heart, and to relationship, has a critical role to play in the evolution of the world.

The practical implications of women’s natural sense of connection is played out today in micro-lending programs in developing areas that count on women using loans more effectively and more in service to the community than men. Muhammad Yunus, founder of Grameen Bank and winner of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize, discovered that when women are given funding their investments often bring bigger yields. In 2005, 96% of Grameen’s borrowers were women.

This same trend has been examined in the 2009 book *Half the Sky* by journalists Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, in which the authors explain:

Some of the most wretched suffering is caused not just by low incomes, but also by unwise spending – by men. It is not uncommon to stumble across a mother mourning a child who has just died of malaria for want of a \$5 mosquito bed net and then find the child’s father at a bar, where he spends \$5 each week.

Women’s instinctual responsiveness to present and even future needs makes them excellent candidates for loans that will bring lasting sustenance to family and community. It is also a missing piece in a world that has focused so much attention on the individual. The feminine in men and women both is a wisdom that naturally highlights connection and harmony, not just between individual people but within life itself.

Like the process of giving birth, feminine power often involves and unites the most base and physical aspects of life with the most sacred and mysterious. Ask a mother what being pregnant and giving birth is like, and you will hear how something that is so natural and physical is at the same time deeply spiritual and life-altering. This is why most fertility deities throughout the ages – from Inanna in Sumer to Demeter in Greece – are goddesses – not gods.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the highest form of wisdom is feminine – she is *Prajnaparamita*, the wisdom of emptiness, and when she is at work she reveals the illusions of duality and recognizes the

underlying emptiness of life. And yet, this wisdom of emptiness is also the mother of all Buddhas, the source of compassionate action in the world, and her mantra ends with a life-affirming call to “Rejoice!”

The Christian example of the Virgin Mary reflects the capacity of the feminine to receive creative seed directly from the Divine Source and birth new life in its highest form. And in the New Testament story of Mary and Martha we are told that devotion and longing are “the better part” compared to busy work and busy preparations.

Being is the nature of the feminine, not doing. In the future, humanity’s emphasis on productivity, industry, and achievement will be tempered and balanced with attitudes and behaviors – like reverence, awe, connection, receptivity, listening – that help us relate directly to life as it is – sacred and complete – and not see life solely through the lens of what we want and what we want to make of it.

INTEGRATION - AGAIN

In our language of previous sections, feminine and indigenous wisdom tends toward integration. Patriarchal cultures based on monotheistic religious traditions emphasizing a transcendent deity, a God above, and a heaven ahead of us, pull our awareness of and our longing for the divine onto the vertical axis alone, and compel a service that does not need to whole-heartedly engage with the horizontal dimension of life. But indigenous traditions, many of which have a strong base in feminine power, do not create this separation, and the medicine, economies, farming, politics, and ethics born from such wisdom similarly cannot be dissociated from earth-bound life.

Indigenous and feminine wisdom encourage and create an integration of the vertical and horizontal axes so that no part of life is sacrificed or forgotten in order to serve the other. Women do this through love and through sacrifice, and through naturally bringing attention back to family and to the ground of life itself. Indigenous cultures with earth-based wisdom similarly remain focused on the juncture where transcendent energies – imagination, love, peace – actually influence and empower daily activity.

In many ways this is a simple and focused wisdom willing to see and work with what is in front of us, and gives rise to multifaceted practical and spiritual ramifications. It is a harmonious way of living that keeps our feet on the ground while our souls and imaginations expand.

The idea of living in a truly integrated way – both in terms of how we experience ourselves and how we express integration through our cultural patterns and mores – might seem idealistic. But, as Don Alverto Taxo reminded us, the future always includes possibilities we could hardly imagine in the past. “Right now we view the idea of an ‘era of harmony’ as something utopian. But many things that now form part of our everyday life seemed utopian before. Now they are everyday things.”

All Aspects of Society

What are the everyday things of the future? What will be the more evident, outward signs of our increased integration, connections, respect, and reverence? From ecology to the economy and from politics to human nature, the future is already emerging. Starting perhaps with the growing understanding that no one single field or area of global society will be seen or experienced as entirely separate from another. More and more our world policy-makers are realizing this. Solutions to one challenge will create solutions – or problems – for other sectors. Richard Heinberg, author of *Peak Everything* and *Searching for a Miracle*, explains this vision of interdependence in terms of energy policy:

As society adopts alternative energy sources, it will at the same time adopt new attitudes toward consumption, mobility, and population. One way or another, the transition away from fossil fuels will mark a turning point in history as momentous as the Agricultural Revolution or the Industrial Revolution.¹⁷

And Heinberg is only one voice of many calling attention toward the interrelated nature of all global issues. But perhaps more interesting is the emerging understanding that these challenges will be addressed through a new reliance on cooperation – nations with nations, individuals with individuals. As U.S. president Barak Obama said in his 2009 Cairo speech to the Muslim world:

Given our interdependence, any world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another will inevitably fail. So whatever we think of the past, we must not be prisoners of it. Our problems must be dealt with through partnership; our progress must be shared.

And Japan's former prime minister, Yukio Hatoyama, elected in 2009, explains the importance of a traditional term he uses in a modern context, *Yuai*, or fraternal diplomacy:

Yuai diplomacy is by no means an insubstantial thing. It is how countries with different value systems can achieve the position of recognizing the existence of each other in this world.

I want to build a society in which every person can discover their place with ties (to society), in which everyone feels that they are useful, and in which everyone feels happy. In a word, I want to create a world in which people can think that another person's happiness is their happiness.¹⁸

Is Hatoyama's vision of the future different from that of Oglala Sioux Chief Crazy Horse?

I see a time of Seven Generations when all the colors of mankind will gather under the Sacred Tree

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17 Searching for a Miracle, pg. 76

18 See Ampontan's May 29, 2009 blog post, "Hatoyama Yukio, Yuai, and the Fraternal Revolution," online: <http://ampontan.wordpress.com/2009/05/29/hatoyama-yukio-yuai-and-the-fraternal-revolution/>

of Life and the whole Earth will become one circle again.

In many sectors of society, it's becoming evident that people working together, rather than leaders offering directives from the top down, is a growing source of power and stability as new ideas are implemented. Conservationist Paul Hawken, while looking at all the business cards he'd been collecting, one day saw in a kind of epiphany the relevance of the fact that over one million organizations were working toward ecological sustainability and social justice:

I crossed my mind that perhaps I was seeing something organic, if not biologic.... After spending years researching this phenomenon, including creating with my colleagues a global database of these organizations, I have come to these conclusions: this is the largest social movement in all of history, no one knows its scope, and how it functions is more mysterious than what meets the eye.

This unnamed movement's big contribution is the absence of one big idea; in its stead it offers thousands of practical and useful ideas. In place of 'isms' are processes, concerns, and compassion. The movement demonstrates a pliable, resonant, and generous side of humanity.¹⁹

All levels of society are likely to reflect this growing importance of and reliance on cooperation. Woody Tasch, president of the NGO Slow Money, even points to the possibility of a new stock exchange to allow individuals to financially support others with similar values:

I could imagine there being a new stock exchange, an entirely new stock exchange – not replacing the NASDAQ or the New York Stock Exchange, but as a complement that would be a place where thousands of slow, small, local, mission-driven companies are traded and invested in by investors who share their values. Some kind of systemic, structural change will emerge in the stock market that will be a place for this growing group of entrepreneurs and investors to work together.²⁰

Working together is a way to access the unusual synergetic creativity that comes only when we depend on others and acknowledge that we can't do everything on our own. When we cooperate, we access unbounded potential that is latent in the infinite relationships within life. It is a mark of our time to discover this creative magic that comes through collaboration and through the humility of acknowledging others' contributions.

PEOPLE ARE GOOD

Maybe we'll cooperate more with each other because we realize people are not as disagreeable as we thought. Psychologist Dacher Keltner, researcher at UC Berkeley and director of the "Greater Good Science Center," thinks so. Tired of working in a field of study that emphasizes how wired

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19 "To Remake the World" by Paul Hawken, from Orion Magazine, May/June 2007, online: <http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/265/>

20 See Brooke Jarvis's article on Woody Tasch: "Slow Money: Bringing Money Down to Earth" in Yes! Magazine, November 16, 2009

we are for “bad things,” Keltner decided to look for the good in people. And found it.

“We tend to assume human nature is dark,” says Keltner, who cites Hobbes, Locke and Freud as delivering a message about people’s predominant dark side. Post-enlightenment psychological understanding – and political philosophy – has said we need society (and our controlling super-egos) to limit our greed, instinctual needs, and rage and help elevate us beyond our animal nature. And culturally the West has largely integrated the Christian religious doctrine of “original sin” into its collective psyche.

But more and more the news is that we’re not as bad as we thought. Yes, we have parts of our brains and nervous systems that compel us towards the instinctual “fight or flight” reactions. But according to Keltner, we also have more mysterious parasympathetic nervous system responses related to the vagus nerves that bundle at the base of the brain, which contributes to an innate sense of compassion, trust, and altruism, a side of us with just as strong an evolutionary push as the flight or fight response.

In psychological science we know a great deal about the flight or fight dimension of nature – we know about that part of the nervous system – and we really don’t know about these other cooperative reaches of the nervous system.²¹

But we’re learning. One thing we now know is that compassion and cooperation are actually hard-wired into us. And we’re also learning that they’re more quickly activated in situations where we perceive a shared future. Not surprisingly, our growing understanding of human goodness is rising in tandem with our understanding that we’re all in it together, which is being significantly helped along by global media and communications networks.

Robert Wright, journalist and author, links developments in technology and communications with an increased practice and awareness of cooperation and kindness. Why? Because awareness of interdependence fosters the perspective that we are all in it together, which encourages just these evolutionary tendencies described by Keltner.

As Wright explains, we tend to cooperate more when we see ourselves in relationships in which we win or lose *together*. He refers to such relationships as *non-zero sum*, in contrast to zero-sum relationships in which one person’s win equals another’s loss. We are in non-zero-sum relationships with teammates or partners, but we tend to be in zero-sum relationships with opponents (for example: they win, we lose).

It’s natural that love, support, compassion, or other positive feelings arise in relationships in which we feel mutually connected. But what’s interesting is that Wright sees that our world is revealing more and more that we are all teammates, and that there are fewer and fewer real

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21 Berkeley Arts and Letters Series featuring Dacher Keltner’s presentation entitled “Born to Be Good,” online: http://fora.tv/2009/01/21/Dacher_Keltner_Born_to_Be_Good

opponents:

Non-zero sum games have always been part of life. You have them in hunter-gatherer societies. But then through technological evolution, new forms of technology arise that facilitate or encourage the playing of non-zero sum games, involving more people over larger territory.²²

The story of globalization is largely a story of non-zero-sumness. Interdependence is another word for non-zero sum...²³

New technologies, communications, and ways of structuring the information exchange of the world are working together to support the parts of our brains, and our emotions and behaviors that inspire us to cooperate, help, give, and care – or, in Wright’s words, “to acknowledge the humanity of people.” Wright claims that a future of increasing interdependence will reveal the evolutionary truth that it’s in our best interest to think of others.

Despite that self-centered emphasis, Wright is making a clear case for oneness: in other words, in the future it will become more and more clear that what’s good for me is what’s good for you, no matter who you start with.

SMALL, SLOW, LOCAL

It would have taken an oracle of Delphic capabilities to have foreseen that as the whole planet geared up and heated up and sped up in the twentieth century, responding to the triple-threat explosions of population growth, technological innovation, and financial markets, the future would hinge in such significant measure on a very different triple threat: the small, the local, and the slow.²⁴

According to Woody Tasch, from money to food to how quickly we will walk to work, local and slow is where we’re heading. Big corporations and giant conglomerates will become less the norm as people work together at a local level developing community systems and new economies to support face-to-face and heart-to-heart exchanges.

Ordinary people responding to peak oil and climate change are already creating *Transition Towns*, a movement originated with permaculture designer Rob Hopkins in Ireland in 2005 to support local food systems, local currencies, and social systems for challenging times ahead. In the first 2 years of existence, the idea of transition towns grew to include over 100 communities around the world, all working in various ways to support local, slow, and small.

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22 See Robert Wright speak, “On Optimism,” at TED, posted January 2007, online: http://www.ted.com/talks/robert_wright_on_optimism.html

23 See Robert Wright’s “The Evolution of Compassion” at TED, posted October, 2008, online: http://www.ted.com/talks/robert_wright_the_evolution_of_compassion.html

24 Tasch, Woody, *Inquiries into the Nature of Slow Money: Investing as if Food, Farms and Fertility Mattered*. Chelsea Green Publishing, White River Junction, Vermont, 2008, p. 10

In the future, local food and local commerce might be served by local currencies. *Phoenix dollars*, *Berkshares*, *Ithaca Hours*, the *Lewes Pound*, the *Venezuelan cimarrón* – there are alternative currencies throughout the world. By 2009, at least 4,000 complementary currencies were estimated to be in circulation worldwide, compared with fewer than 100 in 1990, says economist Bernard Lietaer:

Money is like an iron ring we've put through our noses. We've forgotten that we designed it, and it's now leading us around. I think it's time to figure out where we want to go – in my opinion toward sustainability and community – and then design a money system that gets us there.

My forecast is that local currencies will be a major tool for social design in the 21st century, if for no other reasons than unemployment. I don't claim that these local currencies will or should replace national currencies; that is why I call them "complementary" currencies. The national, competition-generating currencies will still have a role in the competitive global market.²⁵

Whether we're talking coupons for work hours, *The Freecycle Network*, or other barter-based networks, the future is going local with decentralized currencies. Which again reinforces the power of the individual to connect with other community members in a shared vision of community growth.

AND THE COST IS: FREE

Will we even need money at all? "We are entering an era when free will be seen as the norm, not an anomaly," says Chris Anderson, editor-in-chief of *Wired Magazine* in a 2008 *Wired* article, based on his book, *Free: Why \$0.00 is the Future of Business*:

Free is part of oneness. So is immediate. So is abundant. The free and immediate availability of information and resources is part of how oneness works. In oneness, resources naturally flow where needed. But we can always impede this process, just as our modern world has constructed so many barriers – cognitive and socio-political – to get in the way. But reflections of the power and naturalness of free information exchange are being modeled throughout the world, most notably through our growing appreciation for and reliance on technology like the Internet, which provides us so much direct access to each other.

Anderson articulates this point of view in the same article:

It's now clear that practically everything Web technology touches starts down the path to gratis, at least as far as we consumers are concerned. Storage now joins bandwidth (YouTube: free) and processing power (Google: free) in the race to the bottom. Basic economics tells us that in a competitive market, price falls to the marginal cost. There's never been a more competitive market than the

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"Beyond Greed and Scarcity: An interview with Bernard Lietaer" by Sarah van Gelder, editor of *Yes! Magazine*, online: <http://www.transaction.net/press/interviews/lietaero497.html>

Internet, and every day the marginal cost of digital information comes closer to nothing.

Intellectual copyright norms are also changing to reflect a growing recognition that certain “products” like ideas or art should not cost money. Creative Commons and other alternative licensing tools offer their services for free and help people share their ideas and information without the restrictions and profiteering of many licensing organizations.

