



Centered On the Edge

Mapping a Field of Collective Intelligence & Spiritual Wisdom

Published in association with the Fetzer Institute. Editors: Sheryl Erickson & Alan Briskin

“There is more to seeing than meets the eye.”

—Norman Russell Hanson



"Ophthalmic Iris"



"There is a difference between seeing and seeing...
The eyes of the spirit have to work in perpetual living
connection with those of the body, for one otherwise
risks seeing yet seeing past a thing." —Goethe



*"Art does not reproduce the visible.
It renders visible." —Paul Klee*

Welcome. Thank you for coming. We are glad you are here. We don't know what has called you here. Perhaps you don't either, yet. But we are so glad you came.

We want to tell you a story, a story about how this book came into being. And then we would like to invite you to join us in an exploration.

For the past year, a group of us has engaged in this exploration. We are by no means the first group to undertake this journey; countless other individuals and groups have preceded us, helping to illuminate our path.

Our exploration has been supported by the Fetzer Institute. Work at the Fetzer Institute focuses on the importance of wholeness to individuals and communities. During the past decade, Fetzer has regularly convened small groups of leaders from the public, private and non-profit sectors. Through these gatherings, Fetzer has come to know and learn from a broad array of individuals and organizations involved in group work.

As part of an institutional assessment process between 1996 and 1997, Fetzer asked author Jacob Needleman to offer his reflections about the future role of the Institute. In his letter to Fetzer, Jacob offers a provocative image:

"I [believe] that the group is the art form of the future.... [E]very great culture has created forms of sacred art that were needed in order to transmit and...discover by experience the truths which were necessary to absorb into one's life.... In our present culture, as I see it, the main need is for a form that can enable human beings to share their perception and attention and, through that sharing, to become a conduit for the appearance of spiritual intelligence."

Jacob then underscores the urgency of this image, observing that "we obviously cannot confront this tangled world alone.... It takes no great insight to realize that we have no choice but to think together, ponder together, in groups and communities. The question is how to do this. How to come together and think and hear each other in order to touch, or be touched by, the intelligence we need."

How do we come together in order to touch, or be touched by, the intelligence we need?

This question, and Jacob's image of "the group as art form of the future," provided the principal catalyst for our exploration. This book is one small utterance in response to Jacob's provocation.

OUR FOCUS

We focused our inquiry on moments when groups of people experience touching, or being touched by, the intelligence they need, when they begin to function harmonically and fluidly, to experience a palpable sense of clarity and coherence.

Jacob's question led us to wonder whether such group functioning might be one of the primary forces necessary for the evolution of human consciousness, and what might be possible if individuals and groups could better understand how to access and sustain these transformational moments of clarity and coherence.

These wonderings led us to a core set of questions:

- What exactly is this phenomenon when groups touch, or are touched by, the intelligence they need? Can we begin to understand and describe this phenomenon more precisely?
- Do others share our sensing that more and more people are gathering together to experience and explore this phenomenon? If so, what are the implications of this?

The Group as Art Form of the Future

- Is a field of practice and study beginning to emerge around this phenomenon? A field that implicitly or explicitly understands “the group as art form of the future”?
- If a field is emerging, how is it evolving? Who are some of the people connected with it? What are the roots of their thinking, their values, their practices?
- If a field is evolving, how might we participate more consciously in its evolution?

OUR APPROACH

“Start anywhere; follow where it leads.” These words from Myron Kellner-Rogers became a touchstone for us. We started with the names of about forty people, people who had a depth of experience working with groups and a demonstrated passion for nurturing spaces of collective insight, co-creation and action.

Over the course of ten months our list multiplied tenfold, to well over 400 people recommended by their peers as sources of deep experience and expertise. We used a short survey and a “sociometric” exercise to invite people to describe themselves and their work, and then to describe some of their networks of relationships. To date, we have profiled more than 100 people, interviewed sixty-one, and have transcribed and studied over half of these interviews. This data is what informs the book you now hold.

As the data began to emerge, we first felt only the daunting tasks of trying to describe the indescribable, and of somehow organizing a very large and complex array of information. We were trying to render visible a phenomenon with subtle and intangible qualities, qualities most often discerned tacitly, indirectly. Connection. Relationship. Coherence. Wholeness. Wisdom. Emergence. Healing. Flow. Transformation. How can we really, concretely, describe such things?

As we immersed ourselves in the data, however, we were reassured by the words of George Washington Carver: “If you love it enough, anything will talk with you.” As we listened to transcript after transcript, story after story, more and more descriptions of lived-experiences, we began to hear and then see archetypal forms, expressive visual images, resonant quotes, signs, symbols and repeatable patterns. As we invited people to describe themselves and the nature of their work, we began to hear a deeper harmonic.

“Start anywhere; follow where it leads.”

THE BOOK

Throughout this book we have endeavored to reflect back what people said; to bring form to the images and energies that pulsated through the interviews and surveys; and to capture some of the textures and multi-dimensionality of the deeper harmonic we began to hear and feel.

At the heart of this book is an intricately woven braid of three strands of writing (pages 10–63). One strand of this braid is a series of eight *pattern stories* written by Alan Briskin. Each story is an excerpt from one of the interviews, followed by commentary from Alan highlighting some of the insights and paradoxes the stories reveal. We call these “*pattern stories*” because the themes, organizational elements, and group dynamics evident in each story appeared repeatedly throughout the interviews.

Interwoven with the pattern stories is a second strand of writing, *the principles*. Given form by Chris Strutt, these principles also emerged from the transcripts, and are organized into three categories: Elements of the Experience, Significance of Gathering, and Practices for Preparing and Opening. Descriptions of these principles with illustrative quotes appear on the right in column sidebars throughout the pattern stories. Page 59 summarizes these

principles, and pages 60–63 highlight the principles in the category Practices for Preparing and Opening.

The third strand of this braid is the *metaphor clusters*. Joan Lederman read and listened to every word of the transcripts, listening particularly with an ear for the natural and metaphoric ways people describe their experiences of collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom. We have placed Joan's clusters of metaphors on the left in column sidebars where they resonate with particular stories.

The list on pages 71–73 begins to render visible some of *the people* in this field—at least some of those who have so far appeared to us. We have also begun to paint a picture of whom they identify as thought leaders, teachers, mentors and guides. Pages 64–65 articulate an array of questions, entitled "*Field of Intentions*," gathered from the profiles that begin to intimate a nascent field of intention and thought and energy.

To illustrate the creative impulse that often vibrated in response to the listening and receiving of our inquiry, we have included an essay that emerged to Chris Strutt as she absorbed the stories and energies of the transcripts. Entitled "*Electricity and Groups*," this meditative essay inquires into the parallels between the phenomenon we are exploring and the laws and relationships that govern the realm of electricity.

Other forms are present as well: poetry; quotations; color; photography; archetypal images; original art. We have offered these multiple forms partly to respond to the multi-dimensionality of the phenomenon, and partly to honor the many different ways readers may choose to access information and create meaning.

Toward the end of the book (pages 76–79) is an essay of closing reflections entitled "*So What?*" Written by John Ott, this essay articulates some of what we are learning about this phenomenon and the emerging field, and some of what might be needed now to deepen the movement already underway.

OUR INVITATION

So...we invite you to "start anywhere and follow where it leads."

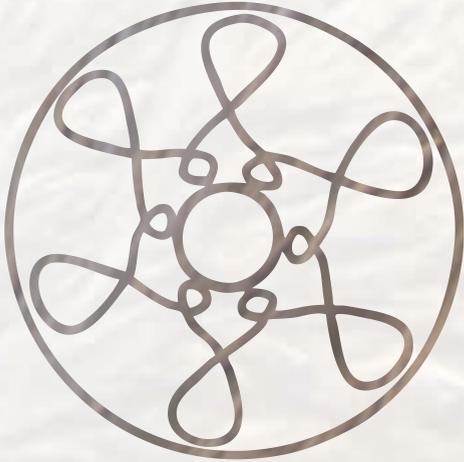
As you begin to explore these forms, here are a few questions you might take with you:

- What reflects your own understanding and experiences of this phenomenon?
- What surprises you? Delights you? Agitates you?
- How do you now understand this phenomenon?
- From your perception, is there a field of action and reflection emerging?
- What do you sense is wanting to happen now in the field? In you?

We invite you to hold these questions as you—in your own way—

We offer this book to you with the hope that it evokes and honors your own experience, and provokes and deepens your own process of discovery and discernment.

Again, welcome. We are so glad you are here.



Mandala: How It Came to Be

"Where do I begin? I barely understand this work they are doing. I am given a few hints: include unity, diversity, symbolized by dendrites? Dendrites look like veins of an eye. Eyes represent individuality! Forming the veins/dendrites, they soon turn into a very vague and symbolic view of people holding hands. Everything pieces together. This design becomes a mandala."

—Peter Strutt (17 years old)

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explore the pages that follow.





"Nothing is harder, yet nothing is more necessary, than to speak of certain things whose existence is neither demonstrable nor probable. The very fact that serious and conscientious men treat them as existing things brings them a step closer to existence and to the possibility of being born."

—Hermann Hesse



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The Least Qualified Among Us:

Listening for the Wisdom in the Group

Pattern Stories: How They Came to Be

"I became enchanted with the stories and images revealed in the dozens of interviews we gathered—the details of an interaction, the honesty and depth of a speaker's voice, the courage to speak about ideas not yet fully formed. In these collective stories I saw patterns, often involving an unexpected turn of events, a transformation, a healing, a clarity that spirit can be made manifest in action. Was it possible to reflect the whole by linking together excerpts from a subgroup of the interviews we gathered? I began with a story that I thought was immensely engaging, wise, and grounded in social reality. Then I began to search my mind for a second tale that could follow this first one and also take us in new directions. I would sit imagining the effect each story might have on a reader and what new riches might be found in the next tale. My role became that of weaver and guide into material that together demonstrated the range and depth of the field of collective intelligence. I found myself hoping that the readers might experience an emotional resonance with the material, even a heightened sense of themselves as part of a larger community of seekers and mystics."

—Alan Briskin

The year is 1966. The grape fields of California are ablaze with conflict and tension. Cesar Chavez and his fledgling United Farm Workers are seeking negotiations through collective bargaining elections with the DiGiorgio Corporation—the largest grower of table grapes in the nation. Many new workers are frightened, already indentured by the company who paid their way from Mexico and now living in DiGiorgio's labor camps. They support their brothers and sisters in the United Farm Workers who are seeking a better life but they have children to feed and have no passage home.

The farm labor camps, row on row of cinder block housing, are located on company property. There are watchtowers overlooking the camps, silent reminders of earlier days when the Japanese were interred in these same buildings during World War II. There are no longer guards in the towers but there are guards at the gates. Because the camps are on private property, United Farm Worker organizers have been barred from entry—barred from engaging in conversations with the workers inside—barred from discussing the workers' democratic rights under the law to vote for the United Farm Workers to represent them in conversations with the growers. A paradox—workers have the right to vote in the first election in agricultural history but not the means to share in the conversation needed to make an informed choice on behalf of a better life for themselves and their families.

What to do? Cesar Chavez and farm worker organizers are on the roadside at 5 AM as the trucks leave for the fields, passing small informational leaflets through the slats of the trucks. The growers have permitted informational leafletting.

Even Cesar is beginning to lose hope. He calls a meeting of the whole community. Men, women, children...the farm worker meeting hall is full. The mood is somber. Cesar explains the situation to those gathered, realistically, honestly, without artifice.

Cesar says he has no answer to the dilemma. If there is no way to engage in conversation with the workers in the camps, it will be hard to change our future, he says. He asks for their honest assessment, for ideas, for help. All bearing witness know that some unforeseen breakthrough is the only way through.

People share ideas, many ideas. None are rejected. Everyone is asked not to debate because no decision is going to be made tonight. We are trying to listen, he says, listen to every voice that wants to be heard.

Many voices enter the conversation. The meeting is nearly done. Way in the back of the hall sits an old woman wrapped in a *rebozo*, a Mexican shawl. She stands and speaks quietly in Spanish.

"Well, I know I am not qualified, but there was something...I had an idea, maybe just a small idea, but maybe it can help. If we can't go in to visit the workers, maybe there is a way they could come to us. I believe only God can help us now. Why don't we build an altar, a small church on the public roadway across the street from the camps. We can hold Mass and a prayer vigil every night. I know there are priests who will help us. The workers can come across the street to the Mass and the prayer vigil. The growers can't stop them from coming to a prayer vigil, can they? And they can't stop us

from holding one, can they? And as we pray together with the workers from the camps, they will come to know who we are and what we stand for and then they can vote in a better way for their future."

And so it was. Cesar's old station wagon got parked across the road. An altar was erected on the back of the wagon and the workers came, first a few, and then many. The DiGiorgio election was held and the United Farm Workers gained the right to have a voice in creating their future as part of a democratic society, all because of the voice of the "least among us."

As the person who translated the old woman's words from Spanish, I think somehow the energy of her presence, the power of her simplicity, and the collective sigh of "Yes" that emerged from the collective in the room will remain forever etched in my own being.

—Juanita Brown

Commentary on The Least Qualified Among Us

How do we listen to a story such as this? What feelings are evoked? What mythic elements of group life are revealed?

From out of a seemingly impossible situation, hope arises. How can this be? From a ragtag group with little real power, victory is won. Is this luck? From a group with a legendary leader, Cesar Chavez, comes an answer from one who declares herself least qualified. Is this the movies? The answer arises again and again from those we interviewed that this is neither strange nor luck nor make believe. We are calling this a "pattern story" because we heard the dramatic themes, organizational elements, and group dynamics in story after story.

The dramatic appearance of group magic, and the emergence of collective intelligence often become manifest when the impossibility of the situation seems bleakest or when the "powers that be" seem most dominant. This is when, from a rational standpoint, we are furthest from our goal or most vulnerable to defeat. The "solution" must lie outside of what is known and thereby is outside of our immediate control. From within an organizational dynamic framework, these are the conditions that demand adaptive leadership, which Cesar Chavez modeled so well by describing the situation "without artifice" and by asking those gathered to bear witness to the paradox and to ask for help. From a transpersonal framework, these are the times we pray and ask for a higher power to aid our journey. The power of the story is furthered by the appearance of an old woman, sitting wrapped in a rebozo, doubting her qualifications to speak, but blessing the group with a small idea that grows from within the belly of the group into magic.

In the whole lies the answer. This is certainly one of the principles of collective intelligence. There is wisdom in the group and the wisdom is not in any one person by right of his or her biography—his or her position, knowledge, past experiences. No, the wisdom can come through anyone if the conditions are right. "We are here to listen," he says, "listen to every voice that wants to be heard." The possibility that the answer, or a portion of an answer, could lie anywhere among us creates an immediacy and heightened sense of presence. Everyone is needed ("none are rejected") because no one individual, not even the leader, has the answer. Some may describe this as the conditions of equality and inclusion or the effects of non-evaluative, non-hierarchical relations, others may simply know it as sacred. When the wisdom of the group is activated, a latticework of understanding grows with each voice, capable of holding meaning, just as a trellis holds a living vine.

Principle

Element of the Experience

Quickening

People speak of a moment when the "magic" happens, a moment of awakening, deepening, quickening, when they seem to transcend their egos or their personalities. They sense a world unseen, unheard, yet truly more there than anything they've experienced before.



"A moment of communion, where spirit is within us.... That was the moment where the shared will of the group became apparent to the group. Where the group knew why they had come together and what they had to address."

—Adam Kahane

"People were really able to enter the timelessness, the shimmering, that space where the mystery and ourselves are really one."

—FireHawk

"The field shifted, the field intensified. I felt an increase of energy...that always begins to happen first in the invisible. Then it shows up in the visible world. We pick it up in the invisible and then clothe it in a way that people see it."

—Glennifer Gillespie

Metaphor Cluster

Fabric

threads of stories weaving • tapestry of a whole • threads of diversity • fibers of relationship • society knitting a fabric of consciousness together • every fiber is alerted • big ball of tangled yarn • healing social fabric • rituals being woven • stitched symbols of wisdom worn on teaching belts • attention is like a net for gathering • in or out of the rational web • vertical and horizontal dimensions • clothing the moment • divine fabric • lead weaver • universality of pattern • unthreading • built, birthed or woven • quilt with a heartbeat • wrapped in tapestry • pulling all threads into the weave • threads fading in and out • shifting weave • spider as master weaver • pull on it, play with it • loosening weave • in or out of the rational web • fraying edges • fiber of relationship • weaving the fabric of community • inviting threads • stringing the beads • midwiving creative tension •

The atmosphere is a critical condition as well. The meeting hall is somber, much is on the line. Yet the somber atmosphere is not so much of panic or despair, but rather of a gravity that demands realism, honesty, and the shedding of pretense. The physical surroundings require nothing less, a farm labor camp where once Japanese were interred, and where watchtowers still loom. The psychological and social significance is echoed by the physical place—we know who is watched. We know who is dominant. Yet, the atmosphere also includes the non-physical aspect of intent. Let no one mistake the dearth of answers with the absence of intent. They are gathered together to seek a better life and also to change the future. Hope still flickers, if nowhere else, in the act of gathering together.

There is an emergent thread suggested by this tale, and others we have listened to, that the group is the medium by which the trajectory of history can be altered. Never before have democratic elections of this kind been held and never before has any group faced this particular dilemma. Will history, in the form of a new kind of confinement prevail, or will something new emerge? Possibly this is where the mythic lies: in a pattern repeated countless times but each time in a new context and with an outcome undetermined.

The “small idea” of the old woman represents the breakthrough, the “set breaker” in the language of systems thinking. There is an immediate inversion of the rules that guide their system. Where the power had resided with the growers to determine who can come in, the power now rests with the rules governing who can step out. The old woman's power is of invitation and symbolized later by an altar. This moment, of an old woman speaking her truth simply and without pretense, seeds the new order, even if things will change again, even if those in the hall know the old order will not simply disappear. Such is the power of such moments. We can hear, even feel, the collective sigh, “Yes.” Her words are genius, but they belong to the group.

And what do we make of Juanita's final comments, that the energy of this woman's presence became “etched in my own being.” Can transformation in a personal sense be catalyzed by interactions such as this in groups? The voices we listened to in our interviews continually spoke of energy, of presence, of knowing in a deep sense, of wisdom that emanates from the body. Is this part of a shared language of groups that is just beginning to be revealed? ■

“When we lift up the eyes of the mind to what is invisible, we should consider metaphors of visible things as if they were steps to understanding.”

—Hugh of St. Victor

Metaphor Clusters: How They Came to Be

“Reading the pattern stories and the clusters of principles enlightened and saddened me; the meaning I heard in reading the transcripts had been lost. Frustration led me to sieve each transcript for language that zapped me, which became sixteen handwritten pages of metaphors which clustered. When I read them I hear a chorus of globally dispersing voices.”