As a global society we are wrestling with issues concerning the protection of previously free resources like clean water and air that had been part of our shared commons. And we’re concerned with how to access, control, and distribute other free resources like solar or wind energy. The denial or restrictions of human freedoms throughout the globe are less and less acceptable to our global society. All these areas of concern and inquiry are a mark of our time, in which issues of sharing and shared resources are more relevant than ever.

Jeremy Rifkin describes the relationship between free and connected in the present generation:

Today’s youth are globally connected. They are Skyping in real time with their cohorts and friends on the far corners of the Earth. They are sharing information, knowledge, and mutual aid in cyberspace chat rooms... They have little regard for traditional property rights – especially copyrights, trademarks, and patents – believing information should run free. They are far more concerned with sharing access than protecting ownership. They think of themselves less as autonomous agents – an island to oneself – and more as actors in an ever-shifting set of roles and relationships. Personal wealth, while still important, is not considered an endgame, but only a baseline consideration for enjoying a more immaterial existence, including more meaningful experiences in diverse communities.²⁶

LIVING BUILDINGS

Not only will we humans be working together in more integrative ways, but things in life that we saw as separate and distinct will also learn to work together. Like buildings and the environment. “Living buildings” might sound like an oxymoron now, but in the future things that we thought were just “objects” might very well reveal or take on new life. And buildings are no exception.

According to projections concerning future economic contractions, Richard Heinberg says recessions will have ripple effects in all sectors of life, including architecture:

We will need a revolution in the built environment to minimize the need for heating, cooling, and artificial lighting in all our homes and public buildings.²⁷

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26 “Empathic Civilization: Is it time to replace the American Dream.” February 22, 2010 blog by Jeremy Rifkin in Huffington Post, online: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeremy-rifkin/empathic-civilization-is_b_469546.html

27 See Richard Heinberg’s Museletter #210: “Dilemma and Denial: ASPO 2009” address on-

That revolution is coming, and one of the revolutionaries is a scientist named Rachel Armstrong, who researches metabolic materials that can be used in building construction. Armstrong anticipates:

An observer in the future, marveling at a beautiful structure in the environment, may find it almost impossible to tell whether this structure was created by a natural process or an artificial one.²⁸

Armstrong decries traditional buildings made from inert materials as a “one-way transfer of energy” which “is not sustainable.” In contrast, proto-cell technology can form the basis of building materials that perform various metabolic functions, like absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to strengthen and repair itself. Think about Venice and how its underwater foundations are slowly deteriorating. Here, Armstrong explains, metabolic building materials could help create a limestone reef beneath the city, fortifying the buildings that are vulnerable to deterioration. Sea-life will find its own uses for the undersea materials. “Now we have an architecture that connects the city to the natural world in a very direct and immediate way,” she says.

Moving from inert to living materials for sustainability is already well underway. The International Living Building Institute is an international NGO with a certification program to encourage fully self-sustaining buildings, which produce their own power and clean and reuse all their own water. Certified buildings must be net-zero energy, net-zero water, non-toxic, and provide for habitat restoration.

From living physical structures that integrate fully into their natural environments to social structures that allow people to really live their human nature – the trends are clear. People are reforming and re-imagining the future, just like those buildings, as integrative, whole, and resistant to isolation and alienation.

Crisis and Change

Until now, we’ve mostly highlighted the reaffirming and reassuring signs of oneness as they emerge as a prevalent force in the world through new ways of thinking about ourselves in relationship to each other and the environment. But many of these visions of peace, innovation, and cooperation don’t come without acknowledgement of great practical challenges and human suffering. As Teilhard had pointed out, great change often comes with crisis, and this transition is no exception.

line: <http://heinberg.wordpress.com/>

28 See “Architecture that Repairs Itself.” Rachel Armstrong speaking at TEDGlobal2009, posted October 2009, online: http://www.ted.com/talks/rachel_armstrong_architecture_that_repairs_itself.html

Since the earliest civilizations, myths and visionaries have predicted the onset of the crises we now face from ecological and earth-based changes to the domination of human greed and violence. Before Crazy Horse saw all people gathering together under the Sacred Tree of Life, he saw “a world filled with broken promises, selfishness and separations. A world longing for light again.”

The Tibetan “Golden Age” is preceded by a “Dark Age” of intense materialism, disease, and violence. The time when “no resident will say I’m sick,” according to the Bible, follows the utter destruction of Armageddon. And in Hinduism, the Mahabharata explains that before the *Krita age* returns in which “everyone has religious perfection” and “there is no buying and selling,” we will struggle through the *Kali Yuga*, when “everybody will be in want... and the course of the winds will be confused and agitated, and innumerable meteors will flash through the sky, foreboding evil.”

From the Hopi Prophecy to Pachucuti – the thousand-year cycle of the Andean people – indigenous peoples have envisioned the future and it involves a long road to balance. Don Alverto Taxo explained:

The age of harmony is the continual progression of humanity toward equilibrium, toward a subtlety of life. So, it’s not that problems will cease to exist, it’s more that there will be challenges that push humanity to grow, but not in a way that implies destruction, in a way that seeks harmony.

How does humanity accept the challenges in front of us? Often, we find balance through recognizing and responding to the impacts of imbalance. And these impacts are becoming more clear. It can seem befuddling why more of us are not responding more actively to the crises around us. Jane Goodall, the great primatologist and ecologist spoke at a 2007 TED conference and asked a pointed question we all can ask ourselves as we look to the future and take responsibility for the past:

What are we doing to our planet? The famous scientist Ian Wilson said that if every person on this planet attained the standard of living of the average European, or American, we need three new planets. Today they’re saying four! But we don’t have them. We’ve got one.... The question is, here we are arguably the most intelligent being that’s ever walked the planet earth, with this extraordinary brain capable of the kind of technology that is so well illustrated by these TED conferences, and yet we are destroying the only home we have.

But how do we learn what we need to learn? We can say that the ecological crisis is driving us to discover deeper and more sustaining relationships to the earth. That the economic crisis is compelling us to learn to find new joys in simple things, and to realize that “more, more, more” is not a key to happiness. That the rise in global materialism is making us uneasy with who we have become, and drawing us to reconsider what is truly “valuable” in our lives. Up-close images of violence in our own and other countries brought by never-ending streams of media are evoking enough despair that we are hoping for and working toward new ways to realize peace. In so many arenas we are discovering that restrictions and constrictions of possibilities don’t always mean that we lose...sometimes we actually gain.

Nonetheless, it's up to all of us to use the challenges of the era to reveal, not cover up, the deeper meaning and possibility that's also here.

To do so, we need equal capacity to work with the present and imagine the future. Neither is more pressing than the other. And perhaps the most important work is bringing them together. To allow the darkness to inspire – not swallow – us. To balance our imaginations with this-world realities. To find solid inner commitment while keeping our eye on community needs.

Of course these are not easy tasks. But all over the world individuals are finding ways to accept the challenges and responsibilities facing them. They are capable of moving past the roadblocks that keep many of us inert. They are putting to use a natural and instinctive intelligence that both inspires and guides them as they live their deepest insights in service to life.

They're working with the consciousness of oneness.

Chapter 8 Exercises

1. "In the future, the reality of the whole will be our fundamental framework." Do you agree? How might it happen? By choice? Or by force?
2. Cosmological stories, whether grounded in myth, scientific evidence, or a combination of both, have great power to provide focus to humanity's perennial questions about who we are and what we're doing here. From the Bible's story of Genesis to the Big Bang, what cosmology resonates with you? What is it about stories that make them so powerful?
3. Teilhard de Chardin described the evolution of humans as moving toward increasing complexity and consciousness, culminating ultimately when life becomes fully aware of its divine nature. Do you see evidence of this occurring? Is this a plausible view in your eyes? How might the meaning and purpose of your life change if you locate yourself as part of this evolutionary trajectory? Would you make different choices?
4. Thomas Berry saw humanity's potential for evolving into an entirely new era grounded in care, reverence, and shared intimacy with the earth, but recognized humans as needing to fully participate for this to actually occur. Is this an attractive vision for humanity? If not, why not? If so, what could you do to more fully participate in this transition to a new era?
5. Don Alverto Taxo speaks of an ancient prophecy when "the Eagle and the Condor will fly together," meaning a time when technology will serve indigenous people "so they can preserve and communicate to others this way of life based on harmony." Are we there yet? Is Western science and technology serving to help preserve and spread indigenous wisdom?

What do you see as evidence? What do you see as evidence to the contrary?

6. “If there is to be a future, it will wear the crown of feminine design,” stated Sri Aurobindo. Do you agree? Why or why not? How might the feminine assume primacy in the future? Or could masculine and feminine influence become essentially equal? What would it look like?
7. The nature of the feminine is *being*, not *doing*, and that suggests a fundamental shift in our approach to progress in the future. What is the relationship of being to doing? How might a positive future arise from a place of being, rather than from our more customary starting place of doing?
8. Oglala Sioux Chief Crazy Horse prophesied, “I see a time of Seven Generations when all of the colors of mankind will gather under the Sacred Tree of Life and the whole Earth will become one circle again.” What signs, if any, do you see that inspire you and give you hope? What is your vision of the future? What do you base it on?
9. Many influential philosophers and scientists of the past have assumed human nature is “dark” by nature. Yet modern research and many ancient spiritual traditions believe otherwise. What do you think? Are humans fundamentally good? Why or why not?
10. It is said that we’d need four planet earths to accommodate everyone living at the standard of living of the average American or European. How can humanity meet the challenge? Must it take a crisis for us to change? Or, can we make a more orderly transition to a sustainable and balanced way of being in the world?
11. The next time you feel yourself wanting to quickly take action to try resolving a complex problem, try instead to pause and allow quiet space for the problem to exist without an immediate solution. Listen to your intuition to see if an unexpected solution emerges.

Oneness Now:

More than just seeing holistically

What does it mean to use the consciousness of oneness to identify and resolve problems? To build community? To live? What does it help us see? Does it change how we see?

When we look at issues, or life itself, with the consciousness of oneness, we tend to see without the divisive or fragmented mental or emotional states that often restrict our vision. On a practical level, this means seeing holistically – recognizing the bigger picture, discovering hidden influences and connections. When we engage with the intelligence and powers of oneness, we are challenged to follow its lead as it points us further and deeper than we might ordinarily go, even as we address what’s right in front of us.

But oneness does not just help us see holistically, it helps us *become* holistic. Our understanding of who we are can expand to include more of what might have threatened us in the past. We come to experience fewer people or things as “other” or “separate” from us, and we deepen our experience of interdependence.

Through stories and examples of oneness at work, we can see the role of holistic thinking and how it transforms not just those who engage it, but others as well. And it becomes clear that there is a momentum to oneness – the more you align with it, the greater its effects, and the more you trust it.

A good place to begin is by looking at how well the consciousness of oneness can examine issues and create solutions by seeing through appearances right to what matters most.

The Consciousness of Oneness: Seeing What’s Hidden

Everything in society tells us to distrust others. I think it’s the other way around. We need to profoundly trust in those around us, in their potential and in who they are.

Nelsa Curbelo, *Barrio de Paz*

When we examine any issue with the consciousness of oneness, we assume there are things we have yet to discover. We try to keep our minds open and see past the obvious.

In a recent Orion Magazine article, for example, author and environmental activist Derrick Jensen says most of us are asking the wrong question in terms of the ecological challenges we face. The way we see and discuss the environment “makes it seem as though the environmental catastrophe is the problem,” he says. “But it’s not. It’s a symptom – an effect, not a cause.”

The point is that worldwide ecological collapse is not some external and unpredictable threat – or gun barrel – down which we face. That’s not to say we aren’t staring down the barrel of a gun; it would just be nice if we identified it properly. If “we” means the salmon, the sturgeon, the Columbia River, the migratory songbirds, the amphibians, then the gun is industrial civilization.

Identifying industrial civilization as the real problem in our environmental degradation compels us to honestly face our industrial policies and habits, instead of wasting resources on the band-aid approaches of solving one species or habitat issue after another.

One call to do just this comes from Daniel Goleman, science journalist and author of *Ecological Intelligence*. Goleman thinks we should employ a new form of intelligence to highlight the hidden costs of our consumer choices and motivate wide-scale change in production and consumption.

One tool already in place – but underused according to Goleman – is what industrial engineers call *life cycle analysis* (LCA), “a discipline that blends industrial engineering and chemistry with environmental science and biology.”¹ LCA, also called *cradle to grave analysis* was first developed in the late-nineteen-sixties, and has since been used in many areas, providing a holistic assessment of raw material production, manufacture, distribution, use and disposal including transportation impacts necessary to or caused by a product’s existence. It assesses impacts on many aspects of the environment from global warming to depletion of minerals and fossil fuels, from habitat destruction to a wide range of pollutions. All this data is taken into account, mostly through intricate software programs. Goleman gives some examples:

LCAs tells us that buying food in one store that’s been shipped in bulk leaves a smaller carbon footprint than driving around town to the local bakery, farmer’s market, and dairy. Or that the better wine choice for those living east of Columbus, Ohio, is a French Bordeaux, and for those to the west it’s the Napa Valley. These are simple problems in ecological accounting, which is designed to evaluate any manufactured thing – your iPhone, Cheerios, lip gloss – on its entire range of impacts on the environment, human health, and the people who labored to make it. LCA lays bare the hidden impacts of our stuff from the moment its ingredients are extracted or concocted, through

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¹ See “Finding My Religion” interview on June 26, 2006 by David Ian Miller, online: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/g/a/2006/06/26/findrelig.DTL - ixzzoYkJTFOLh>

*manufacture, transportation, retail, use and disposal.*²

Goleman advocates a system of complete transparency to motivate consumers towards more sustainable choices. He's really calling for a new lens on our lives – an expanded vision. Says Goleman:

*I see industrial ecologists – along with those at the cutting edge of fields like environmental health – as the vanguard of a dawning awareness, one that may well add a crucial missing piece in our collective efforts to protect our planet and its people.*³

Coleman's "dawning awareness" has a lot in common with the consciousness of oneness, which also expands our vision beyond what we can immediately know. But it can be relevant beyond the field of industrial ecology, and useful in orienting us toward other hidden costs – and benefits – of daily habits. As Albert Einstein said: "Everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted;" but we can still recognize it's worth.

For example, life cycle analysis is critical, but can it value what transpires – on a human level – between the farmer and the consumer at the local farmer's market? Or between the cook and the food that comes from a local farm? Or in the mind or heart of someone as she throws a plastic bottle into a recycling container – or a trash can? It can't, but that doesn't mean these things don't matter.

It's not a contest – which way of looking at things is the most effective. What matters is that we look at things with a flexible, multidimensional consciousness that is capable of expanding when needing, focusing in when important, and shifting around from intellect, intuition, and feeling – or all at the same time – depending on what's most relevant at the moment.

We've mentioned Nelsa Curbelo, the 68-year-old former nun who works with young people in Guayaquil, Ecuador, while discussing the power of trust and cooperation. She's also an excellent example of how the consciousness of oneness pinpoints problems, discovers solutions, and changes lives.