—Joan Lederman

Lauren Artress: An example of the large group spiritual work Veriditas does at Grace Cathedral is a pilgrimage we call *A Moment In Time*. How do we open ourselves to a transformational moment in time? And, of course the invisible part of this is my hope everybody is going to have a transformational moment sometime during the weekend.

We work very much on an interfaith model, so we use interfaith or universal spiritual language. So, referring to the Light works well, especially when we hand them a candle at the entry way of the cathedral and the labyrinth is surrounded in candlelight.

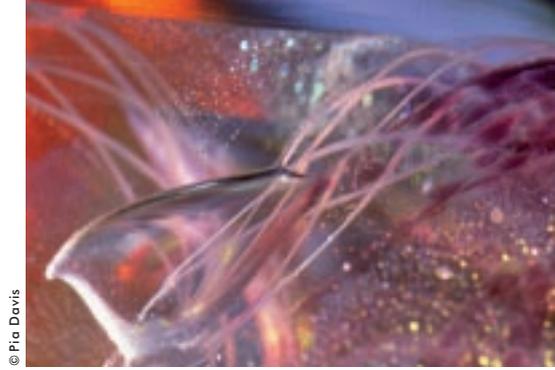
We limit our programs to around fifty—since the labyrinth indoors will hold that many. It is crowded, but not everybody is on the labyrinth at once. There may be 35, maybe 40 people at one time. We have exquisite music from a group called *Musica Divina*. They begin to create music from the very beginning, when we first open the labyrinth. They take the rhythm from the participants. And, again, this is a way of bringing in the invisible element. Rhythm, music, pattern, candlelight. All of those help open what Margot Adler calls the “old mind.” Groups have the potential of opening the “old mind,” much more powerfully than attempting to do it alone. It is difficult to do spiritual work alone. And, of course, once the “old mind” is open you can experience that spark of illumination, through metaphor, synchronicity and through events that happen on your journey. There’s a paradox there. You can’t seek illumination directly, but you can experience it directly through your seeking. That’s where magic can happen in groups.

Alan Briskin: Why can’t you seek spirit directly?

Lauren Artress: Because it’s still under the control of the ego. Do I look here? Do I look there? Maybe this person has the answer! But the “answer,” the illumination, the moment, the spark of divinity, spark of awareness, always comes in from the side. For instance, one man walking the labyrinth had on a tee shirt with some message like, “You are beautiful.” It was a bit quirky. But there he is. And some woman sees this and takes in the message for the first time. She doesn’t get hung up on how quirky it is, or how seductive it may be under other circumstances; it just goes into her awareness: she is beautiful! You see, the labyrinth is a symbolic field. Sometimes I’ll do rituals where people bring a meaningful object and place it in the labyrinth. They won’t tell anybody what it is or why they choose it until later. But somebody will be walking the labyrinth and see this wonderful little charm or bracelet or the I Ching symbol. Whatever it is, it can speak to the intuitive, pattern-seeking part of ourselves. Creating symbolic fields can be a powerful part of group work.

So, in the event *A Moment In Time* we actually provide a special moment in time. Now, please understand me. When you’re creating around the labyrinth, the intention is not to be manipulative. The intention is to offer a climate of trust, a place of beauty and an experience for people to truly be walking the path together. It’s a profound experience. They receive it on the “imagic” non-verbal level. We’re all on the Path together.

Let me tell you a bit about where the idea came from for our *Moment in Time* experience. Tom Keelan, my associate, and I were over in London,



© Pia Davis

Rose Petals Falling:

The Group as Symbolic Field

(Excerpt from an edited conversation of Lauren Artress with Alan Briskin)

“But the ‘answer,’ the illumination, the moment, the spark of divinity, spark of awareness, always comes in from the side.”

returning home from our yearly work in Chartres Cathedral. We went to an off-off-Broadway theater piece called *De la Guardia*. When you arrive, there are no seats or stage. Instead, you walk into a big barn-like room. Overhead, there is a big piece of butcher-block paper that, for the beginning of the evening, is the stage.

Alan Briskin: The butcher-block paper over your heads?

Lauren Artress: Yes, over our heads! And there is lighting angled so you can see shadows through the paper. There are about six people swinging overhead on harnesses, like trapeze artists. About forty-five minutes later, the butcher-block paper breaks because balloons with water in them are thrown down and everybody winds up sort of wet. "Actors" are scaling the walls while doing a dance pattern to music. It is a spectacle of chaos, with no understandable purpose that I can derive. What's really interesting is that because you don't know what to expect your attention is really wide open.

That is exactly the reverse of what can happen in the labyrinth. You are placed in a context of meaning: prayer, discovering an insight, given a metaphor as sustenance for the journey. Your attention is wide open because you're so focused. So, after reflecting on the chaotic theater experience, we decided to drop hundreds of rose petals gently down on the labyrinth, from the Cathedral catwalk, ninety-two feet up in the air. Volunteers went up there and very quietly released handfuls and handfuls of rose petals that drifted down like snow, all over the labyrinth.

Alan Briskin: On the people?

Lauren Artress: Yes, as the people were walking; deep in meditation, surrounded by the soft light of 500 candles lit everywhere in the Cathedral and the beautiful, slowly pulsating music. And I didn't know what to expect. This was the first time I'd ever tried anything like this. I didn't want an overstated experience. It was a very, very tender moment. The group consciousness at that point was so beautifully attuned to the moment. The whole sense of being, as the Buddhist might say, in the presence of the eternal now.

The moment was exquisite. As the rose petals dropped most people stopped and looked up, like kids seeing snow flakes falling the first time in their lives. They began catching the rose petals and picking them up from the labyrinth and holding them in their hands.

We did not tell the musicians we were going to drop the rose petals. They always create their music by following the pace of the people in the labyrinth. When the people stopped, the musicians stopped too and looked up at the rose petals. Then after a few moments of confusion, they started musically expressing what they were seeing, so the music captured a twirling rhythm to it. And they really, truly, captured this whole moment in time musically as well.

Then, after the last rose petal floated down from above, the walkers spontaneously joined in what I call a 'cosmic chuckle.' It was a gentle, accepting giggle! And then the people began to walk again and the music began to stabilize as people walked. It was fascinating.

So one woman stood there, just with a rose petal in her hand, crying, crying, crying. And there's no right way or wrong way to walk a labyrinth. Anything can happen in a labyrinth. I mean, people cry and cry and some people just wail and some people laugh. I mean, there's no...this is a free container and this is a major principle for training facilitators. Stay out of it. You're only going to walk into your ego state in the labyrinth. And the ego

Quotes and Principles: How They Came to Be

"I would read a transcript, immersing myself in the spoken words; pause a day or two, letting its meaning wash through me; then move on to read the next one. Over the months certain themes began to crystallize; familiar sounds in different voices, which seemed to echo over and over again through the 37 transcripts studied. These I eventually wrote down in clusters of direct quotes, along with the gems they contained—the 'Principles.'"

—Chris Strutt

state is not happening in the labyrinth. People are in a suspended, luminous, open, transitional space.

The woman crying with the rose petal—and it wasn't an agonizing cry, there was some grief to it, but it was joyous, too—and the last time she'd had a rose petal in her hand was a year earlier at her husband's funeral. It "book-ended" the whole experience of grief. Here she was, holding a rose petal, remembering back then; looking at it and feeling so deeply moved and ripped with grief. And here, now, she's standing in Grace Cathedral with exquisite music, surrounded by candlelight, holding yet again, a rose petal.

You see, there is a magic that happens. We planned the rose petals, but that's all we did. We offer the labyrinth and the music, and we do that on a regular basis. But there is something that happens when a group of people come together. We do shape the weekend with the intention of healing and wholeness—finding courage, releasing grief and walking into the future with an open heart and an open mind. We talk a lot about finding your soul assignment; following your call to do the work you have come here to do. I believe there truly is a Spirit that's trying to get our attention, that wants to help us come to our fullest potential. This Spirit, whatever you call it, wants us to live fully and, in Hildegard's words, flower. And that's always evident in this transformational work that we do.

The labyrinth is a metaphor for our spiritual journey in this life. Sometimes the path is really tough, sometimes it is flowing. If you come across anything that is difficult let yourself be amused by it. Because when we're amused, we're not in our ego. We're in a reflective state instead of criticizing or attacking ourselves.

Commentary on The Story of Rose Petals Falling:

Group magic often begins with an interior experience. How does the journey of my own life intersect with others? How can the real beauty of the world be made visible, so that my capacity to see enlarges to include the spirit world? The labyrinth is a tool for social meditation, a physical embodiment of the paradox that we are each on our own path and yet we walk this path in a common field with others.

Ninety-two feet high at the crown of a cathedral, a reverend and a canon of an Episcopal church drop hundreds of rose petals down onto a twelfth century geometric design believed to quiet the mind and evoke transformation. Walking on this sacred space in candlelight are a dozen or so people, deep in meditation. The whole setting is designed to be metaphorical, to create a gathering where it is safe to think symbolically. And when the rose petals fall, like Tin Man, Lion, and Scare Crow awakened by snow in the Wizard of Oz, all action subsides. And then, from out of the stillness, the cosmic chuckle. Lauren describes the state as luminous, an open transitional space. What is activated is an interior radiance, what religious traditions call *kairos* time.

These are the moments the future is unknown to us, requiring the search from within ourselves before stepping forward. In story after story, some version of this phenomenon was described, how the inner work of the individual and the work of the group came to be in some form of synchronization. How time and pace slowed down and group members felt, in a deep, kinesthetic way, that some important transition or healing was imminent.