NELSA CURBELO AND PEACE TOWN

Guayaquil, with a population of about 6 million, is the most violent city in Ecuador, home to hundreds of gangs and organized groups such "nations," "associations," and "clans," and approximately 60,000 gang youth – many armed.

Which is why Nelsa Curbelo decided to move there.

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2 See Daniel Goleman's blog article entitled "Ecological Intelligence," May 2009, online: <http://www.danielgoleman.info/blog/2009/05/02/ecological-intelligence/>

3 Goleman, Daniel, *Ecological Intelligence*. Broadway Books, New York, 2008, p. 5

My work is to promote peace in the areas that have the most conflict. I work with kids who have become gang members. That's my field of work. But it is beyond work, because it's more than a job, it's a lifelong project. It keeps me busy day and night because it's about building a better world.

How did Curbelo start this lifelong work in Guayaquil? She tried a radical approach: listening.

Before formulating any plan to address the issue of gang violence and disenfranchised kids, before any strategy or program, she walked the streets of Guayaquil – not just for a week or a month, but for two years – talking to the residents, learning what they wanted and seeing what they needed. And she heard them.

She recognized their solidarity and their capacity to work in groups. She saw that they want to belong, and are “in need of deep love and affection.” Curbelo came to understand that the young people of the area were responding with violence to a world that gave them no place or way to live. Curbelo didn't see gangs as the problem. Instead, she recognized young people's instinct to come together in “teams” as a positive response to a “...very unfair and unequal society.”

Some people belong to the society and others are expelled just like when you are expelled from school: you can't go back there. So in the same way these teenagers have been expelled from the society, they are not just marginalized. They are outside of the society. And because they are outside, they get together.

Curbelo saw that joining gangs offered young people a way to belong, a way to live the basic human need to contribute. And gang violence was a way to express power in a world that reinforces powerlessness.

By far the most terrible thing I learned is that assaulting, harming or killing others is a way to say, “I am here.” When you lack the power to give life, it seems the only recourse is the power to take life away.

This key insight into the underlying meaning of violence and its inverse relationship to creative participation provided Curbelo a directive for change: “What needs to be enhanced is the power to build life,” she says. So she founded an NGO called Ser Paz (Being Peace), which offers young people creative ways to “feel present without committing a crime.” Something that society had not provided.

In creating *Ser Paz*, Curbelo worked with all areas of local government and business. She contacted local banks for loans so *Ser Paz* could start businesses that the gang kids could work in. She set up the businesses in neighborhoods renamed “Peace Towns” to encourage community renewal. Businesses were projects that young people would want to join – a pizzeria, a hip hop studio, a print shop.

Her conditions are that everyone arrives on time for work, no drugs or violence are allowed, and each business must be staffed by people from rival gangs so kids can learn to work together across gang boundaries.

Other projects initiated through Ser Paz focus on many aspects of a young person's life, including: technical trainings in fields such as mechanics, computers, and gardening; conflict resolution workshops in gangs, schools, and in the community; teacher trainings so Peace Towns can be created in schools; business development; sports team development; training for circus performing; partnering university journalism students with gang members to write stories about Peace Towns for publication in Ecuador's newspapers; and even a collaboration with the military to develop an alternative to the traditional service requirement for young men. Ser Paz has also created alliances with European universities to offer students who study conflict resolution opportunities to volunteer in Peace Town.

Curbelo's projects have been very effective. At one point, crime in one Peace Town neighborhood included 30 murders a month, but in a few years time the murder rate went down to near zero and robberies decreased by 70 percent. And in a show of devotion to Curbelo and commitment to their Peace Town and each other, rival gangs piled their weapons in the street – rifles, machine guns, grenades, pistols, and knives – and drove over them with a steamroller.

For many policy makers, the reasonable response to gang violence might be tougher jail terms, greater police enforcement, maybe even social programs like drug treatment or access to education. But Curbelo saw something else – she saw the basic human need to contribute, and she answered that need.

When one has moral power, power of conviction, and the power to do good, one doesn't need violence. Then there's the power of humanity working together, the power of teamwork. This power, which is not a power over other people, or an authoritarian power, is actually the power of service. That's the real non-violent power... True power means to serve.

Oneness and Sustainability

Waste is a resource.

– Dorah Lebelo,
GreenHouse Project, Johannesburg, South Africa

The consciousness of oneness is a remarkable tool for identifying and solving problems. But it can do much more. It can remind us how to *live*.

In our fast-paced, forward-looking, achievement-oriented world, many of us keep turning away from what we have in the hope of something better. There's nothing wrong with looking ahead, except that so often it includes ignoring what's already available.

Those aligned with the consciousness of oneness are capable of looking in both directions – towards what's ahead *and* what's here. And often they look forward out of curiosity, interest, and engagement, not out of a sense of lack. They do not disregard the resources available right now.

Which is why the consciousness of oneness is critical as we strive toward sustainability. It reflects back to us our own completeness – that we have enough, that we do not need to indulge, over-spend, or over-consume. And it attunes us to how our actions impact others, the earth, and even our sense of who we are. It does not let us ignore the consequences of how we treat others or life. In fact, it uses that information to inspire and build more sustainable approaches.

When we examine sustainable practices, we see the consciousness of oneness at work reassuring entire communities that resources are at hand, that sharing does not deplete, that trust is both natural and necessary. And we see how what we have now can be the best starting point for the future, because with the power of human attention, sometimes the smallest resource can prove infinitely helpful.

In some communities – like the newly emerging *Transition Towns* – the focus on sustainability is a choice, both a value system and a way to prepare for the future. And in some communities – like living indigenous societies – it is a cultural norm.

In others, like in the small country of Cuba, sustainability was not a choice. Through the collapse of the U.S.S.R. in 1991, Cuba was forced to become a self-sustaining country. It lost half of its petroleum imports and nearly all of its imported fertilizers, pesticides, and medical supplies. In the “special period” of four or five years after the collapse, Cuba had to restructure its entire food, transportation, and medical systems. And ironically, while the average Cuban lost 20-30 pounds during this time, as a whole the country began to thrive. From ecological health and human health to quality of life, Cuba became a living example of sustainability with an emphasis on local community.⁴

In New Dehli, we visited the NGO *Goonj*, which recycles clothing to answer various needs of India's poor, distributing clothes and products like school backpacks and sanitary napkins made from clothing material. What makes *Goonj* an important model is its emphasis on using every bit of what comes to them. Nothing is wasted; even the smallest bit of an old shirt is used in a patchwork schoolbag, a strip of material is woven into a larger rug. Used paper from businesses and copy shops, written or printed on one side, are stapled together into a usable school notebook. “Anything and everything under the sun which is an urban waste can be reutilized,” says Goonj

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4 See “How Cuba Survived Peak Oil,” online: <http://www.powerofcommunity.org/cm/index.php>

founder Anshu Gupta. Gupta extends this message to all of us:

You open your closet, you will at least find 20 clothes which you haven't used for the last 3 years, 2 years, 1 year. You don't need it, but you're holding it.

Key to sustainable initiatives is the understanding that our wants often exceed our needs, and there is much to learn about life, ourselves, and others if we live more closely to what's needed rather than what's wanted. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said of Henry David Thoreau, one of the earliest and most inspiring advocates of sustainable living: "He chose to be rich by making his wants few."

And in Thoreau's own words about his simple, rustic life:

This was an airy, an unplastered cabin, fit to entertain a travelling god, and where a goddess might trail her garments. The winds which passed over my dwelling were such as sweep over the ridges of mountains, bearing the broken strains or celestial parts only, of terrestrial music. The morning wind forever blows, the poem of creation is uninterrupted; but few are the ears that hear it. Olympus is but the outside of the earth everywhere.⁵

In a modern context, we have Japan's former prime minister, Yukio Hatoyama, accentuating values that our commercial world has helped us forget:

Our responsibility as politicians is to refocus our attention on those non-economic values that have been thrown aside by the march of globalism. We must work on policies that regenerate the ties that bring people together, that take greater account of nature and the environment, that rebuild welfare and medical systems, that provide better education and child-rearing support, and that address wealth disparities.⁶

"Non-economic values" are not always easy to locate in a world that places so much value on what can be bought and owned. But around the globe, individuals and initiatives are reminding us of what's more important.

REMEMBERING HOW TO LIVE – THE GREENHOUSE PROJECT AND PEOPLE'S GROCERY

Inner-city Johannesburg is not always a pretty place. Crime and unemployment in some neighborhoods, like Hillbrow, are high, drug use common, and accommodations are overcrowded. But we discovered that in a small part of the neighborhood, people are remembering a different way to

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5 See Wilson Flagg's *The Woods and By-ways of New England*. James R. Osgood and Co., Boston, 1872, p. 392

6 Yukio Hatoyama from an August 2009 New York Times Op Ed piece, online: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/27/opinion/27iht-edhatoyama.html?_r=1

live. And the GreenHouse Project is reminding them. Dorah Lebelo, executive director explains:

What we are doing here at the GreenHouse Project is empowering the people so that they can realize they've got all the knowledge... They have once lived like this, they have once produced their own foods, they have once built their own houses, they have once fetched their own water, they have once dealt with their own waste.

Located in Jouert Park, the GreenHouse Project officially opened in 2002 in partnership with the city. An environmental NGO, the Project uses the principles laid out in Agenda 21, a program of the United Nations related to sustainable development revealed at the Rio Earth summit in 1992. The Project brings simple sustainable practices like organic farming, green building and design, efficient and renewable energy and recycling into the lives of residents of Johannesburg with the aim of making it a “green” city.

Every aspect of the GreenHouse Project has an educational component. They don't just recycle; they train people in recycling. They don't just garden; they teach permaculture techniques to both children and adults. The Project staff runs workshops and follows up with visits to community members who implement what they learn. After only a few years in operation, about 100 families in the township had portable barrel gardens. Empowerment is the key directive behind the Project. Says Lebelo:

We're starting from a place of abundance – knowing that we've got what we need and operating from that, saying that we're not going to look at some other people to give us what we need, but actually we've got what we need, and we only work with people to maximize our own potential.

And Lebelo articulates the reason behind the multi-pronged approach of the GreenHouse Project:

If we want to create sustainable communities we're going to have to look at things in a holistic way. You cannot just come and say, “Oh my responsibility is health and I'm just going to look at health and I'm going to give people drugs and help them survive AIDS.” You need to look at what is it that they are eating, what kind of houses are they living in, what kind of energy are they using. If they are using coal and inhaling the smoke at night it's not going to be helpful...

It's not only about one thing, it's about a number of things. And most of them have a local effect, so once you start addressing this, it's going to lead you to that. And once you own that one it's going to lead you to the other. And how do we design interventions and programs that look at the lives of people in a holistic way?

Another answer to those same questions comes from across the globe, in West Oakland, California, where the non-profit community-based People's Grocery is also reminding residents how to live through comprehensive local food and wellness programs.

Brahm Ahmadi and two partners co-founded the multi-faceted People's Grocery in 2003 to work

for food justice, which Ahmadi describes as “the principle that all people regardless of socioeconomic constraints should have access to the best foods available in our society.”

At People’s Grocery, “health” refers to the most basic elements in life, including fresh foods but also connections to the land and within the human community. Programs aim to repair people’s dissociation from the earth – especially urban residents. Ahmadi points out the relationship between class, race and alienation from nature:

For some urban residents who have the ability – be it transportation or some other opportunities – to go out to nature, their relationship is somewhat intact. But for many residents who do not have the income, do not have the transportation, are in conditions of survival in which they don’t have those opportunities to connect with nature, there is a fundamental breakdown.

This is partly historical, particularly for communities of color who come out of histories in which their ancestors were actually forced to work lands. So there is a desire to distance oneself from those negative connotations of what it means to be on land and work on land. And part of what we are trying to do is reframe those relationships with positive attributes... and to try to separate those pains and angers of the past to the present and provide opportunities for young children. For example in West Oakland – for those who would never have an opportunity to go to nature, a little piece of that be it through a garden or even a piece of fruit can be used to try to reconnect that relationship.

People’s Grocery and the GreenHouse Project remind us that we are more powerful than we think. We rediscover this power through connecting to each other, to the land, and to what we have forgotten about life. Sustainable living practices help us shed the skin of social convention and distractions and take us right back to our most basic relationships and to the energy and power hidden there. As Ahmadi says:

I’m very excited about the notion of creating new models for our future world – the opportunity to change the direction of the course of what we have assumed to be given to us. Meaning that these economic constructs or market assumptions or what is celebrated or prioritized in our society can actually be redefined.

WHO ARE WE?

I think we tend to see what’s on the surface, and we don’t realize how interconnected we are. We get into the illusion of, “Oh, it’s me. I earned that job. I made a name for myself. I did it.” We forget how much we need the kindness of other people to survive.

– Nipun Mehta⁷

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7 See Miller’s “Finding My Religion” interview previously cited.

How most of us answer the question, “Who are you?” is most likely quite different today than how we would have answered it a hundred years ago – or even fifty. All you have to do is watch an episode of *Mad Men*, the television drama set in early nineteen-sixties Manhattan to see how attitudes, habits, and fundamental behaviors have radically changed in a very short time. All those differences between races, sexes, jobs, even between adults and children that were so defining in the early sixties are so much less so now.

And they continue to change. More recently, our sense of who we are is becoming more defined by global challenges forcing us to create, sustain, and respond from a sense of global citizenry. We are thinking of ourselves more and more as a world community, less and less as isolated people with solely personal issues and agendas.

One reason our *sense of self* can change so quickly is because we all have access to – whether we use it or not – a very flexible consciousness that can expand to include and identify with new people, ideas, and experiences. Of course, like many things it’s up to us to discern how and when to use it.

Why does a shifting sense of self matter? For one thing, research has found that flexibility in who we think we are can be a firm foundation for conflict resolution and peace. Social psychologists have shown that the more we learn that someone who seemed to be “other” than us actually shares some of our aspirations, qualities, or needs, the more likely we are to cooperate, forge bonds, and even offer assistance. Likewise, too solid a line between “us and them” contributes to persecution, disrespect, and violence.

When people meet from across boundaries and recognize shared experiences, peace and cooperation come more naturally, which is why tolerance training and peace building often focus on shared interests. Like “Dissolving Boundaries,” a university-managed Irish and British government funded program in Ireland that brings school kids together with information technology from both the north and south of Ireland. Kids in the north – mostly Catholic – interacting with kids from the south – mostly Protestant – discover that kids are just kids after all. A report about the project repeated statements from kids from the south, “They are not aliens;” “They are just like us;” “You begin to realize they are all human.”

And in these revelations about identity reside the bonds of peace.

In his book, *Humanity: A Moral History of the 20th Century*, historian Jonathan Glover describes moments during international conflict when a sense of “shared humanity” breaks through the “robot psychology and defensive hardening and distancing” of wartime consciousness. These moments are deeply transformative, and encourage respect and non-violence:

One Vietnam veteran described how the men in his platoon had felt unease on removing belongings from dead Vietnamese. Pictures of parents, girlfriends, wives and children made them think,

“They’re just like us.”⁸

English novelist George Orwell writes of an experience in the Spanish Civil War, during which he was aiming a rifle at a fascist – but did not shoot:

At this moment, a man presumably carrying a message to an officer jumped out of the trench and ran along the top of the parapet in full view. He was half-dressed and was holding up his trousers with both hands as he ran. I refrained from shooting at him... I did not shoot partly because of that detail about the trousers. I had come here to shoot at “Fascists”; but a man who is holding up his trousers isn’t a “Fascist,” he is visibly a fellow-creature, similar to yourself, and you don’t feel like shooting at him.⁹

Glover explains that such “breakthrough” moments are not uncommon between people during the heightened experience of war. But such moments of connection and communion are also not uncommon between species. Vegetarians often describe such moments of insight as life-changing. One woman describes why she stopped eating meat:

When I was ten years old, I went to a farm with my fifth-grade class. I can still remember this beautiful calf with watery brown eyes. He was only a few days old and had long feathery eyelashes and the softest pale-pink nose... I just stood there and looked deep into the calf’s eyes for a long time. Years have gone by and I have never forgotten him. He was so peaceful and gentle and that day I felt like I made a connection with him. Like I saw his soul in his big, glassy marble eyes.¹⁰

And it’s not just children who become transformed by inter-species communion. In his 2009 New York Times Magazine article, *Watching the Whales Watch Us*, Charles Seibert, who studies and writes extensively about animals, considers why whales in Baja, Mexico are seemingly interested in contacting humans after decades of being hunted and killed. He explains that encounters between gray whales and humans are increasingly initiated by the whales themselves, mother whales often guiding their calves to boats in a gesture that few scientists can comprehend. Out on a boat, Seibert experienced:

The baby gray glided up to the boat’s edge, and then the whole of his long, hornbill-shaped head was rising up out of the water directly beside me, a huge, ovoid eye slowly opening to take me in. I’d never felt so beheld in my life.

Inquiring with his accompanying researcher, marine mammal behaviorist Toni Frohoff, about the possible meaning behind these encounters, Seibert wonders if they could be expressions of

8 Glover, Jonathan, *Humanity: A Moral History of the 20th Century*. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1988, pp. 52-53

9 Orwell, George, “Looking Back on the Spanish War, Essay 1,” from *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, online: http://www.george-orwell.org/Looking_Back_On_The_Spanish_War/o.html

10 From Jennifer Cohen’s “It all started with a kiss,” on PETA’s “Why Did You Go Vegetarian?” online: <http://www.peta.org/feat/07cont/index-postessay.html> - Anchor-Courtney-44867

forgiveness – a sort of inter-species reconciliation process after decades of persecution and violence. She responds:

Those are the kinds of things that for the longest time a scientist wouldn't dare consider. But thank goodness we've gone through a kind of cognitive revolution when it comes to studying the intelligence and emotion of other species. In fact, I'd say now that it is my obligation as a scientist not to discount that possibility. We do have compelling evidence of the experience of grief in cetaceans; and of joy, anger, frustration and distress and self-awareness and tool use; and of protecting not just their young but also their companions from humans and other predators. So these are reasons why something like forgiveness is a possibility.

When the barriers between the “us” and “them” in human/animal relationships don't seem as strong as they we usually believe them to be, we can be deeply changed. Recounting the story of a diver who freed a whale from a series of nets off the Farallon Islands near San Francisco, Seibert reports:

For an hour they cut at the lines and rope with curved knives, all the while trying to steer clear of a tail they knew could kill them with one swipe. When the whale was finally freed, the divers said, she swam around them for a time in what appeared to be joyous circles. She then came back and visited with each one of them, nudging them all gently, as if in thanks. The divers said it was the most beautiful experience they ever had. As for the diver who cut free the rope that was entangled in the whale's mouth, her huge eye was following him the entire time, and he said that he will never be the same.

Intra- and inter-species communion is transformative, as is all communion – the meeting of two “separate” entities or identities to become, even for only a moment, one. To say this is the consciousness of oneness at work might seem linguistically redundant. But it's important to understand that the part of us that experiences union or oneness with other beings is always present, and it holds infinite power and intelligence that can re-form our lives, in the same way that those at war who see through the differences between national identity often simply stop fighting.

Changed ideas about who we are change what we do. No question about it. They change our behaviors, our relationships, our lives. If we knew that whales – and other animals – were more like us than we thought – capable of intricate communication, feelings, capable of relationships with us, capable of *forgiveness*, could we continue to use them solely as a resource for our benefit?

The more like “us” we believe something to be, the less likely we are to harm it. Which is why the consciousness of oneness – which reveals these deep bonds and fundamental equality between the various parts of life – is key in creating a more peaceful, and compassionate world.

NIPUN MEHTA: FROM “ME” TO...?

Recently in the West, much has been communicated about the idea of changing from a “me” based mentality and society to a “we” based one. And more and more we’re hearing about how this works on an individual level – from research that links meditation and “loving-kindness” practice with brain changes that make us feel more connected and more empathic, to stories like those above about how a moment of seeing or experiencing similarities and likeness can transform us.

A 2010 UC Berkeley study even confirmed that when using language like “we” and “ours,” married couples are better able to resolve conflicts and show less psychological stress than those whose language emphasizes “separateness.”¹¹

But how do we live this understanding of the power of “ours” and “we” in a society that often encourages competition and self-interest? One example comes through Nipun Mehta who was a computer science major at UC Berkeley when he started a career in software at Sun Microsystems. After a short time, put off by the greed of the dot-com world, Mehta organized a variety of volunteering efforts with some co-workers both within and outside his workplace. He wanted a way to channel the creative intelligence he saw all around him away from self-interest into a collective power. Inspired by the acts of volunteering, he and some friends created CharityFocus, an entirely volunteer-run service organization that initially helped non-profits with a variety of IT-related services.

At 24, trusting that a life of service was not only preferable to a normal career, but viable in our modern world, Mehta quit his software job to become a full-time volunteer. CharityFocus is currently run by almost 9,000 volunteers and offers a variety of services geared toward helping those in need and inspiring others to do the same, and maybe more importantly it’s a model of a new kind of business.

A non-profit, CharityFocus does no fundraising. Any and all expenses it has are provided through gifts. All the resources at their disposal are put toward helping others. Mehta doesn’t receive a paycheck – he and his wife live entirely dependent upon the generosity of others.

It might not seem easy living this way in our modern world, but the boundaries constructed to keep us from taking this step are mostly fear-based, and not reality-based, explains Mehta. “We’re afraid that if we give we’ll have less,” he says, and he points out that this fear is part of a cycle of consumerism that continually reinforces an unnecessary insecurity:

Our culture has become very commercial. And when it becomes commercial, it becomes very self-centered. It’s telling you constantly you are incomplete. And to be complete – you need this. You need

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11 See “Couples Who Say “We” Have a Better Shot at Resolving Conflicts” from January 28, 2010 article by Yasmin Anwar on InSciences, online: http://insciences.org/article.php?article_id=8244

that. You need this product; you need that product. And when we start to get all this stuff, we say, "Oh this is not enough, we need to buy more, I need to have more; I have to acquire more."

That's actually the exact opposite.... The reason why you feel empty is because you don't give enough. It's not because you don't have enough.... It is when you give that you are fulfilled.

Mehta leverages some very basic realities of oneness into business principles that have proven, over time, to be very effective. What are these simple truths? That life is abundant, that everyone has something valuable to offer, that service to others is a great power and responsibility. CharityFocus puts thousands of volunteers to work, daily, all the while strengthening the lived experience of service. In a 2008 Wall Street Journal interview, he says:

For the last six years, I haven't had a formal income, but I'm embedded in a community that (supports) the offerings I provide. It seems like a bit of a novelty, but indigenous cultures and monastic traditions across the world have long been rooted in this gift-economy paradigm.

UNCONDITIONALITY

One of the principles of CharityFocus is to not ask for anything in return for its services. This unconditionality frees individuals to use their work as expressions of who they are, not as a means towards an end.

When you start looking at life in that way, you don't measure – you're not thinking, "Oh, is this going to make me look good! Oh, is this going to get me in the papers! Oh, is this going to earn me money! Oh, is this going to save the world!"

No, none of that. This is an expression of my joy. This is who I am. I realize that you are my brother. I realize you are my sister. I realize that I depend on the shade of this tree. I realize that I need these animals to survive, this diverse earth to be what it is. I realize all that. I am a strand in that collective quilt that is humanity. That is life. You express your joy out of your gratitude for being alive. That's it! There is no measurement, there is no reward. The process – the act itself – is the reward.

Mehta echoes the research of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Abraham Maslow that we discussed earlier, both of whom describe states of flow or peak experiences as intrinsically self-rewarding.

The practice of not asking for anything in return also means that we have no preconceptions about what is valuable. We don't seek out what we *think* we need, but rather learn to value what is given. Mehta continues:

When you don't ask, you're humbled; your survival plan relies on the ripple effect. You count on everybody. You have to count on everybody because you don't know who is a gateway to what. We

found some of our most radical ideas came from the most unexpected places. And that's because we assume value. No matter who they are, no matter what kinds of clothes they're wearing, what they bring to the table, no matter how radical it is, we assume value.

THE POWER OF KINDNESS

Mehta might seem like a brave young man, willing to take great risks for his “experiment in giving.” But he would say we make a mistake turning him into something special or unique. The freedom, power, and joy he feels in his work are available to all of us willing to look – and act – beyond the constrictions and delusions of extreme self-interest.

One way for the rest of us to come to know these truths about who we are and what we can offer to the world is to start with very small acts. Mehta's initial risk was minimal – he still had a well-paying software job when he founded CharityFocus. But the momentum from those early years was enough to encourage him towards a greater commitment.

Mehta tells a story about the momentum of service based on an evening walk with friends in India, during which they came across a group of elderly women who were sweeping the streets. They offered to give the sweepers a break and take over the sweeping for a short while. After some resistance, the women agreed.

As soon as we started doing that, all the traffic stopped. People started looking – “Wait! Wait! What are you doing? Why are you doing this? What group are you with?”

“Oh, we're just a bunch of friends who wanted to do it because it felt like the right thing to do! And we had a half hour so why not give them a little half hour break?”

And you would be surprised. It was just incredible. Everybody said, “Hey, can we do this, can we try this?” And we said, “Sure, don't you see this every day? Here, try it!”

People started to warm up to it, and your traditional stereotypes – these are just street cleaners – all of a sudden they're human beings. All of a sudden they're your grandmas in that moment. And that's a beautiful thing.

That shift can really happen at any time and any place. We just need to be willing to look at a situation and look at circumstances, and to look at people as if you are connected to them. Not even “as if.” Maybe initially you look at it “as if” you're connected but ultimately you start to realize you actually are connected. When that woman smiles at me, I feel happy! I am connected.

In another story, he describes how his brother had to switch lanes suddenly while approaching a tollbooth, and in doing so angered the driver behind him. Instead of becoming angry himself, Mehta's brother paid the driver's toll, leaving the toll collector one of CharityFocus's “smile cards”

which indicates that an act of kindness has been offered and “tags” the individual to *pay it forward*. Mehta describes the power of such an act:

That transformation, in that moment, when that person with anger is confronted with generosity, with goodness in spirit, that moment is the seed of a revolution. That's what it takes to create revolutions. We think of revolutions like these mega concepts that you hear about in history books – but it always comes down to the small. It always comes down to that one tollbooth where you were tagged with an act of kindness.

Through acts of generosity or service, we change who we think we are. We realize that we do not have to restrict our energy and identity around a controlled and deficient “me”; we can expand into a fluid, collective experience in which every aspect of life has value; and we discover power that seems only present when we look – and live – beyond self-interest alone.

And just as important, we can be free and *still* eat daily meals and sleep with a roof over our heads.

Nipun and his wife went on a walking pilgrimage across India to increase their trust in the inter-connection of life. With only one dollar a day, they depended almost entirely on the kindness of others to survive.

In a way, I don't feel like the pilgrimage has ended. A pilgrimage is a kind of conscious intention to go from self-centeredness to selflessness, to move from fear to love, from arrogance to humility. I think that process had started for us before the walk in India, although the walk helped us to deepen that practice. And I think the practice continues.¹²

YOUR TURN

The consciousness of oneness has great potential to change who we think we are and how we live both as individuals and as a global society. From practical and inspiring solutions to social issues and infrastructure – and inspiration – for more sustainable living, to the re-discovery of human experiences like trust, generosity and joy, the consciousness of oneness is a powerful intelligence with a great deal to offer.

And it's been offering us alternatives for centuries – guiding philosophers, scientists, and people from all walks of life into a growing awareness of our interdependence, empowering individuals toward greater transformation and fulfillment of our collective needs.

More individuals are accepting these alternatives, sometimes out of necessity and sometimes because they just feel right. We hope that by looking closely at how people are creating new relationships and new social structures *right now*, you'll see that we're not as fixed in our patterns

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¹² See Miller's "Finding My Religion" interview previously cited, page 3, online: http://articles.sfgate.com/2006-06-26/news/17297206_1_pilgrimage-kindness-living/3

of exploitation or alienation as we might fear, that there are as many ways out of those patterns as there are people, and that small steps go a long way toward great change.

Not all of us will work with inner city youth, and not all of us will be inspired by smile cards. But *by its nature*, the consciousness of oneness offers everyone a way to participate, and make a difference.

As the tide turns and more and more individuals accept in their own lives, and demand in our shared world, that principles of oneness become more the norm, we all have a part to play. Not just by saying “Yes” to this shift in tide, but by being courageous enough to flow with it despite resistance – inner and outer.

If we are going to move into a new way of living together on a shared planet, it’s going to demand our attention and our commitment, and our growing awareness of just what it means to serve.

Chapter 9 Exercises

1. Our global environmental problems are a symptom of a larger problem, says Derrick Jensen. Do you agree? Why or why not? If so, what do you think is the underlying root cause? Could there be more than one? How far “upstream” can you trace the source?
2. What do you think Einstein meant when he quipped, “Everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted”? Can you think of some examples in your life?
3. Nelsa Curbelo learned from her work with Ecuadorian gangs “that assaulting, harming or killing others is a way to say, ‘I am here.’” Why do you think resorting to violence can make a powerless person feel they exist? Can you identify a time in your life when destroying something was the result of frustrated creative energy?
4. Whether it is from structured programs like Ireland’s Dissolving Boundaries, or spontaneous moments such as a soldier suddenly recognizing the enemy as just like himself, our conditioned sense of self can expand and our hearts can open unexpectedly. Can you identify experiences in your life where you felt a shift to a larger identity or sense of “shared humanity”?
5. The “gift economy” has been central to traditional cultures and monastic traditions for many centuries, and yet it feels so foreign to those of us living in a society where everything is given a monetary valuation. How could you begin participating in a gift economy of your own?