In this particular story, a crying woman holds a rose petal and unbeknown to anyone else in the group, a personal healing takes place. "You see, there is a

Principle

Element of the Experience

Synchronicity

People experience a heightened sensitivity, a kind of enhanced sensory perception of their surroundings, whether in nature or within a space. Events appear to have synchronicity—a certain rhythm and timing that is meaningful to the participants in the group. People speak of having a special kind of attention, of noticing things, words, sounds, and other cues that they would not normally notice, and of receiving clear meaning from these signals. Every happening has intelligence and is seen to add value to the learning and wisdom unfolding in the group.



"There's a deep presence of heart and mind where you can tap into profound group wisdom. There's deep respect and authentic sharing and a kind of group flow state occurs, as synchronicity seems to happen more frequently."

—Deborah Vogele Welch

"The whole natural world seemed somehow to be part of what it was we were doing together."

—Glennifer Gillespie

Metaphor Cluster

Sound

silence hit the room • wake up call • dominoes toppling • music lifting off the keyboard • rattling in our cages • group hearing itself think • sonic backdrop • tuning to intention • tuning self to the group • crank up trust level • calling the circle • ideas clicking • sounding fluffy • battery of 300 compact disks • doom-doo-boo-bob-bob-da-boom • paint buckets vibrating • calling to creativity • buzzing of another order of self • listening to drive of humanity • barking up the same tree • cosmic giggles • squinting your ears to hear the whole • implosion that amplifies • voice collage • God talk • beating out a pulse in unison • humming birds • hearing Earth and trees • coming around on the groove • stuck wings squawking • rocking the world • holographic listening • aggressive listening • silence attaching to the meta-level of pace • triggering magic • self-amplifying feedback loops • vibrating chords • music as magic carpet • music changing brain chemistry • rocking chairs • synaptic inputs playing music with dendrites • applauding spaciousness •

magic that happens," Lauren recalled, "there really truly is a spirit that's trying to get our attention." The dropping of the rose petals, the candlelight, the music, all that is part of the structure and the setting, but what cannot be planned is the particular meaning of the parts in relation to each other and how they come together in the particular experience of the individual and the group. Individuals may come alone but they participate in a collective act.

Also in this pattern story we see the juxtaposition of structure and spontaneity—we witness through the story the paradox of creating psychological safety with a provocation to face the unknown. And we glimpse the power of the invitation to grasp life experience symbolically, so that every action takes place in a mythic field. The particular genius of the labyrinth, its physical and psychological structure, is how it promotes freedom. What we see again is the power of intention, in this case to create an experience of wholeness, to release grief and find courage.

Finally, we see the ability to jump categories. As the old woman of Juanita Brown's story "saw" a way to translate a power struggle into a vigil, so too did Lauren intuit a way to take a Broadway show whose intent was entertainment and "see" how it might apply to spiritual growth. Some may wonder, after the fact, why she was so uncertain about the reactions to the dramatic power of falling rose petals. Yet in the moment, a canon of a prestigious church creeping along a cat walk to throw down rose petals on unsuspecting labyrinth walkers, is an act of courage and faith. This too is part of what we discovered, acts of courage and faith that form an invisible intent surrounding and seeding transformation in groups. ■

"You can listen with a sharp focus and understand what it is you're relating to on a very specific basis. But there's also a soft focus, where you're actually able to hear the melody that's created by all the parts coming together. That melody changes as each part changes, because the melody is the sum total of everything that's present at the time. A lot of times we don't listen for that, and a lot of times we don't know it's there, and a lot of times we get stunned by the fact that we hear it, and then everything stops."

—Ysaye Barnwell





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Coyote and other Archetypal Tales:

Synchronicity, Surprise and the Unexpected Moment

(Excerpt from an edited conversation of Angeles Arrien with Alan Briskin)

“Magic happens when there is a movement in the group from opposition to paradox.”

Angeles Arrien (Angie): I think we’ve been trying to define transpersonal for years (all of us who are deeply interested). It’s the spiritual or the mysterious or that which is greater than any part. Use the word “magic.” What creates magic in us? And it’s a mystery. But I think there are choice points along the way. I think that the transpersonal is a unifying force.... Wherever there’s magic there’s delight and love. Humor. The human spirit is being moved. Moved and uplifted. I think the transpersonal is very mysterious wherever there’s breakdown. I guess it’s a call to creativity. All conflict is a call to creativity and problem solving. I also see the transpersonal as something that wants to move something forward....

I could have success by cultural standards or by family standards, yet I may still experience a divine haunting.... I think another word that people will use is “meaning.” “I’ve lost meaning”.... The human spirit always wants to make a contribution and perhaps there are not enough invitations to do so.

I think the meta conversation in every group is about inclusion and exclusion, it’s archetypal. And it’s interesting to watch the drive for inclusion and the fear of exclusion, and what that sets up as a matrix for competition or comparison, rather than cooperation and collaboration.

I keep wondering, if we could be as creative positively as we are in the shadow side. There’s a lot of human creativity going into the shadow side, and I’m struck by the possibility: if we could just put that much attention and effort, collectively, on the positive side, we could create together something empowering with such inspiration and excitement that could change the world.

Jung says that when the poles of good and evil, or the shadow and the light are very far apart, then there’s a necessity for an intermediary bridge. And [he spoke of] two symbols. One would be Pegasus, the winged horse, which was a symbol of the positive instinctual nature that knows how to move opposition into paradox. The winged horse, whose wings are the mystery—the transpersonal—and the horse, which is of the ground—the practical and knowable worlds.

Then he said also [a second symbol is] the feminine—found in every man and woman—a place where you can create a field of allurements. To magnetize, so that people will open and deepen their experience. And we can’t open and deepen our experience until we feel safe. And he says we’re never safe in polarity, but we can create safety in paradox....

Perhaps paradox is the element of surprise that always comes up in the collective. I love tracking the unexpected in a collective, because I feel that that’s the place where spirit announces itself. Because it’s beyond people’s agendas. Coyote. Trickster....

Alan Briskin: Is there something that may be particularly left out of the group that would sort of call in the trickster?

Angie: I think the trickster opens a way to transforming opposition into paradox. I think what is left out is the unifying principle... where there’s been maximum conflict in a collective, the trickster shows up.

Principle

Element of the Experience

Surprise, Mystery and Alchemy

People describe the element of surprise in their experiences—the unexpected, the unpredictable, the mysterious, the magical. They speak of this element seeming to appear out of nowhere, completely unplanned, in its own time and rhythm, and on its own terms.

Sometimes a person appears uninvited, sometimes an object is produced, or a familiar object takes on new significance; a sudden conflict erupts, or a surprising connection is made between two people that could be named “coincidence.” All of these are instinctively known by the group to have significance far beyond coincidence. Whatever form it takes, this is the appearance of the wildcard, the “joker”—also referred to as the “trickster” or “coyote”—and despite the guise of its appearance, this is the messenger of insight.



“When you’re really looking for that moment of illumination—and, of course, you can’t look for illumination, that’s the paradox! You can’t seek it out directly—that’s where magic does happen in groups.”

—Lauren Artress

“When I am present in a group, I will listen and watch for whatever seems to be around the edges of a group—places where a thought or an emotion or an insight will be touched on and then not deepened. Or where there is this kind of (*sings a note in the air*), but then there’s either a reflective move away from it—from fear or from unfamiliarity, or from a lack of recognition. That moment—if we could hang in that moment for a moment—would open something up for us that is ready to be born.”

—Rachel Bagby

Once I was in a group that had much conflict. Specifically, there was a hold-out, someone who wanted to have her way, period. And so an older gentleman said, “You know, I’m really curious about why you need to have your way.” And she said, “Because I want to be queen.”

In this group was also a princess, a true princess from Arabia, who went over to her and gave her her crown. That acknowledgment brought the whole collective down, put them in a place of delight...[the situation] polarized. It was the group, and her. Which is a coyote action...the true princess. Why would she be there? It’s just a mystery. The forces bringing these two women together to shift an opposition to a paradox. It’s always interesting when there’s a severe polarity...any investment in looking good, doing it right, having it together...a trickster is ready to catalyze people out of fear or out of pride, which are the two large impediments in group work. [Trickster] is the awakener.... “Wake up, now! You’re falling asleep.”

Commentary on Coyote and other Archetypal Tales:

Who or what is the trickster? Trickster tales, particularly Native American stories of coyote and raven, embody awakening, “reflection coming into being,” in the words of the mythologist Lewis Hyde. In Angie’s story of a group polarized, opposition between one member of the group and the rest leaves everyone stuck, a common phenomenon in groups. Sometimes the opposition is between two individuals, sometimes between sub-groups, other times polarized around issues that the group cannot solve in a satisfactory way. Something is left out, “the unifying principle” in Angie’s language. In opposition, the group is polarized between light and shadow, good and bad, right and wrong. In other words, a duality not bridged.

Magic happens when there is a movement in the group from opposition to paradox. In Angie’s story of the woman who wishes to be a princess and the princess who is, paradox is achieved metaphorically. A person says she is stuck because she wants to be treated as a princess and a real princess is present. The real princess pulls out from the folds of her dress a crown, and presents it to her. Now there are two princesses. Paradox has the quality of presenting two truths, each with its own tiara.

The shock of seeing two truths bridges opposition because it awakens us, makes us reflect, makes us wonder, “How can this be so?” In one traditional trickster tale, raven dives into the water believing plums reflected in the water will feed his belly. Instead, he raps his head on the rocks just below the water’s surface. How can this be so, thinks raven, that the appearance of plums are not the same as plums? The pain of contact with the rocks awakens raven and helps him to eventually fool other animals, using what he learned from his experience with the plums. There is delight, but only after raven takes a good knock on the head.

In our conversations with people about collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom there is often mention of the unplanned moment, the surprise, the unexpected. What makes them trickster moments is the quality of their effect on the group. A mark of trickster’s cunning is his ability to seize or block opportunity. So too in the group, where trickster dynamics can as often feel like a rap on the head as much as a slap of enlightenment. Collective intelligence is furthered when enough preparation has occurred in the group for trickster’s antics to become delight rather than frustration. In Angie’s story, something is already moving in the group, otherwise the older gentleman could not ask such a direct question, and the woman, who is so polarized from the others, could not answer in such a creative way.



Angie points to two qualities that prepare the way for movement into paradox. The first is safety, “we can’t open and deepen our experience until we feel safe.” The feminine aspect is crucial to safety in group life in the specific way it “magnetizes” and creates a field of allurements. This chemistry or quality of attraction can be between individuals or found in common interests, but however it emerges, its function is to open the inner eye so that individuals can open to and deepen their experience. Possibly it begins with a question, “Why is this so?” or “How can this be?” or simply “Tell me more.” The question magnetizes the various elements, attracting new understanding.

This kind of inquiry goes hand in hand with the flight of Pegasus. The chasm between polarities is bridged by the positive instinctual forces for compassion, empathy, knowing of a unity despite the appearance of opposites. The older gentleman asks why, the woman answers with an image of royalty and a real princess shares her crown. Only then does a group really begin to “take off,” metaphorically rising up, nestled in the wings of a mythological beast. ■

“This chemistry or quality of attraction can be between individuals or found in common interests, but however it emerges, its function is to open the inner eye so that individuals can open to and deepen their experiences.”

Principle

Significance of Gathering

Connectedness

People most often find great comfort and inspiration in group gatherings. There is a very real need for safe places where people feel welcomed; where they can come together to share feelings and experiences at a deep personal level. Places where they come to feel fully seen and heard and validated. Places where they are able to take the time to really listen to each other, to reflect together, to make sense of their experiences, and so to reach deeper levels of understanding in their own lives and for the community represented. In the group, people experience the power of being seen, being heard and understood at a very deep level; a sense of coming home, of belonging.



“People are sick of being intimidated and run by fear or pride or politics. They’re hungry—hungry for anything that’s meaningful, or a quality connection, or to create something together that everybody could get satisfaction from.”

—Angeles Arrien

“One is to be part of calling the world to cease to be fragmented and to become whole; to carry a consciousness of relationship and connection that lives the life that serves life.”

—Anne Doshier



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A Finn in Denmark:

Initiation Stories of Collective Intelligence

(Excerpt from an edited conversation of Finn Voldtofte with Sheryl Erickson.)

“The difference between the intuitive and intellectual approaches to the science of nature is illustrated metaphorically by Edwin Abbott’s story, *Flatland*. This concerns a society of creatures who inhabit a two-dimensional surface, and what happens when a sphere appears to one of them. Of course, he is unable to perceive a sphere. All that his sensory experience tells him, as the sphere passes through the plane of his existence, is that a point appears, grows into a circle of expanding diameter until this becomes a maximum size, and then shrinks back to a point again and vanishes. Evidently, what his senses tell him is an abstraction. The sphere tells him that he must go upward.

Not having any experience of ‘upward,’ he tries to interpret it at first in terms of his familiar experience with a compass as ‘northward.’ After struggling for some time with the paradox, to him, of how to go ‘upward, yet not northward,’ the sphere casts him out of Flatland into the three-dimensional world. Now he sees directly what he had previously only been able to infer by association based on his familiar experience in the two-dimensional surface. This is a transformation of his consciousness.... This can be taken as a metaphor for the restructuring of consciousness into the holistic, intuitive mode that is necessary...to make the phenomenon visible.” —Henri Bortoft

Finn Voldtofte: I use the metaphor of the relationship between the ant and the anthill and the neuron and the brain. As individuals we are like ants or like neurons—both an ant and a neuron are intelligent entities, but we are more interested in the thinking of the anthill or in the thinking of the brain. So if you are willing to participate as ants or neurons, then should we engage in the process of getting to know what the anthill thinks?

The café seminar format establishes a situation where we can have access to a flow of collective intelligence of the group. To many people this is a new reality and it takes courage to stay connected to the flow. It’s an initiation, and like many initiations, it can be scary.

I think that initiation is a situation where you are in one world and you think that this is the world and then a door opens, and you realize, oh, there’s another world there. You see the door and you are maybe a little scared or you may have resistance to go through the door, but then if you enter somehow, go through the door...you enter the new room, then you suddenly realize that actually the new room contains the old room. But now also it’s a new room. That’s an initiation.... And an initiator is one who stands in the doorway and maybe makes you feel confident that you can actually [pass through] the door. And an initiator is one with a foot in both worlds, so to speak. He can speak the language of the old world and he can speak the language of the new world....

One example that comes to mind was when I was working with disabled people, or rather an organization of disabled people. I was to arrange for a café seminar with representatives of the organizations of disabled people, and architects and city planners and people working with training architects and with buildings and things like that. The issues were about accessibility to public spaces.

Principle

Element of the Experience

Storytelling

People share their stories—the stories that have deep meaning to them personally, and are also directly reflective of the issues they have come together to address. This storytelling occurs in many forms and has many names: “stringing the beads” in Native American tradition, or *cognosiniento* in the Spanish tradition—to create knowledge and awareness. In the telling of what is true for them, in the sharing of what is most deeply authentic, there begins a kind of softening and release—a collective sigh of recognition that though the stories are very different, the feelings are the same. This sharing of experience begins to remove many of the obstacles to collective forward movement.



“We begin by developing knowledge of each other, by doing *cognosiniento*.
More *cognosiniento*, more trust.
More trust, more unity. More unity,
more shared power.”

—Roberto Vargas

“Social change occurs often because of a small group of people who come together and start talking about the things they really care about. And suddenly because of the passion that’s involved, there’s a shared purpose and they get more people involved, and it becomes a movement. For example, solidarity in Poland grew in just a few weeks from less than a dozen concerned people to over nine million people organizing together.”

—Tenneson Woolf

The seminar was in Copenhagen. And in the planning of the whole thing, the atmosphere was hostile. There was no need for two groups of people to talk with each other, but to argue with each other. [They] were not able to take each other’s point of view and perspectives and understand each other. And definitely not able to work together....

The invitation was from the Minister of City and Environment. She personally invited everyone and was there in the room welcoming people [as they came in]. She stayed there together with another Minister, and they took part in the dialogue. So, by their presence they signaled that this was to be taken seriously.

The café dialogue evolved around having a chance, through conversation [to ask], “How does the question of accessibility touch on our lives and our professions?” They were speaking completely out of “this is how I see the world” from personal experience. Having the conversations around these experiences enabled the people—there were 100 in the room, including some politicians and ministers and secretaries of state—to overcome their past patterns of behavior in the way they talked with each other. And as a side effect, they agreed to have another kind of meeting to coordinate activities and agree on budgets and finances and things like that. Even though it was not the intention, they made actions. They made agreements about how they wanted to act and cooperate in the future.... They shared the knowledge of each other’s perspective—“I know that you know that this is my perspective....”

This was one and half years ago and it has turned out that they actually did what they said they wanted to do. They did change their behavior.

Commentary on A Finn in Denmark:

Finn uses the metaphor of the relationship of the ant to the anthill and the neuron to the brain. Both the ant and the neuron have intelligence in their own way, but the collective intelligence of the anthill or the thinking of the brain has greater complexity and greater capacity for action. Finn compares the personal experience to the awareness of a mind screen in which one can see the whole projected. The shift in consciousness is an orientation to the whole, to a curiosity about what the whole looks like, which is tremendously compelling once we become aware of this holistic, intuitive mode. The ant does not know that it is part of the anthill, the neuron does not have free will, but human beings have some flicker of capacity to see the whole, understand they are influenced by it, and act in ways that make them participants, co-creators of its form. When “you get that feeling [of experiencing and relating] to the collective intelligence, that you’re right now taking part in creating it, then that keeps you in that flow. You want to stay there.” This description of a flow, an interior experience of creativity, an awareness of expanded scope, parallels what we heard time and again from those we listened to. The initiation has the quality of shifting our perspective into something as practical as seeing through another’s eyes, and as significant as the restructuring of a consciousness capable of glimpsing the whole. The café makes the phenomenon more visible.

What Finn emphasizes, and what makes this such an important pattern story, is the need and practicality of this vantage point to public life. No one had to testify to transformed consciousness to become a vital part of the process. In this and other stories of engaging the collective intelligence, participants had access to richer data, could seek “very practical and doable advice, useful within the context of a political framework, with its budgets and its special planning procedures and decision procedures...to help the city government.” In other words, the larger framework of synergy and magic in groups that we explore in this book does not have to be shared at a theoretical level for the experience to be relevant and valuable.