6. CharityFocus created “smile cards” to “pay forward” acts of kindness. Do you think such a thing makes a difference? Where could you practice “paying it forward” in your own life?
7. Nipun Mehta is on a self-described, ongoing pilgrimage in life, moving from “me” to “we.” Does moving from self-centeredness to selflessness sound attractive to you? Why or why not? How might your life change?
8. Have you ever had a “breakthrough moment” of sudden connection that changed how you acted toward another person or animal? As in the case of George Orwell and the wartime enemy he could not shoot, or the whale researchers feeling a deep sense of relatedness. Do you think there is anything we can do to encourage such breakthroughs?
9. South Africa’s GreenHouse Project, India’s Goonj, and Oakland’s People’s Grocery all encourage us to focus on using what is in front of us rather than persistently striving after what don’t have. Identify some of your own possessions that you currently ignore or don’t use but that might be revitalized, reused or repurposed, either for your own use or by others.
10. To help reveal what is otherwise hidden, try implementing a “cradle to grave” life cycle analysis on an item you’ve acquired, tracing its production, use, and disposal. Does this knowledge change your attitudes or feelings about that item?
11. Think of a problem in your community or in the world and try to trace its source as far “upstream” as possible, taking into consideration not just the obvious causes but also the assumptions and worldviews of the people involved. Did you discover anything new or unexpected?

Service:

Shifting the emphasis from getting to giving

Peace, compassion, meaning, and service – these are building blocks of our own individual lives and building blocks for a global society more in tune with who we are and what we need.

These are also attributes of oneness – along with respect, generosity, love, joy, belonging and awe for the beauty and power of nature – creative forces that bind us to life and to each other in a deeply sustaining way.

As we become more conscious of our interdependence and more valuing of the experiences and responsibilities that arise in relationships to others, we empower oneness in our own lives and in the world.

Why is this so important, today?

Because our psyches and sense of wellbeing, the health of the planet, and the social systems that guide and maintain our relationships to each other and to the earth have been degraded by our imbalance toward self-interest and individual success. The losses, the corruption, and the violence caused by extreme self-focus, competition for resources, and a divisive “us versus them” mentality have been so great that they seem almost irreversible. Our alienation and feelings of isolation have become so much a part of our modern culture that we almost take it for granted that to be human means to feel alone in an uncaring world.

But isolation and self-interest are more like distortions than our birthright. A world of competition is a fallback scenario, not humanity living its greatest potential. Our fear of scarce resources is like a smokescreen that keeps us from understanding how to create genuine community. We can choose to live differently.

When we align with oneness we create ways of living supported by a very different worldview. We can afford to do with less, so others can have what they need. Sharing does not need to deplete us, but can strengthen our sense of community and security. Peace is not just an ideal, but a sturdy foundation for dynamic community growth. Consideration of the environment does not restrict

SERVICE

our experience of life, but opens us to streams of reverence, awe, and stewardship that are more lasting and nourishing than materialistic fantasies.

But how do we get there?

Throughout this study guide, we've provided examples of oneness in so many contexts – from war-time realizations that an enemy is more like us than we thought, to heightened awareness brought on by sports events, spiritual practice, or extreme isolation. While these experiences are intense and often deeply transformative, they can be isolated incidents dependent upon unique circumstances.

We're more interested in *living oneness*, in finding ways to align with oneness so its energy and power can influence life continually. If isolated, individual incidents are so powerful, what could happen if more of us could align with this consciousness?

We think a lot could happen. And we've seen glimpses of these possibilities through the work of many of the people we discussed, individuals and programs that put to use the forces of oneness for the sake of change.

They also illustrate a simple and dependable doorway to oneness, available to all of us at all times, not specific to athletes or spiritual seekers, but to all of us. This doorway is service – a change in attention that orients us beyond self-interest alone and helps us contribute to life.

When we follow the shift in tide mentioned in the previous chapter, when we start to wonder what we can offer life, rather than focusing on what we need to get from it, we begin working with the forces that are already working for the whole. We begin *living oneness*.

RESPONDING TO NEEDS AROUND US

By service, we don't mean imposing solutions onto others, or even on ourselves, or following a prescribed ideal of duty. We mean acting from the genuine understanding that life consists of many interconnected members of one community and that meaning and purpose are discoverable through taking responsibility for our place in the whole. This is not a conceptual understanding, but a natural openness to life that engages and motivates us.

Whether it's through a profession or an attitude, at its root, service is simply the lived acknowledgement that life depends on all of the contribution of every member of the community of life and that offering ourselves to life is part of discovering who we are.

As we step into relationships of service, we discover some of the hidden truths of life – including that “not enough” is a myth, that we always can give, that others have something to give to us, and that we can help circulate resources where they are needed much more easily and efficiently than

most of us acknowledge.

Responding to needs around us reflects the power of oneness in many ways: We see oneness in how serving others also brings us closer to what is true in our own hearts, in how contagious and inspiring service is, and in how life seems to open to and support those with a willingness to give of themselves. We see oneness in the ways that service brings us more in tune with our environment and dissolves the boundaries between those served and those serving.

But service cannot be born from any kind of sense of superiority or division. Lily Watson, Aboriginal activist, has been quoted as saying:

If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

Living oneness includes just this understanding – that we are all in it together, that what truly benefits one benefits the whole. And in oneness there is no prescribed way to serve others. Consider Albert Einstein's statement:

My passionate sense of social justice and social responsibility has always contrasted oddly with my pronounced lack of need for direct contact with other human beings and human communities.

We all find our own way to serve. For an extrovert with a special connection to animals or the natural world, one might work in the field of environmental conservation. For an introvert with the same interests, one might study wind-power or solar engineering in an office or laboratory.

Service isn't a special practice; it's the reality of life. We see this simply by looking around. Is there even one part of life – a stream, a plant, a speck of dirt – that exists in isolation and does not contribute something to the world around it? All life serves the needs of others. As human beings we have the unique opportunity to become conscious of this foundational web of interdependence, to discover how and where we fit in, and to honor our place in the whole as well as the place of others. And we have the opportunity to integrate this understanding into our world structures, so we don't limit "service" to a field of non-profit organizations, weekend volunteers, or religious charity groups.

But honoring relationships of service includes a willingness to move beyond many of the beliefs and even myths that we've been holding on to for a long time, beliefs that have become more entrenched in the modern world, and that continue to emphasize the need for self-preservation, self-empowerment, and even self-realization over all else.

These beliefs and stories come from a variety of sources – the depths of our own psyches, outer society, parents, priests, and teachers of all kinds. Many are intentional – like marketing tools in a world that thrives on our need to consume more and more, and think of others less and less. Others are personal fears that hold us back from the vulnerabilities of really being present and

available to life.

Regardless of their source, these story lines and assumptions undermine our willingness to serve, and separate us from the wholeness found through making deep connections with life. Living oneness often includes recognizing them and letting them go.

What are they?

“I HAVE TO WORK ON MYSELF FIRST...”

When you see a child trip and fall, do you consider your own skill level before you rush over and help?

Responding to the needs around you doesn't require that we be perfect. In fact, our general sense that we cannot help until we are “more” in one way or another – more calm, more mature, more aware, more stable – often impedes our becoming those things. We learn stability, we grow, we wake up the more engaged and responsive we are.

In our modern world, so influenced by individual focus on our selves, it's natural to assume that we must start with ourselves before we can really make a difference for others. Gandhi's imperative to *Be the change you want to see in the world* and the popular Buddhist emphasis to “change your mind” in order to “change the world” contain a great deal of wisdom about the interdependence between inner experience and outer reality. But this wisdom also goes the other way around. Changing the world changes our minds.

Sometimes a need for change exhibits itself so clearly that we are simply compelled to respond. As a world and as nations we've responded this way during other periods of history, as with the abolition of slavery, the civil rights movement, the unification of Germany, the abandonment of the Cold War, and the conservation movement.

As we struggle to ensure political and economic freedom for those who are oppressed, are we doing something other than supporting the possibility for all of us to be free? As we work for peace in areas of conflict, is that peace inside or outside of us? As we save lives through bringing health care to remote areas, whose “life” are we saving? As we protect the earth's resources, are we protecting something other than ourselves?

As we align with the consciousness of oneness, we become attuned to needs both within us and outside of us, and we respond to each at the right time. If we are too focused inwardly when our time or attention is needed to make a difference outwardly, we miss our opportunity to contribute.

“THE PROBLEMS ARE TOO BIG...”

Stepping into oneness is not the same as solving the world’s problems. We’ve seen how individuals aligned with the powers of cooperation and peace instinctively know how to bring those realities about, and how individuals who do not separate themselves from those they serve develop innovative and enduring programs. Nonetheless, stepping into oneness is just that – stepping into oneness. What happens next is often unpredictable – which is why oneness can be so engaging, exciting, and challenging.

Living oneness includes becoming awake and responsive to the needs around us – big or small. The size of the issues at hand and the depths of our own resources need not be inhibiting factors.

The belief that the world’s problems are too big and we are just one ineffective individual is created and heightened by a mindset of duality. We feel far away from our goals; we feel distant from the tools we need; we feel change is beyond our reach. The more we fear that we cannot realize the changes we want, the greater the abyss grows between us and the world, which in turn separates us further from the parts of ourselves that intuitively know how to respond.

But where do these feelings really come from? Why do we feel that change is beyond our reach? Often we feel this way before we have taken up the challenge at hand.

This way of thinking – that the life we hope for is unreachable – is often undermined as soon as we take a step. Not because that step brings us so near to achieving our goals, but because it brings us *near to the goal*. We hold it, we see it, we taste it, we long for it. We close the distance between our hopes and where we are as we honor and work towards them as real possibilities.

This is not to downplay the sorrows of the world or the overwhelming nature of modern challenges. But the problems of the world will be big whether we work to change them or not. And we will always only be one person.

We all have tremendous capacity to contribute, but few of us really use it. But as environmental activist and eco-feminist Vandana Shiva articulates, when we do turn to these capacities, we start a process that can continue to empower it. In the participation that is part of oneness, the powerlessness of distance and remoteness is greatly diminished. In its place, we can find the seeming magic of cooperation, the joy that comes from acting on our intentions, and the security of strengthening our relationships to others. All of which encourage us to connect, respond, act, and feel in ways we couldn’t when we kept ourselves “separate.”

And of course this participation is the only way to begin manifesting the world we hope for. Change depends on all of us working to make real what we sense is possible.

“I DON’T HAVE ENOUGH TIME OR MONEY...”

There is always a way to contribute – if it’s not time or money, it can be attention or intention. Often, the entryway to service is simply a shift of attention, and a willingness to respond when a need becomes evident.

But many of us – especially in the West – already have more than we really need and can afford to share our resources. Giving time and money or attention does the important work of dismantling our sense of separation and our fear of losing what we have, which builds as we focus on the accumulation of individual wealth.

In many parts of Africa, the philosophy and expression of *ubuntu* – the understanding that we are members of a universal family and all responsible for each – is a way of life. In the West, more individuals are discovering both the joy and necessity of this perspective. In a 2010 book, *The Power of Half*, the Salwens, an American couple from Atlanta, Georgia, were so inspired by their 14-year-old daughter’s natural distaste for social inequity that they sold their large house to live in a smaller one, and donated the extra funds to charity.

“We essentially traded stuff for togetherness and connectedness,” Mr. Salwen told New York Times journalist, Nicholas Kristoff, adding, “I can’t figure out why everybody wouldn’t want that deal.”¹

Trading “stuff” for “connectedness” is oneness at work. We don’t just give, we also discover a different way of living. As we let go of our own wealth, and watch it empower others, we find the meaning that comes only from connection and contribution.

And there is so much we can trade for connection; we don’t need to sell a house. We can give time, attention, and other personal resources. We can trade our self-concern and many of the fears that come with self-focus. We can take these steps individually at any time, and we can encourage public policy to make the same trade-offs. As a world culture we can begin valuing the redistribution of resources for the sake of global health – human and environmental.

In Bogata, Columbia, Enrique Peñalosa, mayor from 1998 – 2001, was nearly impeached for a variety of community projects that created opportunities for those who had little, sometimes diverting resources from those with more. Perhaps the most radical initiative restricted the use of cars and encouraged the use of public transportation. Peñalosa received the “Stockholm Challenge Award” for instituting the city’s first “Car-Free Day,” an annual event that prohibited personal cars while allowing taxis and buses to run.

Unpopular at first, Bogata’s transportation transformation has become a model for community revitalization. Peñalosa was not driven by environmental concerns, but by an economic

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1 See New York Times Op Ed piece, “What could you live without?” by Nicholas Kristof on January 23, 2010, online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/24/opinion/24kristof.html>

philosophy that aims at fostering human happiness. By restricting cars, creating safe ways for people to bike and walk, and building the highest-capacity bus rapid transit system in the world, Bogota has addressed a variety of intersecting issues such as urban violence, economic growth, environmental issues, and citizen happiness. “What are our needs for happiness?” Peñalosa asked, explaining his policies, “We need to walk, just as birds need to fly. We need to be around other people. We need beauty. We need contact with nature. And, most of all, we need not to be excluded. We need to feel some sort of equality.”²

While many balk at the idea of government-imposed restrictions on private choices about resource use, it’s important to recognize that no matter how it happens, sharing resources is a fundamental aspect of community life and has many more benefits – as the Selwans discovered – than the simple redistribution of wealth.

When we offer our money, time, and attention to others, we don’t watch these resources disappear into a void; instead, they strengthen links between the world and us, and support direct experiences of care and connection, making it a lived reality that when we help others, we also help ourselves. Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian poet and Nobel winner wrote of how giving leads us to this other reality:

I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.

IF I CAN’T SEE IT, IT’S NOT THERE... (AND I CAN’T SEE ONENESS)

As hard as it might be to believe, often what we see is determined by where and even how we look. This is one of the principles brought to us through quantum physics, and it’s relevant as we live oneness in our daily lives. When we begin to look beyond our own needs, a much larger and extremely compelling vista opens up. But to notice it requires that we turn our heads, shift our attention, and look.

Stepping into oneness includes opening our eyes to the world around us. This isn’t easy when we are used to staring straight ahead, as though life were a one-way street and we were the only driver that mattered.

Perhaps because we are born, grow up, and die, we think of life as a trajectory taking us from point A to point B. We support this linear point of view as we reference life back to own goals and needs, which creates a deterministic vision: if I do A, I will achieve B. When we consider the needs of life as a whole, our linear perspective becomes balanced with an appreciation for holistic and even

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 2 Reported by Charles Montgomery, in The Happy City blog, online: [http://8-8ocities.org/Articles/The Happy City - enRoute Charles Montgomer.pdf](http://8-8ocities.org/Articles/The%20Happy%20City%20-%20enRoute%20Charles%20Montgomer.pdf)

intuitive cognition, which does not depend on logic or reason to discover or process information. Just as on the Internet, where information can be accessed immediately from a variety of sources, so too with a mind attuned to oneness can we receive and share information without many intermediary steps.

Seeing through the lens of oneness frees us to recognize patterns and often the beauty that reveal themselves through life's wholeness and even its chaos. We can respond to life around us without the concern that we will be diverted from our goals. This freedom is exciting and challenging – like any situation in which you are pushed to pay attention, respond, or work creatively.

Who hasn't had an experience like rushing to leave for work just as a friend calls in a crisis? Or heading to an important meeting and having to stop to allow an elderly person to slowly cross the street? Or being too focused on the meal you're going to cook to be polite to the check-out clerk at the grocery store? Take away the goal-orientation and linearity in these situations and we are much more free to explore, be present, and even give to what's taking place in the moment.

When we relate to life through our awareness of oneness, we become part of a conversation rather than a list of information in a closing argument. This quality of dialogue includes listening and openness, and taking responsibility not just for "our part" but for the entire conversation and where it is heading. How can we be responsible for the world beyond us? Because through the lens of oneness, we start to see that the "beyond" is much closer than we think. Everything we do has an impact, everything we think ripples out through us into the rest of life, and others' experiences ripple deep within us.

Orienting ourselves toward oneness includes accepting the non-linearity of life, seeing that we are part of a world beyond ourselves, and acknowledging that within the sometimes peaceful and sometimes bewildering terrain of not-knowing, we still have something to offer.

Chapter 10 Exercises

1. How is service a doorway to living oneness on a continual basis? What is it that connects service and oneness?
2. Which kinds of service are easy for you? Which are more difficult? What makes the difference?
3. The consciousness of oneness recognizes that helping another is helping oneself, that what benefits one benefits the whole. Can you think of circumstances where this is true? Can you think of instances where this isn't true?

SERVICE

4. The consciousness of oneness recognizes “not enough” as a myth perpetuated by modern society. Do you agree? Why or why not? When we feel we don’t have enough, could this feeling be pointing to something else inside of us we aren’t recognizing?
5. It’s said we always have more to give, but many of us don’t feel that way. Have you had times when you felt even more full after giving everything you could?
6. “Service cannot be born from any kind of superiority or division.” Why is this true? What is the relationship between service and equality?
7. “Is there even one part of life - a stream, a plant, a speck of dirt - that exists in isolation and does not contribute something to the world around it?” Can you think of anything that isn’t contributing? Are there any superfluous things in the world? Or, does everything have a purpose or role, even if unseen or not understood?
8. “I have to work on myself first...” is sometimes used as an excuse for not being of service. What are ways to get past “me” and into “we”?
9. Given the magnitude of today’s issues, it is not unusual to be overwhelmed and feel “the problems are too big...” What are ways to manage feelings of overwhelm or despair?
10. Reflect on the essence of the following emotions/experiences: empathy, gratitude, humility, peace, and joy. How does each of these emotions engage you to be more open with others around you?

Living Oneness:

Synchronizing head, heart, and hands

An attitude of service carries us across the threshold from isolation and self-interest into connection, contribution, and meaning. But even though we catch a glimpse of the essential unity between people and within life and begin to feel the wholeness and stability sustained by this vision, the challenges continue. We are tested to live as we see, and to act according to what we know is true. We become responsible for synchronizing our own head, heart, and hands as we move through life, contributing our growing power of wholeness and cohesion. Without this synchronization, our efforts themselves remain fragmented and less effective than they could be.

It's easy to forget how expressions of oneness change, become empowered, and increase their capacity to influence others and us. The capacities of oneness deepen and broaden the more we live them. But this requires we never allow oneness to remain solely an idea in our own head or an experience within our own heart, nor can we allow it to remain reflected only through the physical reality of interdependence.

In many ways, the synchronization of our head, hearts, and hands is how we guarantee that we do not remain unbalanced along either the vertical or the horizontal axis of oneness. And this balance, this synchronization, has been a missing link historically, as oneness has often been thought of as a deeply personal spiritual or philosophical experience, and as such has been kept separate from worldly life. The more we integrate both dimensions—horizontal and vertical—into a lived experience, the more powerful oneness becomes. And today it's imperative that we become aware of this challenge as never before.

Nature needs us, right now, to remember that the material world is neither separate from us nor something other than sacred, that human intelligence, imagination, and stability are deeply tied to our physical planetary home, that what we can achieve as human beings depends on the nourishment found in a healthy and respectful relationship to the earth.

The violence in our cities, between races and ethnic groups, nations, and even between political parties, is necessitating that we find more successful ways to live together. Threats of global violence through terrorism and nuclear weaponry demand it – if we succumb to the aggression

that comes from feeling threatened by a separate “other,” humanity could be more seriously harmed than it has been already, along with our shared ecosystems.

And our own psychological and physical illnesses continually remind us to seek out basic, balanced relationships to our bodies, through which we can find assurance that life is good and that we have a place in a secure and nourishing world.

Oneness supports simple and powerful responses to these needs. Awareness of our interdependence and the heart-felt experiences that arise from it provide the foundation for and the power behind community, balance, health, and growth. Without oneness, we risk divisiveness, isolation, loneliness, and all the physical implications of those diminished states of our minds and hearts.

Our heads

The mind is an intellectual and visionary organ, allowing us to see, know, understand, translate and communicate about life. A mind aligned with oneness sees holistically, recognizes connections, and notices how parts impact each other, how all parts are needed, and how the wholeness of an object or living being is more than the sum of its parts. It does not depend on rationality, and acknowledges the power of intuition.

This aspect of our mind naturally thinks ahead, considering impacts of current actions onto future generations, using foresight and even imagination to connect dots that might be invisible to those only looking myopically. *Life cycle analysis* and other tools developed to recognize long-range environmental impacts of our actions and consumer choices are great examples of how to use our minds to acknowledge and respect oneness.

Peace workers who train individuals to see that they are not “other” than their enemies also reflect the intelligence of oneness. Such a vision supports cooperation instead of violence and provides a worldview that is more synchronized toward peace than toward opposition.

Any time we think ahead – such as parents saving money for a child’s education, or preparing for old age by eating well – we are recognizing connections through time, and acting accordingly. We know that as unpredictable as the future might be, it is also right here with us. The simple consideration of not saying something that we sense will hurt another person’s feelings recognizes shared sensibilities – we would not want others to hurt us, so why would we hurt them?

A mind attuned to oneness supports community identities – local as well as global – and also knows that what we see as the “outer” world is not entirely “other than” our own thoughts and imagination. In this way, we take responsibility for the world around us. Judgments and concepts that accentuate differences and inhibit communication are untenable; actions based on separation should compel insight and inquiry. The mind of oneness asks, “Is he really that different from me?”

“Is there not more that links us together?” “Where is there common ground?”

And perhaps most importantly, a mind attuned to oneness doesn't see itself as separate or isolated from the physical aspects of life. Mind and matter are not disconnected, but interactive. This recognition supports and motivates care, attention, and transformation of the physical world, and cannot support disregard or exploitation.

THE MIND OF ONENESS

Researchers are learning more and more how specific practices like meditation or prayer strengthen and activate brain areas that in turn increase feelings of connection and our capacity to empathize with others. Yet another example of how brain function is a base for oneness comes from the extraordinary story of Harvard University neuroscientist Jill Bolte Taylor, whose massive stroke one morning closed down one part of her brain and forced her into another – the part that could be conscious of oneness.

In her 2008 book, *My Stroke of Insight*, Dr. Bolte Taylor describes being “enveloped in deep inner peace” and a sense of “being at one with the universe” during her massive stroke. As her left brain functioning slowly shut down entirely, she was forced to experience life primarily from her right brain. It took her many years, but Dr. Bolte Taylor regained her left hemisphere functioning yet never lost the capacity to experience the oneness she located in her right hemisphere.

A trained scientist, Dr. Bolte Taylor has referred to these newly discovered right hemisphere attributes – including intuition, non-linear thinking, and experience of mystery – as “higher cognition” than the rational mindset she'd developed through her education and scientific work.¹

Echoing traditional spiritual understanding, but grounding it in neuroscience, Dr. Bolte Taylor located the ego-center of “I am” in the left hemisphere, along with looping thought patterns that determine our habitual thinking and actions. She located in the right hemisphere the capacity to be watchful and detached, aware of the present moment, and to have an expanded sense of identity that includes connections to all life. She conveyed this literally larger sense of self in a 2008 interview with Oprah Winfrey:

What I gained was this incredible knowingness of deep inner peace, an excitement of realizing that everything was interconnected, and I lost the boundary of my body so I felt that I was enormous, as big as the universe.²

Dr. Bolte Taylor's discovery of oneness was based in the brain and rippled outward through every

1 Taylor, Jill Bolte, *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey*. Viking Press, New York, 2008

2 View the 2008 interview with Oprah Winfrey online: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-5152756549882526815>

aspect of her life – her perceptions, feelings, sense of identity, and ultimately her purpose and meaning, which she came to understand as being an inner call to help humanity know our fundamental connectedness, which she articulated in a 2008 TED conference talk:

I pictured a world filled with beautiful peaceful compassionate loving people who know that they could come to this space any time. And that they could purposely choose to step to the right of their left hemispheres and find this peace. And then I realized what a tremendous gift this experience could be, what a stroke of insight this could be, to how we live our lives. And it motivated me to recover.

Dr. Bolte Taylor's experience was extraordinary. But equally extraordinary is her commitment to recover in order to help others understand that we all have a right hemisphere that we just aren't using enough. Oneness can sometimes remain a deeply personal and private experience, so at odds with modern culture that it seems impossible to reconcile the two.

But as we hope and strive to live oneness more fully, it's important to remember that historically, oneness has been more evident in entire cultures, shaping worldviews and guiding community life. Indigenous cultures, for example, have markedly different worldviews from modern Western culture – much more aligned with oneness. We all do – as Bolte Taylor knows, and indigenous cultures illustrate – have the capacity to adopt and adapt to a vision of life that sees knows and supports integration, harmony, and connection.

THE POWER OF A WORLDVIEW

The view of the world as an integrated whole – threading through spiritual, intellectual, physical realities and through all members of the community of life – has been a living vision in many indigenous cultures. Consider traditional Lakota language and society. The lack of a word for “me” or “I” emphasized the continual direct experience of relationship and connection. Individuals in traditional society were greeted and identified by their relationships: “sister” or “brother” or for those who were not even known yet, “cousin.” Many Native American languages name or identify objects not by their form, which emphasizes distinctiveness and separation, but by their activity. The Algonquin language of the Mi'kmaq, for example, names trees by “the sound the wind makes when it blows through the trees during the autumn about an hour after sunset.”³

Tiokasin Ghosthorse, a Lakota Sioux who produces First Voices Indigenous Radio out of New York City, contrasts a Lakota and a Western view:

In the West, people think they have a soul in a body, and this individuality contributes to thinking a 'me' has a right to own or consume everything around it. But Lakota thought and language does not allow for this view. Instead, we know our bodies are in the soul, surrounded by responsibility.

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3 Alford, Dan Moonhawk from an article, “Manifesting Worldviews in Language” for the California Institute of Integral Studies, online: <http://www.enformy.com/dma-wv.htm>

Living within a field of shared responsibility seems antithetical to individualism, in which we create or discover our own personal responsibilities and live them in our individual lives. But our adherence to individualism – and the worldview of separateness that it supports – does not reflect a permanent human reality. It has not always been dominant and it does not have to be dominant.

In fact, this emphasis on individualism is largely a new phenomenon, according to Mary Evelyn Tucker, author and senior lecturer at Yale University. Dr. Tucker spoke to us about a worldview of individualism and separation born from the enlightenment mentality and supported by monotheistic religious traditions that emphasize a transcendent God.

The view of a natural world separated from the divine is illustrated through the Biblical story of Genesis, in which we are told humanity was expelled from the Garden of Eden, and experienced a fall from God's grace. An emphasis on a separate or transcendent God pulls the sacred away from the natural world and our daily lives. These rifts between humans and the divine and between the divine and nature have, in turn, supported economic systems' use and exploitation of the natural world. Today, says Tucker, we're left with a "hyper-modality of hyper-individualism without a sense of hyper-responsibility."

But it doesn't have to be this way. Dr. Tucker suggests we can shift our worldview of humanity alone in a world devoid of the sacred, to one in which life is alive with sacredness. In particular, we can value indigenous wisdom and at the same time re-discover the emphasis within monotheistic traditions on God's immanence:

Religious stories and cosmologies in particular have helped to really ground humans in this immense universe, overcome our alienation, overcome our sense of isolation even, and give us this tremendous sensibility of the aliveness of the world around us and how precious and sacred and to be cherished is this aliveness... It's immensely present in these different world religions starting of course with indigenous traditions who knew this in very fundamental ways.

Regaining this sense sacred wholeness includes recognizing how language, thought, and stories influence our world all the time. Many of the stories we tell ourselves about life are unconscious. Becoming more conscious about what we see in the world and how we translate and communicate it is key to developing a mind awake to and respectful of oneness. Not only can we then step into a more responsible relationship with the world in which we live, but we can accept our power to create and influence forms and expressions of our individual and collective life.

For centuries, much of humanity has experienced itself as separate from the Garden of Eden, fallen from God – so much so that the idea of "getting back to the garden" has become a generally respected endeavor. Many of us want to "get back to the garden."

But what if we ask ourselves about the time-line for that particular story. What if the story we tell ourselves of having to get back somewhere is no longer relevant? What if "getting back to" just

means looking in a fresh way at where we already are?

It's up to us to discover religious passages, texts, and imperatives about the immanence of the divine. It's up to us to re-discover "the garden." It's up to us to ask, what would it be like to see the world as sacred and whole? How would this vision change our behaviors? Is this vision already present in these very questions?

Today, as we stand with most of our weight in a world of separation, it helps to pull back and assess, realistically, where our actions find their ground.

For example, a worldview of oneness cannot separate out one part from another in a permanent way. Thus, natural resources have economic value, psychological and spiritual value to human beings, value to the community, and an inherent – and possibly unfathomable – value. And of course value to generations to come.

If we relate to resources with a worldview of oneness, we naturally take these facets into account, which might make decision-making complex, but at the same time calls on us to be thoughtful, creative, and responsible to more than just our pressing interests.

Contrast this with a worldview that sees parts of the natural world as *separable* into parts. Using a resource without acknowledging its multiple dimensions supports its use for one thing only, which then supports us seeing it as having only one purpose, which supports its objectification and distance from us. Hence oil becomes just how we drive cars and heat our homes. Food becomes just how we satisfy our hunger. Other people become means to an end.

Consider the English language word "extraction," which we've become used to hearing in reference particularly to how we obtain natural resources. Oil and gas extraction is how we take these resources out of the earth. But what if we understood that the idea of extraction – of separating or removing one thing from another permanently – is an illusion? Then we become less interested in extracting out than in working with, joining in, transforming, and discovering. Which does not mean we cannot use oil and gas, but means we will not perceive and use it as though it is a means to one end.

Exploitation and objectification are born from and perpetuate a worldview of separation and individualism. Whereas when we recognize one thing for its many attributes and uses, we learn to balance, honor and respect the multidimensional nature not just of the item, but of life itself, and of course our own selves.

Our hands

We all have the potential to become aware that oneness is already very much who and what we

are; it's part of our hard-wiring – as Dr. Bolte Taylor discovered, and as indigenous cultures remind us.

One way to strengthen and ground this mind-based awareness is by honoring it through our behaviors. We find that it feels good and right to act according to what we see and know, and we feel out of sync when we fail to do so.

When our actions are in accord with our insights and our beliefs, we step into a feedback loop that continues to strengthen our inner understanding. For example the more we learn about the earth's finite resources, the less we want to consume, and the more we try to use less and re-use what we have. As these shifts in behavior become more the status quo, the less likely we are to conceptually identify things in our life as “garbage.”