Metaphor Cluster

Doorways

portal • the in-between world • opening the door • threshold experience • suspension bridges of thought • crossing thresholds into ideas • gateways to capacities • having a foot in both worlds • dialogue as a key to being in the world • co-portalling • walking into a jungle naked • shuffling and side-stepping • vibrating open • hitting the wall of a system • a roof getting ready to open up a wall in thought • blocked meridian • eye of the needle • secret door • sticky wicket • key practices • catapult into a new realm • coming to the end of our time keys • willingness to enter the mystery • veil separating us from oneness • ramp into experience • cusp of touching • recoiling in horror while reveling in curiosity • chasm between people • a person serving as a catalyzing gate • opening to the sensuous • separateness stretched as far as we could stretch it • bombproof field • stepping into the sacred • burning sage to open a window into time • blackballed • making music as a window into behavior • pushing the boundary • when the outside and inside match, a person is supported • using symbols as doorways to understanding •

In Finn's tale of the potentially hostile meeting, invitation and initiation are both vital. The personal invitation extended by the Minister of City and Environment was critical, as were her physically welcoming people and participating fully. Another form of invitation was the framework of the meeting: a dialogue whose purpose was understanding—to build on each other's experience without an assumption of agreement, to listen without the necessity of action.

The personal nature of the question, "From out of your own life experience, what do you know about accessibility to buildings and public spaces?" created a third type of invitation. The question helped create a field of allurements, magnetizing random events and personal reactions into a common inquiry: How might 100 separate stories demonstrate both diversity and coherence associated with the question? What themes, dilemmas, paradoxes do we confront together? By attending to the personal first, the group became a setting for receptivity to the multi-dimensional nature of their task, a shift from the two-dimensional plane of advocacy or debate to something three-dimensional, downward toward interior experience, upward into what might be the common good. The fact that the event catalyzed a group to sustained effort suggests a shift in consciousness among some or many of the participants.

Beyond the invitation then is the initiation. Finn suggests the café setting is about form and logistics—what kinds of tables and chairs are needed, what question is put forward, who is invited—but beyond that is an induction into a "field of consciousness...that informs the process of the people in it." The field is brought into existence, it emerges, often beginning in small ways and then intensifying. In other words, the field comes into being from the intent of the conveners and the participation of the members, as much as it is created from form or logistics. Collective intelligence, like the sphere in Abbott's story of the movement from two dimensions to three, has multi-dimensionality and scope.

What may need also to be understood is that this initiation, like most initiations, comes with resistance and fear—it's scary. Finn noted that the resistance can come in any form—to the room, to the question, to leadership. We should be cautious, therefore, because the shift can be unsettling, unfamiliar, raise personal questions of competence, and collective fears about direction. Collective intelligence is not a solution or a "thing" but a process of unfoldment, a faith that wisdom can emerge if courage and commitment to a higher good is sustained.

Through this unfoldment, both conscious and unconscious aspects of collective intelligence emerge. The collective conscious aspect concerns the diversity of experience articulated by participants and the emergence of the collective thinking of the group—patterns and themes become more apparent and visible. They are by nature about what individuals and groups can consciously address.

The collective unconscious aspect of collective intelligence manifests through the symbolic and mythic nature of groups, the archetypal patterns and universal themes explored in some of the earlier stories. These too can become conscious and visible, but must be addressed through more indirect paths, the labyrinth being one example, but also including reflection and activities that invite mystery. The capacity of a group to reflect deeply on the assumptions held by group members is one vehicle for this kind of inquiry, and the subject of our next story. ■





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From Lacrosse to Healing Our Species:

Thought Passing Toward a Goal

(Excerpt from an edited
conversation of Tom
Callanan with John Ott)

Tom Callanan: During college I was a member of Middlebury College's lacrosse team. During my senior year, we were playing Williams College for the New England championship. I'd read about sports teams entering "the zone," but I'd never really experienced it until that game. From the opening whistle we entered this space that seemed like everything was happening in slow motion. Roy would win the face-off, and I knew where he was going to run and where he would pass to me. And I'd move in that direction, and he'd make the pass just as I'd seen it. I would turn, and I knew exactly where A.J. would be for my pass, and then for his shot on goal. In that first five minutes we scored five unanswered goals. Not only did it seem like the moves of my teammates were scripted, but it also felt like the other team was somehow participating in the dance as well, like I knew where they would be as well. The whole thing had this incredible, magical quality to it. I don't know how it was broken. Perhaps after we got so far ahead and realized what was going on, and became enamored with it or something, I can't really say. What I can say is that I will remember that five minutes for the rest of my life.

Commentary on From Lacrosse to Healing Our Species:

There is a Lakota Sioux war chant, that translated means "the spirit goes ahead of us." It was the warrior's expression of being at peace with oneself and a recognition that we are not isolated from the rest of the universe. There are times in groups when a synchronization kicks in and we experience ourselves as part of an unfolding unity. These moments, in Tom's words, are "magical." Tom sensed a flow and movement, as if "scripted," and even the actions of the other team seemed as part of the unity he experienced. Thought and action were revealed to be connected and only when they appeared again as apart, "perhaps...we realized what was going on, and became enamored..." did the spell lift.

The physicist, David Bohm, makes this same point in his reflections on his own development as a scientist and philosopher: "I see that even as a child I was fascinated by the puzzle, indeed the mystery, of what is the nature of movement. Whenever one thinks of anything, it seems to be apprehended either as static, or as a series of static images. Yet, in the actual experience of movement, one senses an unbroken, undivided process of flow, to which the series of static images in thought is related as a series of 'still' photographs might be related to the actuality of a speeding car."

What enables an apprehension of wholeness and movement? What conditions are necessary? How is our own puzzling about the nature of movement related to thinking and in a larger sense, to the nature of reality? As with Finn's experience of the world café, there is this initiation point in which a part becomes aware of the whole. How does this pattern reveal and replicate itself in different groups settings?

In the interview, Tom talks about some of his initial assumptions. His lacrosse experience, though not uncommon in sports, is still a rare event. His team was relatively homogeneous, its focus assured by the nature of intergroup competition, its discipline determined by years of practice with each other. Although he is left with an experience that he will remember for a lifetime, there is the possibility that the experience will remain isolated, a fond memory in a sea of static images. For Tom, as for all of us, some group experiences will be better than others, more focused than others, more personally meaningful than others—but Tom recounts this story because he suspects its an initiation into another way of "knowing." What was it he glimpsed?

Let's continue with a second story from Tom, years later...

Tom Callanan: I had another experience of group synergy in Essex, Massachusetts, at an *Introduction to Dialogue* training by Glenna Gerard and Linda Ellinor. There were about 30 participants in the group—mostly women, a number of lesbian women, a number of women of color, and four white men including myself. It was one of the most diverse groups I'd ever been a part of. And when I first came into the circle, I thought, "Gee," the last thing I was expecting was an experience of group unity. My assumption was that the more homogenous the group, the more well practiced, the more like a traditional tribe or family or sports team, the more likely you're going to get group synergy. And the more diverse—the more difficult it would be.

Indeed, for the first three days, I struggled and we struggled. We'd been working on the building blocks of dialogue, of "suspending judgment" and "questioning our assumptions" and "deep listening" and "waiting for the call to speak" and "looking for a sense of shared meaning coming from the group." And it just wasn't happening. We were trying too hard, like thinking too much about your tennis swing and not letting it happen.

On the fourth frustrating day, this woman began telling a story about a relationship—a very painful story. It was very personal and intimate. I couldn't imagine telling that kind of story in that group, but she did it. Her courage took the whole group.... It was almost like you could feel the energy of the group sinking to a deeper level as we sat like trusted friends around this woman as she opened her heart. I remember her crying, and many people in the circle were crying with her. We'd been trained through dialogue to not come in and try to rescue her, or fix her, or run away from the moment by intellectualizing, or changing the subject to something lighter. So we just sat with her.

This woman did an amazing thing. She asked a question about relationships that invited us all into the inquiry with her. Rather than just plopping her story down and saying, "poor me," she said, "Here's my story, and the story is in service of a question that I'd like to put at the center of this gathering."

Answering her call and her courage, another woman stepped forward and told her story. It was different, but still within the realm of relationships, and what she offered deepened the inquiry. Then another person stepped forward, and another, and another, telling their stories and offering their experiences and questions. I got this sense that there was a stew that we were making together, a stew called "an inquiry into relationship." There was this cauldron in the center of the circle and into which each of us was throwing our piece of cauliflower, or broccoli, or meat.

It became more than just a story-trading session. It was like we were all leaning forward and smelling the stew. Did it need something conceptual, or an image, or another story? If we had what it needed, we offered it without rehearsal. Every once in awhile, someone would throw in something weird, something from left field. But then, after a few other people would speak, we'd realize that the weird comment was the essential spice for our conversation.

All this happened within the period of about an hour, maybe two. From the outside it might have looked like just a group of people talking. But it was totally magical. Toward the end, I would say something, and somebody across the room would say, "You know, I was thinking the same thing." And

Principle

Element of the Experience

Movement of the Whole

People describe times in the group when the boundaries normally experienced between them seem to dissolve. At these times, people seem to make the deliberate choice not to see their interests as separate from anyone else's, and in so doing, they begin to experience the sweetness of unity, and the harmonious forward movement of the whole. The gathering settles into a graceful and profound flow of communication, understanding, and knowing with all present. There is no loss of identity, rather there is a heightened sense of each one's essential part in the whole, and a rightness about every word that is offered and every action that is taken. This is a liberating formation in which people are able to practice knowing their sameness, and simultaneously offering their unique gifts.



"It's not like the separateness is lost, but the separateness exists within a wholeness, rather than just as separateness."

—Red Pele

"You are speaking more from the emerging whole, more from the center of the circle, rather than as a single individual within the circle."

—Otto Scharmer

"And when I did speak it was almost egoless, like it wasn't really me. It was, in a way, something larger than me [that] was speaking through me."