“Garbage” in an interdependent system never finds a hiding place – it only finds a new use. In time we might even lose the word and idea of “garbage” and in its place acknowledge a lack of restraint in our patterns of consumption, or a lack of imagination or creativity in how we re-use materials.

The physical aspects of our lives are always calling us to oneness. Perhaps nowhere is oneness so evident as through the interdependence of physical life, and perhaps nowhere is the invitation into this physical interdependence so clear as through food.

FOOD

Food provides one of the most direct doorways into oneness, and the most omnipresent means for living oneness. Our awareness of what we eat and how we come to acquire our food brings us right into the physical realm, where the interdependent web of life is undeniable. Our global culture is realizing more and more not just how the diversity of ecological elements works together in one earth community, but how humans are part of that community. The health of the earth is inexorably intertwined with our own physical, psychological and even spiritual wellbeing. If we poison our food, we poison ourselves. As we eat healthy food, we change our physical bodies as well as our mental and psychological states.

When we approach food with an awareness of oneness, we experience being part of a living system that connects nature, humanity, and all life. Food – like other basic human needs – gives us a home on this earth and a way to feel nourished and connected. In our modern world we know that without food we die, but do we know how food can help us really live?

In a worldview of separation, we can use food just like we use other natural resources. We take it from nature, and commodify it as an abstract component of our economic system. When we treat food this way, we create items to eat, but they do not remind us of our relationship with nature, or offer a way to be fed by life's essential nourishment. The co-modification of food emphasizes food as objects of our desire, rather than an entryway into a supportive life system.

A Twinkie does not resemble food in its natural state, nor does a bag of Cheetos. These are contrived “things,” not nourishing food, and as we ingest them we distance ourselves from our own bodies, which do not benefit from such “things.” But the more we force the body to try, the more we transform it into a thing itself.

We eat “junk food” all the time – but if we understood that we are what we eat, would we want to consume, and become, “junk?”

Carlo Petrini, founder of Slow Food, an international non-profit supporting healthy local food production and enjoyment, illustrates the mind-boggling absurdity of living in a culture that supports the production and consumption of low quality food:

Publicity has convinced us to eat worse food so we can consume other things. So now we're at this absurd figure where underwear costs more than food...

If I eat prosciutto, or cheese, or good bread, after a few seconds it's Carlo Petrini. But you know that pair of underwear from Armani? It's always outside of Carlo Petrini. Let's give ourselves more value than our clothes!⁴

Valuing food for what it is – a foundation for life – compels us to re-assess how food becomes co-modified within our global and local economic system, and gives rise to such basic questions as: Why does a Twinkie cost less than a bag of carrots? What are the impacts of soda machines in elementary schools? Why is agriculture one of the highest contributors to global CO₂ emissions? Why do we allow U.S. agriculture to use nearly half – and the world to use nearly 70% – of our fresh water when we understand water's scarcity—what are we growing with that precious water (since we know growing any food requires water)? How are we growing it? How does modern food production affect future generations?

Individuals like Brahm Ahmadi, the young man who founded People's Grocery as a means for supporting food justice, naturally use the lens of connection to examine and then change our food systems, acknowledging the impacts of how in developed countries the poorest residents consume the unhealthiest foods. Through this lens, we all can see how food has become a tool to make a few people wealthy. This trend is encroaching on undeveloped areas as well, in rural India and parts of Africa, such as the Gamo Highlands.

By choosing – and growing – healthy food from healthy systems we live oneness daily. We see this in how healthy school lunch programs, and especially those that include growing food, like Alice Water's “edible schoolyard” in Berkeley, California, ripple through every aspect of a child's life including health, academic performance and sense of community. And in how just a simple

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4 See Carlo Petrini, “An Evening With Carol Petrini”, May 8, 2007, online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECzTRG7tjVo>

change in diet to include more organic foods changes our mood, work performance, and general sense of wellbeing.

Through food, the earth takes care of us, sustains us, and gives us pleasure. But we need to approach the business of food in a way that acknowledges food for what it really is – a life-support system through which we are given connection, belonging, and real nourishment.

CONSUMER CHOICE

Through our consumer choices we dissolve boundaries by expressing our private views in the public domain and bringing other's products into our private sphere. Every dime we spend reflects our inner attitudes and hopes, and supports and recreates those values in the world around us. Living oneness includes becoming more conscious of and taking more responsibility for this inter-relationship. As we become more aware of how our spending habits affect others, we are naturally compelled to "put our money where our mouth is" and use it as an expression of our deepest values and concerns.

Every time we buy a food item with a fair-trade label, we are communicating to the world our support for social justice, environmental protection, and our own individual health. When we spend more money on organic cotton shirts we tell the world that we are willing to pay to keep us all healthy. When we buy heirloom seeds to grow our own food, we remind ourselves and our community that food is not abstract but an intimate part of our lives.

At the other end of the spectrum, when we buy sodas for example, like Pepsi, Coke, or Sprite, we communicate to these companies and to the world that we approve of their use of plastic and aluminum, their use of sugar and caffeine, that perhaps less directly that we support, or choose to ignore, addictions and even childhood obesity, which is in large part caused by children drinking too much soda. When we buy goods made in a sweatshop, we support child labor. When we buy goods made by exploiting natural resources, we support ideas about human dominance over the earth.

Environmental activist and eco-feminist Vandana Shiva tells a story of a childhood request to her mother that brought on a lesson in the simplicity and power of our consumer decisions:

My mother always wore khadi (Indian homespun cotton fabric). When we wanted nylon she said: I'll buy you nylon. But you know, if you buy nylon, some industrialist will get another Mercedes, and if you buy khadi, some woman's chulha (kitchen fire) will get lit. You decide.⁵

The decisions are ours. And the more we know about where our purchases come from and how they are made, the greater our capacity to use our economic system as a tool within a more inter-
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5 See "Nature - Earth Crusader", March, 2002 interview by A. Rishi on LifePositive.com, online: <http://www.lifepositive.com/body/nature/environmental.asp>

twined network of moral, ecological and even spiritual realities. And we can ask that our world's manufacturing companies disclose this information to consumers. Some companies are doing it – like Patagonia, an American manufacturer of outdoor clothing and gear that provides such information in its “footprint chronicles” web feature. And economic tools like *life cycle analysis* have a key role in consumer education, helping us become aware of the impacts of our choices.

In many ways, our recent global economic crisis has been a wake-up call, asking that we accept increased responsibility for where we invest both our money and our hopes. Woody Tasch, who founded the non-profit Slow Money to encourage investment in endeavors that support both human and ecological resources, met with us in Northern California and pointed out how current systems are at odds with each other. “What becomes economic growth is not synonymous with human well-being,” he told us. “In fact much of the activity we measure in terms of dollar flows is actually destructive.”

There are alternatives, and they include investing predominantly in local enterprises that work for more than just their own economic benefit. Describing the economics of *Community Supported Agriculture*, for example, Tasch suggests how spending can open us to a world of connection and meaning:

It is in most cases a purely voluntary thing, there's nothing written down, it's just a handshake between the farmer and the family. It's probably the purest expression of non- globalization – it's a direct personal relationship between producers and consumers that relies on a voluntary social contract. The quality of the food is better; the environmental footprint and impacts are better; it has all kinds of qualitative benefits to everyone who participates in it.

Spending money more consciously is a tremendous tool for change – if we use it as such. And we don't even need to spend money to make a difference. We can also *not* spend money. Historically, individuals joining forces to not support specific commodities or companies have been extremely effective methods to bring about sociopolitical change –from the mid-eighteenth century American boycotts of British goods that contributed to the American Revolution, to the 1955 year-long boycott of Alabama's bus line by 42,000 African Americans that inspired a supreme court ruling against segregation, and more recently the effectiveness of international anti-apartheid divestments out of South Africa. And many of us remember the U.S.-based Earth Island Institute's 1986 consumer boycott against tuna fish, which had routinely been harvested in a way that included dolphin slaughter. In 1990, the three largest tuna companies in the world agreed to stop purchasing, processing, and selling tuna caught by the intentional chasing and netting of dolphins.

Not spending money is a form of non-violent protest that, when taken seriously, could make a huge impact on our economy, forcing corporations to bring their practices into alignment with our collective values and not only with their bottom-line requirements. As Martin Luther King said after the effective Alabama bus boycott:

We have gained a new sense of dignity and destiny. We have discovered a new and powerful weapon – non-violent resistance.

TRADING OWNERSHIP FOR STEWARDSHIP

As we live oneness, we consume less. Why? Because the sense of security, nourishment, and connection that we attempt obtain from the acquisition and ownership of material goods is found in other ways – through the sense of being okay as we are, through recognizing and valuing what is free in life, and through our gratitude for what we already have, all of which have space to develop when we curb our spending and choose purchases more conscientiously.

In the West, we’ve become familiar with the idea of an “ownership society” in which individuals discover personal freedoms through the power of buying goods like homes and cars. But there’s little doubt that the sense of goodness gained through the capacity to control one’s life through purchasing power is less at issue today than the emptiness, lack of fulfillment, and addictive consumerism that is now much more the norm for those who put too many hopes and dreams into ownership.

When we put so much of our expectations for freedom and self-betterment onto material goods, we limit our capacity to find these things more directly – through aspects of life that we don’t have to buy and that we can’t own.

Mark Winston Griffith, who ran a non-profit community development organization in Brooklyn, New York for twelve years and is currently a senior fellow in economic justice at the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy describes how the ownership mentality in U.S. cities can undermine community – rather than support it:

By proposing individual-based approaches like school vouchers and privatized social security accounts, American domestic policy increasingly isolates the family struggles and economic fortunes that were once a more shared experience among Americans. At the same time, our culture encourages working and middle-class people to centralize their financial security in a single-family home. Under these conditions, civic engagement that is not directly tied to one’s property interest is a luxury few homeowners can afford.⁶

As we cultivate oneness, the ramifications on the material world are truly immense. Ownership itself becomes suspect, as we see how ownership isolates items out of a shared web of existence as though they are separable and only relevant for one purpose, and usually our purpose. And we question how we can “own” something that comes from the earth, will eventually transform back into the earth, and was created – most often – out of someone else’s sweat and ingenuity. With this

6 Griffiths, Mark Winston, from a 2005 article on TomPain.com called “Consumer versus Community,” online: http://www.tompaine.com/articles/consumer_versus_community.php?dateid=20050331

perspective, how do we relate to the material world?

We start to trade ideas about ownership for the responsibilities of stewardship. We are aware that in many ways, ownership pushes us toward attitudes and experiences with limited purpose, while stewardship offers deeper rewards. When we “own” something, we conceptually isolate it from its environment, objectify it, and ascribe it a limited purpose.

But through stewardship, we understand and express the reality that the material world is alive with a purpose beyond our own needs. Instead of thinking an object serves us, we also cultivate our capacity to serve it. We acknowledge a two-way relationship with even the most simple parts of life, which allows us to both give and receive.

Through caring for and respecting physical life, we discover what happens when we are connected to and embedded *within* the physical dimension. From here, we create the greatest art and architecture, in which beauty, sacredness and transformation are possible through the simple and profound mingling of human imagination and physical materials.

How can we understand what makes a painting or a sculpture – items that are only clay, pigment, oil, etc... – inspiring, beautiful, and in some cases life-altering? What makes a well-designed and well-cared for house more than just wood, glass or cement? These are the mysteries of how human creativity can seemingly enchant and enhance the material world.

When the mind and body work together, we realize this power of creativity and transformation, which becomes even more powerful when we develop and include another dimension of oneness – the heart.

The heart

To transform our deliberate actions not just into expressions of who we are, but into a new *way of being*, we need to include the heart. Otherwise, we’re required to depend too much on discipline, incentive, or will power. In contrast, the powers of the heart are natural motivators, and they have a domino effect – expanding through our own lives and others sometimes indefinitely. The kinder we become, the more powerful we understand kindness to be, and the more we want to be kind. The more grateful we become, the more we have to be grateful for, and the less deficient and insecure we feel. The more compassionate we are, the more respectfully we treat others and the more we see how respect encourages the best in all of us.

Perhaps in the same way that we often ignore what is most obvious, we tend to forget that our inner attitudes are some of our most accessible resources, and possibly our greatest. They are always available to us, and they cannot be taken from us. Nothing can restrict our access to gratitude, compassion, or kindness except us. We do not need to have money to be generous,

and we do not need to be physically strong to feel respect; we don't need material goods to feel grateful, and we don't even need companionship to feel love. Every moment in time, every meeting with another person, every contact with the objects of the world, can be consciously shaped by the heart.

In the modern world we find hints that we value the powers of the heart, but hints that only go so far. "Random acts of kindness" became a popular fad and bumper sticker but how many of us really value kindness in the midst of modern pressures? Where is kindness in our political debates? Can we take the recent business trend to emphasize a *triple-bottom line* (or the *four-way-win*), designed to balance profit with human and environmental impacts, even further? The world has taken note of compassion as a political force, largely through the smiling and patient example of the Dalai Lama, but why don't we demand it from our local politicians?

When we exclude the energies and power of the heart from our visions of life and actions in the world, we are only allowing a fraction of ourselves to participate. As we learn to live oneness, the contribution of the heart is critical, not just because its energies are unifying, but because when they are infused into life through our minds and our behaviors, they help us become exponentially more powerful than without them.

THE HEART OF ONENESS

Many of the heart's lessons are about oneness. Our heart shows us through pain and suffering how much we need and depend on others and on life around us; through joy it shows us how simply and deeply we are tied to an ineffable essence threading through all life; through love it expands our sense of self sometimes explosively; through gratitude we learn the power of our own vulnerabilities – how truly receiving from others inspires us to give more; and through kindness and compassion it reveals the power to change the world.

Contemporary research is also discovering and documenting the power of heart-based attitudes. Professor at the University of California, Davis, Dr. Robert Emmons has focused particularly on gratitude, its roots, and its power. Emmons links gratitude to vulnerability and awareness that we are dependent upon others. This dependence can feel unsettling, giving rise to feelings of indebtedness or powerlessness, which is why some prefer not to be grateful.

In one study from the nineteen-eighties, Emmons discovered that American men were less likely to acknowledge gratitude as a positive trait than German men. Why? He answers, "Gratitude presupposes so many judgments about debt and dependency that it is easy to see why supposedly self-reliant Americans would feel queasy about even discussing it." In the same article, Emmons illustrates a uniquely American form of reasoning:

A scene from The Simpsons captures this mentality: When asked to say grace at the family dinner table, Bart Simpson offers the following words: "Dear God, we paid for all this stuff ourselves, so

*thanks for nothing.”*⁷

Gratitude comes not just with humility, but with the powerlessness of knowing that there is an aspect of our lives in which our own will and hard work are not the only factor in what we are given. But a willingness to cultivate gratitude comes with lots of benefits, including – according to Emmons – “higher levels of positive emotions, life satisfaction, vitality, optimism and lower levels of stress and depression.”

Emmons’ research finds that individuals who take note of what they are grateful for have the capacity to empathize and to take the perspective of others. They are more generous, place less importance on material goods, and are less likely to judge their own and others’ success in terms of possessions.⁸ And these changes are not just personal; Emmons also found:

*And even more importantly, the family, friends, partners, and others who surround them consistently report that people who practice gratitude seem measurably happier and are more pleasant to be around. I’ve concluded that gratitude is one of the few attitudes that can measurably change peoples’ lives.*⁹

Kindness and generosity have also been found to have a similar “domino” effect, say researchers at University of California, San Diego and Harvard Medical School. Studies have shown cases “in which one person’s generosity spread to three other people and then to nine people that those three people interacted with, and then on to many others as the experiment progressed.”¹⁰

Powers of the heart can do what other powers can’t. At a time when so many of our resources – human and planetary – have been degraded and destroyed by self-interest, we need the restoration and revitalization that comes when we are willing to open our hearts and live our deepest understanding in service to other beings and the earth itself.

But to bring about this revitalization includes being courageous and innovative, in the ways so many of the individuals in this study guide have been – to empower our actions both with our intelligence and our imaginations as well as with the unifying forces of love and respect. We can bring our hearts firmly into the picture and synchronize them with our hands and our heads, for balanced, effective, and enduring responses.

Many of us are taking this step already through consumer choices – especially around food – and

7 See Robert Emmons’s article, “Pay it Forward”, in Greater Good Magazine, Vol. IV, Issue 1, May 2007, online: <http://peacecenter.berkeley.edu/greatergood/archive/2007summer/emmons.pdf>

8 Emmons, Robert, “Highlights from the Research Project on Gratitude and Thankfulness”, University of California, Davis, online: <http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/labs/emmons/>

9 Ibid.

10 See “Is Kindness Contagious?” A U.S. News and World Report web article from March 12, 2010, online: <http://www.usnews.com/health/family-health/brain-and-behavior/articles/2010/03/12/is-kindness-contagious.html>

through community service and volunteerism. And we are learning to slow down and live more simply – sometimes because we must due to the economic crisis. But through this newly appreciated simplicity, we restore dignity and respect in our environment; we enjoy and appreciate what we have because we cannot or choose not to purchase more.

But the heart compels us to live our generous nature for the sake of all life, not only for a small circle of friends or family. We live kindness not just when it serves us, but *because it serves*. We cultivate empathy because we understand its power to reveal what is true between people, and because without it we reduce ourselves to relationships that force us against each other, which betrays our shared humanity. We search for solutions to others' suffering because we know that one person's or group's suffering influences and defines all of us.

In his book, *The Power of Kindness*, Piero Ferrucci, a transpersonal psychologist from Florence, Italy, articulates the ways oneness is expressed through the heart:

For the generous person, borders are permeable. What is yours – your suffering, your problems – is also mine: This is compassion. What is mine – my possessions, my body, my knowledge and abilities, my time and resources, my energy – is also yours: This is generosity.

The true benefit of generosity, for the giver, is not a material advantage but an inner revolution. We become more fluid, more willing to risk. We place less store on possession and more on people. And the boundaries between us and others become less drastic, so that we feel part of a whole in which it is possible to share resources, emotions, and ourselves.¹¹

THE POWER OF THE HEART

Like no other aspect of ourselves, the heart has the capacity to revitalize the world we live in. More than our minds, the heart senses and can live the reality of wholeness. It knows we are *already* whole. The heart finds wholeness in simplicity, in how deeply we feel, how we love, in our sorrows and in our pain. It knows in these depths how alike we all are, how we each have unique qualities that we all need developed and honored, just as our own deepest qualities need a place in the world. With powers of the heart, we reflect this wholeness back into all our relationships.

But we can't find the power to heal and restore, to reclaim and bring forth wholeness and peace, if we don't open our hearts to the world in the first place. Just as Mother Teresa asked: "I want you to be concerned about your next door neighbor. Do you know your next door neighbor?" We need to be willing to see and know what is going on around us in order to respond.

Many of us don't want to take this step out of fear that the suffering and the losses will be too much to bear. But as soon as we engage from our heart, we know that suffering – as hard as it is

11 Ferrucci, Piero, *The Power of Kindness: The Unexpected Benefits of Leading a Compassionate Life*. Jeremy Tarcher/Penguin, New York, 2006, p. 114

to acknowledge – is the a powerful source of change. Suffering reminds us that we are all equal in our pain (Who escapes from loss? Who can avoid grief?), it compels us to act, and it calls forth the most enduring powers of compassion, love and peace. Suffering and solutions are intertwined; without knowing the depths of pain – ours or others’ – we cannot truly respond with what’s needed, and we likely won’t respond at all.

Throughout history, it’s been the heart’s involvement that has inspired us the most: individuals, black and white, who risked their lives to shuttle slaves to freedom through the underground rail-road; individuals – like Miep Gies – who took in Jews as they were persecuted by Nazi Germany; Anne Frank, who despite the horror she experienced still saw the goodness in people’s hearts. Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, all responded to seemingly insurmountable obstacles with the unrelenting power of the heart. And through a continual expression of love – one touch, one kindness, one human being after another – Mother Teresa changed the lives of thousands and inspired the world.

Without the intelligence of the heart, we can’t comprehend what is taking place around us, nor can we know what to do about it. If we see life through the mind alone, it comes across like a movie, or a newsreel, giving us information without meaning, telling us a story in which we have no genuine role to play. When we act without the heart, we burn out, or arrive at solutions that can’t possibly reach into the depths of our shared experience.

Ibtisam Mahameed, a Palestinian peace worker living in northern Israel who works to improve relations between Jews and Arabs, described to us the role of the heart in creating peace:

We need to learn mutual respect from each other. We need to know how to listen, not with our ears, but with our heart. I should tell you that I want to open a new life page with you, and that I want to give you my hand, not to betray you, but to say you are welcome in my home. I shall like to visit you at your home, to hear more from you, and hear more about the world. This is what I call, the “language of mutual love in the world.”

In many ways, peace, healing, and renewal are as simple as this – offering ourselves to each other and to what’s needed, not in order to gain something or to achieve something, but because to be with each other, to be responsible for each other, and to want to create a better world just makes sense.

In Los Angeles, California we witnessed Orland Bishop, youth worker from Watts, being questioned in court about his relationship with one of his mentees who was on trial for gang-related activity. A prosecutor tried to reveal bias in Bishop’s testimony supporting the young man’s character by suggesting they have a relationship – like father and son – in which love might influence an honest assessment. When asked if he loved the young man, Bishop responded “Yes. I could not do my work without love.”

The entire court – the jury and the judge and all the observers – sat in a moment of stunned

silence, as though finally hearing what it is we all want to have acknowledged: love is not a problem, but a solution.

The heart has something to offer in every situation, small or large, in every relationship and every opportunity. It offers a key dimension that supports our intellect and all our activities. But in a world that seems to do much to discourage our use of this key resource, we have to remind ourselves of how simple and accessible and necessary it is.

HEAD, HEART, AND HANDS

When we align our hearts with our minds and our actions, we open a door for these living qualities not only to support our relationships, but to sanctify everything we do. N. Scott Momaday, the contemporary Kiowa-Cherokee writer, has said, “The highest human purpose is always to reinvent and celebrate the sacred,”¹² and this is the work of the heart.

Many of the individuals and movements we’ve described in these pages are examples of this work. They offer new ways to trust what is deep and true, ways to reflect our most heart-felt wisdom into outer world structures, give of ourselves to what’s needed in local or global communities. These are radical programs, flying in the face of such generally accepted ideas such as that the greatest resources in life are only available to a few, that our success is dependent solely on our own efforts, that intellect is more important than love, that “you” and “I” must compete in order to thrive.

But just as they are “new” these expressions of oneness are natural and essential to who we are and have always been. Oneness is as old as the universe itself and as old as human consciousness. But our times call on us to remember and renew this understanding at the core of our relationships with each other and life, not just because we long for connection and meaning, but because our world is in danger of unprecedented destruction and degradation brought on by unchecked self-interest. Our times call on us to live oneness specifically in service, to synchronize all our actions to reflect and transmit the potentials of oneness through our individual actions and our social structures, never ignoring the untapped dimension of the heart.

Most of us will need courage to live in a way that seems so at odds with our global culture. Or as Nelsa Curbelo put it:

Everything in society tells us to distrust others. I think it's the other way around. We need to profoundly trust in those around us, in their potential and in who they are.

In *Living Oneness* we offer assurance of how effective this trust can be, how enduring and how creative the powers of oneness are, and how quickly they can work to bring a lived sense of wholeness back into our communities.

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12 Attributed to M. Scott Momaday at a private meeting, The Council of Ideas, in New Mexico, 1992, online: http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.12/nesmith_pr.html

We all long for this wholeness, to feel it in our personal lives and to see it lived in corporate offices and in centers of government. It brings the intimacy we need, without which we will continue to degrade the people and environment around us, an intimacy that finally allows us to feel like we are not separate, but *with* life.

The Navajo prayer, *I Walk with Beauty*, reflects the naturalness of living intimately *with* the deepest qualities within life:

*As I walk, as I walk
The universe is walking with me
In beauty it walks before me
In beauty it walks behind me
In beauty it walks below me
In beauty it walks above me
Beauty is on every side
As I walk, I walk with Beauty.*

The Navajo walk with “Beauty.” But oneness has many names, including harmony, peace, love, gratitude, joy, wisdom and reverence – all the qualities we find in the deepest parts of ourselves and in life itself, and in the flow of experience where there is no separating the two.

Living Oneness provides one doorway after another to inspire and guide us toward feeling and living *with*. This process of discovery and renewal can start with our simple awareness of interdependence and a few changes in our behaviors to reflect this awareness. We can use money, food, professional choices and our personal habits to express what we know is important. We can use other’s courage to inspire and ignite our hearts. We find that even the smallest changes create a strong momentum that encourages us to step further into oneness.

As many ways as there are to know and live oneness, we become more powerful the more synchronized they become. We magnify our impact on life as we coordinate and integrate the domains within ourselves – our own head, heart and hands. What good is the connectivity of the Internet if we use it mostly to buy more stuff at a better price? Who do we really help when we give generously to someone else, but what we give is created at the expense of non-renewable natural resources? Does it make sense to hold on to an experience in the depths of our heart if we could magnify it through sharing it with others? By its nature, oneness does not stop with us, but has a purpose of serving us all.

In *Living Oneness*, we’ve provided many descriptions of oneness, and offered examples of ways to know and express it. Stories of individuals who live simply, close to the land and to the most fundamental processes of life, and stories of innovation in the fields of technology and engineering. We’ve highlighted peace initiatives and spiritual insights, and spiritual insights that are not

separate from social change.

And perhaps the most important thing to remember among this kaleidoscope of ideas and people we've shared is that you always have your own heart, mind, and body as doorways to wholeness, peace, compassion and all the attributes of oneness.

For one of the most basic principles of oneness is that you are never without a way in.

Chapter 11 Exercises

1. Can you think of experiences in your life where you've synchronized your head, heart, and hands? Compare those experiences to other times when one or two of the three were missing. How did the experiences differ?
2. Think of a need in your community or the world and examine it from all dimensions – head, hands and heart. In what ways does each entry point emphasize a different aspect of the need? How do all three work together to become even more effective?
3. In the “head, heart, and hands” tripartite, the head implies thinking, which is something we're very comfortable with in the modern world. Do you believe we can “think” our way out of the problems we're facing? What is the role of thought? What are the limitations of thought for solving problems?
4. Hands refer to doing, taking action. In a world of so many needs, taking action is seen as virtuous, but is it enough? What might be called for *prior* to taking action? What *kind* of action is being taken? What *informs* our actions? How can we become more conscious of ourselves before we move into action?
5. Why do you think the heart, being the most abstract when compared to the head and hands, can nonetheless be considered the most powerful? Who has access to your powers of the heart? Can they be bought? Sold? Are there things one can do to make the capacities of the heart even more powerful? What are they? Are these capacities available to everyone? Or just a fortunate few?
6. “When we align our hearts with our minds and our actions, we open a door for these living qualities...to sanctify everything we do.” Why might bringing all three together be more powerful than simply adding up all three capacities separately?
7. What does stewardship mean to you? How is ownership different from stewardship? Which

do you find more attractive? Why?

8. “Through stewardship, instead of thinking an object serves us, we also cultivate our capacity to serve it. We acknowledge a two-way relationship, which allows us to both give and receive.” Can you think of anything in your life in which you have (or would like to have) a stewardship relationship? What makes stewardship attractive? Or not?
9. “The highest human purpose is always to reinvent and celebrate the sacred,” said one indigenous elder. What do YOU feel is the highest human purpose? What role might the combination of head, heart, and hands have toward this purpose?
10. Do you trust your intuition? How do you differentiate between your intuition and your ego’s voice in your head? Is your intuition infallible? Has it ever steered you wrong?
11. Dr. Bolte Taylor attributes her mystical experience of peace and oneness to her consciousness becoming focused on her right brain as her stroke shut down the left side. Do you think our consciousness is so mechanically tied to our bodily functions? Why or why not?
12. We eat “junk food” all the time but if “we are what we eat,” why do we allow ourselves to become “junk?” When you reflect on becoming what you eat, are you inclined to change your food choices?
13. When food becomes a commodity within our global and local economic systems, what is lost? What is gained? What is the way through this dilemma?
14. “Every dime we spend as consumers reflects our inner attitudes and hopes, and supports and recreates those values in the world around us.” Do you think the choices you make as a single consumer make a difference? Do you think your choices support and help create the world we live in? Why or why not? What can you do as a consumer to help create the world you want?
15. Community Supported Agriculture “is probably the purest expression of non-globalization because it’s a direct personal relationship between producers and consumers that relies on a voluntary social contract,” says Woody Tasch. What are the costs and benefits of supporting a CSA? What would you give up? What would you gain?
16. Food provides a direct doorway to oneness because it is connected in all directions...land, body, health, primary energy, etc. Yet, in the modern world food is so removed from its source that we typically can’t visualize where it was from or how it was grown or got to our table. What can you do to better understand the source of your food? Try tracing as many interconnections as you can (e.g., the store, the farmer, the trucker, the water, the sun, fertilizer, chemical

company, etc.). What did you learn?

17. It's argued that the less natural the food we eat the more we're transforming our own body into a "thing," distanced from nature. Compare how your body and mind feel after eating a meal of "contrived" foods (such as a Twinkie or Cheetos) versus a meal of more natural food (organic and/or freshly prepared foods). Which do you prefer?
18. Think of opportunities in your life – for example, at home, at school, at work, with friends, in your community – where you could practice balancing your head, hands, and heart. Now try it!
19. Every moment is an opportunity to begin living oneness – because the doorways into this way of being in the world are everywhere. What can you do right now to get started?

About the Global Oneness Project

The Global Oneness Project began as a film project committed to exploring and documenting how the radically simple notion of oneness can be lived in our increasingly complex world. By showcasing the voices and stories of people and communities from around the world living from the perspective of our interconnectedness, we hope to inspire and support others to do the same. The Project currently uses film, online resources, events, and educational programs to fulfill its goals. For more information, or to download this study guide or other educational resources, go to <http://globalonenessproject.org>.

This study guide is the result of the combined efforts of the entire Global Oneness Project team and its contributors, with special thanks to the primary author, Hilary Hart.