—Beth Jandemoa

"Funny, we spend all this time trying to bridge with others, trying to touch. We build these amazing suspension bridges between our little nodules, trying to make connections across our differences, when actually, if we were to sink down into the water of our collective consciousness of which we are all an essential part, we'd meet and bridge each other effortlessly."

then they'd follow with something that had just entered my mind. And I'd have the sense for who would speak next, and they would. It was very much like the lacrosse experience. I remember sitting forward in my seat spell-bound and listening harder and deeper than I ever had in my life. Listening with my whole body. New thoughts began coming to me about the nature of relationship that I'd never had before. I'd never really thought about what a new thought looks and feels like. [My past assumption was] you basically have the same number of thoughts like letters of the alphabet and you just recirculate them or combine them in different ways.

I often struggle with my participation in groups. I question the value of my thoughts. I rehearse what I want to say; I second guess myself; and then I often step forward very tentatively. But in this circle I knew instinctively what my offering was. And I knew that if I didn't add it, the ball would be dropped, the stew would suffer. When I spoke, I was clear, confident, and uncensored.... I felt more essentially myself. I imagine that others were feeling the same way. Everyone had something to offer. Our diversity wasn't just tolerated, or even honored—it was essential.

This is where things got interesting. In the past, I've juxtaposed individual and community. If you join a community, you have to compromise, or become more homogenous with the rest of the group. You have to give up some of your individuality or freedom. You quiet your voice a bit. But here, I was feeling so powerful and unique and, at the same time, so much a part of this very diverse group. The two (individual and group) seemed to grow hand in hand. And, unlike my experience with lacrosse, we barely knew each other. We were unpracticed novices at dialogue. We were as heterogeneous as they come.

In retrospect, I imagine that our group had somehow tapped into our shared mind or collective consciousness. David Bohm said that we exist in a sea of thought and emotion, almost as if we are walking around within this fabric of shared consciousness. I had assumed that this meant some kind of a mechanistic phenomenon. As in—my consciousness meets yours and others and, if we get along, we have group consciousness. I asked two researchers in the area of consciousness research about this and they said that actually collective consciousness is primary, and individual consciousness comes out of this sea, almost as little nodules that pop up. Funny, we spend all this time trying to bridge with others, trying to touch. We build these amazing suspension bridges between our little nodules, trying to make connections across our differences, when actually, if we were to sink down into the water of our collective consciousness of which we are all an essential part, we'd meet and bridge each other effortlessly. What seems to happen in these magical groups is that with twenty individuals, "one plus one plus one plus one" doesn't equal twenty—it equals more than that. Something emerges in the center of the group. That's alchemy.

I'd experienced this sense of unity and connection before with meditation practice. I know that meditation is a powerful tool for healing and purifying individual consciousness. Could it be that what we were practicing at Essex was a social form of meditation aimed at healing our collective consciousness? This sounds so esoteric, but what I do know, and what I felt deep in my body, was that something very important was revealing itself at Essex, not just for me but for our species. Could it be that this particular dynamic and practice of coming together across differences, while simultaneously becoming more uniquely ourselves, is a fractal for a new way of being in

the world? What would happen to our society if we began to discover that we were knit together, not just through forces of kinship or ideology or culture or nation, but through a shared collective consciousness that cuts across all boundaries of race, ethnicity, culture, etc.?

Commentary on From Lacrosse to Healing Our Species: (continued)

Tom's second story harmonizes with the first in its sense of movement, each highlighting the experience of flow. In the game of lacrosse, the physical object of the ball makes visible the movement of the players interacting. Tom's description of the game includes both the physical connections of players to each other as well as the flow dictated by the impersonal task—making or defending the goal. There emerges, in moments, an exquisite coherence and rightness to each action. In his group experience, a similar pattern of coherence emerges as members begin to experience resonance with each other and then collectively begin to create meaning.

Bohm's image of dialogue begins with his description of the word itself, as a "river of meaning flowing around and through the participants." Thoughts, passed back and forth between members, take on direction and meaning. What is revealed in dialogue is the hidden connections that lie around and through participants—the way our past experience informs our thoughts and the way our thoughts impact each other. This different way of knowing has the effect of healing, not because of any direct attempt to remove emotional blocks from any one participant, but as a consequence of becoming aware of a connection to a larger "implicate order" surrounding and including us. The "aha" of this experience can feel magical, as if the events are scripted ahead of time. Paradoxically, the experience can also feel utterly spontaneous and synchronistic, as when an individual having a thought hears it voiced by another member, almost instantaneously.

What else can we make of the pattern of Tom's story? How does it inform us about this aspect of collective intelligence? Tom began with some assumptions about homogeneity and continuity. How could a group in which there was both diversity and relatively new relationships among members be expected to achieve synergy and shared meaning? He found that these criteria were not only peripheral but that the diversity of experience acted as substance and spice for the stew that was being created together. He wondered how a group not practiced in a common discipline, so different than his lacrosse team, could achieve deeper connection with the task. He discovered that being "practiced" was a function of opening to the wisdom of the group rather than any specific skills. And he assumed that creativity was predominantly a personal experience or a recirculation of existing thoughts. He came to see how creativity could be experienced at a collective level and that thoughts not previously held could appear both internal to the individual and with others. What is also suggested by Tom's story is that understanding is not necessarily a bridge between different people or experiences but a dropping down together into the waters of collective consciousness. The imagery of water here suggests that collective consciousness can include unconscious material not immediately available to the ego state.

How did this occur? We know that a group invited to give serious attention to a task but without a clear direction or detectable leadership can experience anxiety, frustration, and annoyance. This is clearly evident in Tom's description of struggle for their first three and a half days. Often during this period individuals attempt to give the group direction or wonder if they should leave. Often members discover and reveal unacknowledged needs and purposes that open the group to opposition or polarization among members. During these times, issues such as superficiality vs. depth or real work vs. process or even depth vs. spontaneous action can appear insurmountable and projections between members can begin to take hold. The group is sustained by these

Principle

Significance of Gathering

Re-membering

People are drawn together in groups to remember who they really are. To re-member, meaning to join, to become whole, to fill the place where a part was missing. There is a part in each person that has not forgotten that we are one, and so there is a natural desire in each of us to return, and to experience again the joy of being a part of the whole. This cannot be accomplished individually and separately. We are required to join with each other, literally in group gatherings, and also across distances—to level the playing field, remembering for each other, enabling all to experience joining in one mind and one spirit.



"There is a level where all—where you, I, God—are one, and are trying to respond to the need that Earth has to heal herself. The world is under blessed, the country is under blessed. I think that's so vital, that if we could create an atmosphere in which giving blessing would be easy and natural, it would be such a joy!"

—Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

"We've stretched separateness as far as we can stretch it. And we've learned the gift of it, because it clearly is a gift. And now we're coming back to the realm of oneness and collectiveness."

—Red Pele

Metaphor Cluster

Water and Fluid

questions spilling over • developing pool of common meaning • carrier wave of communication • dipping into words • cleansing the group • owning the alchemy of water in the mixing bowl • sea of possibilities • joining streams of experience • I was cold, not so deep into flow • ripple effect • a water crunch • philosophical juice • pools of resources • dialogue as shared flow-through • rivers cleaning themselves • priming the pump for creativity • a sea of thought and emotion • sting of indictment washed through me • the bottom percolates and bubbles up • a vortex like a tornado • large questions in floating conversations • a sponge with listening nodules • the place of the juice • plunging • islands of privacy • channel of intention • a pool of data • dark moving silences on the river • hearing the whole is like a flood • freeze him out of the group • in the same boat • infused with nourishing humanity • sensitive to currents under the surface • being in waterfall's gushing power • cloudiness in a group • stirring memories • blowing people out of the water • going down a rapid into a hole in the water that was so much more • structured time evolving fluidly •

conflicts to a point and tilts between resignation and creativity. And then, as Tom's story illustrates, a shift can take place.

In this pattern story, the shift revolves around a personal story placed into the center of the circle by a participant. What is significant about the story is that it was understood as both personal and an invitation to a larger inquiry—in Tom's words, "the amazing thing about her story was...a question that suggested something larger...the door to other people's stories, inviting other people in to join her in an inquiry around the nature of relationship...." Coming at just the right moment it catalyzed a movement into a developing pool of common meaning. The emotional truth of her story resonated through the group and ushered in further stories. Instead of helping or rescuing the woman, others began to take off their own masks, an experience one of our interviewees described as "authentic nakedness."

This shift, what some describe as the emergence of group mind, allows for a new level of creativity and insight, unavailable to individuals or groups reacting in more familiar ways. Patrick de Mare called this aspect of dialogue *koinonia*, a word meaning impersonal fellowship and which might be understood as the moment when partnering and initial self governance is achieved—as a consequence of the persona or personal mask being let down.

This period of increased coherence is immensely seductive and it is the period during which group members report a "high" or experience taking off into new discoveries. Group members can feel a tremendous sense of belonging, security, and personal renewal. However, it can also be an obstacle to further development. As group members wish to hold onto the experience or recreate it everywhere they go, they can subtly block the group's reentry into confusion, uncertainty, and anxiety—energetic elements that often precede discoveries of new depths. Bohm writes that only in persisting with the discipline of dialogue, its cyclic movement from incoherence to coherence and back again, do the more subtle realms of understanding reveal themselves. Parallel in ways to Tom's speculation about his lacrosse experience, the ego's awareness of having scored five goals can bring a halt to the flow. We might also speculate that the experience of flow cannot be sustained without intermittent periods of disorder.

Finally, what might we say about Tom's intuition that this initial experience was a fractal pointing to the possibility that shared meaning might be a force for healing and hope across divergent aspects of society? Bohm's interest in dialogue was not to champion one method but to make visible the possibility of achieving shared meaning, of healing the fragmentation of thought that he believed lay behind the disputes and violence that marked modern societies. In essence, the group is a cauldron in which choices are made. At one extreme, it is a bubbling cauldron heated by warring factions, power, history, and the illusion of separateness. Yet the cauldron can also be a place for discovery, spiced by diversity but fueled by a common search for an underlying unity. Where does one look for evidence of this aspect of groups? How does one prepare groups to sustain the uncertainty and anxiety so fundamental to the process? Why bother? We only know that this different way of knowing marks those who have experienced it and leaves them transformed. One observation is that the specialness associated with this transformation does not feel exclusive of others or personal as in simply wanting more. Though this can be the case, there is more often a sense of urgency, a premonition that one is being called, and a feeling that one is in service to something larger than oneself. ■





Art Blocks: How They Came to Be

"In thinking about my own experience of the phenomenon of collective intelligence, I was struck by the pronounced authenticity and individuality of the group's members that seem to be critical components for the magic to flow. The twelve canvases that emerged, therefore, each represent the unique essence of an individual and are designed to come

together in a multitude of possible combinations to form new compositions over and over again. As the form of the composition shifts, a new panel begins to draw the eye's focus much as a new, and perhaps unexpected, member of the group organically comes forward as the channel for the collective intelligence to flow in that particular moment."

—Margaret Vaughan





"Art does not reproduce the visible. It renders visible."

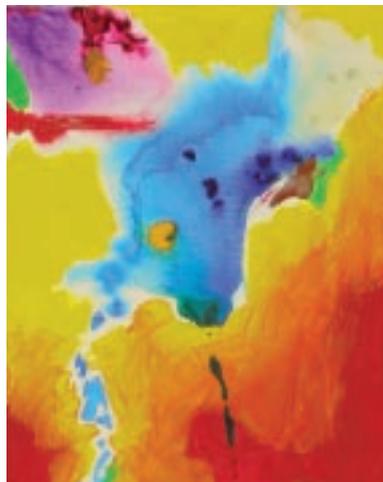
—Paul Klee



"What would it be like to have not only color vision but culture vision, the ability to see the multiple worlds of others?"

"If we can find ways of responding as individuals to multiple patterns of meaning, enriching rather than displacing those traditional to any one group, this can make a momentous difference to the well-being of individuals and the fate of the Earth."

—Mary Catherine Bateson



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Metaphor Cluster

Containers in Space and Time

cauldron • holding a group as a whole • zone of creation • an abyss as a grand adventure • fractal zone • field within field within field • umbrella of collective meaning • being a hollow bone • circles of stakeholders • mind-encompassing horizons • group field as container, crucible • veins of gold • kinetic fields • magic in the middle • synchronicity • field of the natural world • ego solar system • invisible territory • deep into the hole of denial • putting consciousness into fields of science and education • coin does not separate from its sides • pseudo-pods • educated boxes • underbelly of group • labyrinth • ripe time • embracing a field • regular zone • zone of healing • group as art form • role of an outfit • pockets of change • mushrooming fields • computer stuck in sleep mode • co-habitants on planet • new language of whole • sensing the timeless • deep time • vertical time for just being in • Earth as classroom • burning sage to open a window in time so our ancestors and unborn children can be present • bottomless pit • labyrinth bringing in the old mind • coming to the end of our time • altering trajectory of history •



© Joan Lederman

"Told to me by a geophysicist: This ocean sediment, which I use as ceramic glaze, in millions of years will become magma that will erupt as Earth's new crust. Here is that cyclical process shown in microcosm, in the bottom of this stoneware bowl. The patterns on this bowl self-organized in the kiln during firing and emerged after cooling."

—Joan Lederman

Alan Briskin: Where is your sense of urgency, something that has been preoccupying you? Something that you are fighting with, against, on behalf of, but something moving in you that maybe is our starting point?

Tom Hurley: At the Institute of Noetic Sciences, I had many opportunities to explore the kinds of questions we're concerned with here in diverse group settings and with a variety of really wonderful and talented people. I learned an enormous amount in that context, for which I'm very grateful. But one of the issues that always arose was: "What do you do with any of it?" In a way, that's the challenge that defines my work right now.

It's actually not very hard, in my view, to convene groups and facilitate processes that enable people to have deeply moving and significant experiences that open them to spirit, to the transpersonal, to an experience of collective intelligence, or to other experiences of heightened insight or emotion. So what? And when I say "so what," I don't mean to minimize the value of those experiences, because I think they are extraordinarily valuable, especially for people who are moving from one world of experience into another world of experience...or who are on the cusp of a breakthrough in the transformation of their inner or outer lives.

As an initiation or threshold experience, I think those kinds of processes and experiences are very valuable. Obviously they're valuable in an ongoing way, as well—we all need continually to renew and open ourselves. But eventually I ended up feeling that it was like eating nothing but rich desserts all the time. So I became most interested in how you could marry or integrate that kind of inquiry, that kind of expansive experience, with very focused attention on particular issues and real-world opportunities.

Now to the present. The Chaordic Alliance works with groups that are trying to design or redesign entire organizations. As a generalization, I would hazard that in any given group we meet with, perhaps a quarter of the people at the table would be comfortable with the kind of language and ideas that we're here to talk about. I can talk about "dialogue," I can talk about "process guidelines," and I can talk about "exploring deep personal values and beliefs," but specifically talking about "spiritual wisdom" would be foreign at best and raise serious obstacles to the work in other cases.

So what interests me is how we can foster similar kinds of deep experience and insight, how we can promote the synergy of the individual and the group, without encumbering the process with language that's going to be uncomfortable for people. Or without insisting on certain kinds of group activities or processes that might be uncomfortable or alien. Not that I'm unwilling to challenge people to extend themselves and take risks, because I challenge people in that way all the time.

Then the question is, how do we do this in a way that serves the end of actually accomplishing something specific in relation to a particular company, organization or community? That not only helps us create a wonderful new vision for organization, but that actually helps us think through all the hard issues around power, resource flows and function in the organization, that helps us conceive an organizational structure to serve as an immune system against re-centralization of power and wealth, and that helps us draft a constitution for that group that will provide a real foundation for their work.

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The Cauldron and the Crystal:

Awakening to the Truth of Our Experience

(Excerpt from an edited conversation of Tom Hurley with Alan Briskin)

"...We are living in a period where the membrane between worlds is thinning. Many more people are becoming more transparent to spirit or to the transpersonal, I believe that there is a deeper, wider and greater intelligence and wisdom that is available to us, and that there's nothing esoteric about it. It's fundamental, and it's available to us in our essential experience as human beings."

Personally and professionally I'm asking myself: How do I bring these streams of experience and interests together? An interest in how we open to deeper, more essential sources of wisdom and love, an interest in how we bring the truth of our personal realities into dynamic, creative harmony with the truths of others, and an interest in how we integrate what we discover—who we become—with the work of transforming the systems and structures of our organizations, institutions and communities.

In my view, we are living in a period where the membrane between worlds is thinning. Many more people are becoming more transparent to spirit or to the transpersonal, however one defines that. Now, there are a host of questions around the positive and negative, or helpful and unhelpful, manifestations of that transparency. Because there are risks in the experience of other domains of experience.

What do I mean when I say that "the membrane is thinning?" It's a view that I first encountered in the Celtic tradition, which holds that on sacred days such as All Hallows' Eve, the membrane between this world and others thins so that we have greater access to the luminous, to the paranormal, to magic, to grace.

As a culture, I think, we in the United States do not understand the transpersonal or the realms of spirit very well. Meaning we don't understand the powers that characterize that realm, and we are largely bereft of systematic disciplines for exploring those realms in sustained, intelligent and reliable ways. So we often don't understand very well what we make ourselves available to when we start working with some of the processes that we're interested in today.

Without speaking in terms of any particular theology, I'll just say that in my personal experience there are powers that are present, and that we can open ourselves to, that are trans-human and that cannot be understood entirely in terms of the frameworks of human experience. I'm reluctant to characterize them as good or bad, positive or negative, but they clearly are not always "good" in purely human, moral, or ethical terms. Some discrimination is called for in our relationship to these forces.

As we open ourselves to these forces, the way they manifest (through our personality or our psychological structures) makes for a very mixed bag of experience and behavior. We have a lot of learning to do collectively about how to open ourselves to these realms in a healthy way—to heal ourselves of the wounds that we've experienced—to be able increasingly to rest in the presence of spirit and to be more transparent to it in ways less conditioned by our history. That, of course, is a huge topic by itself.

In any event, the membrane is thinning. I believe that there is a deeper, wider and greater intelligence and wisdom that is available to us, and that there's nothing esoteric about it. It's fundamental, and it's available to us in our essential experience as human beings. The challenge is how to make ourselves available to that, to express that in our daily lives, to give that experience form in our daily lives and work, in ways that actually create viable alternatives to the day-to-day relationships, organizational structures, institutional systems, cultural lifeways and life-destroying worldviews that are pervasive right now.

Alan Briskin: What is the feeling that I'm picking up, as you're describing this awakening, this re-immersion?

Tom Hurley: Perhaps you're picking up on my own emergent sense that the only way I can go forward is to marry these two strains that I was talking

Principle

Significance of Gathering

Synergy

People come together because they instinctively know that no one person has all the answers. They know that each person holds a piece of the story, and that coming together to listen to each others stories gains everyone an understanding far greater than their own. It is this synthesis of the whole that opens up the portal to the implicit—enabling the inflow of spiritual wisdom into the group.



"People who were really struggling with situations would come to incredible insights in the group energy, and it wasn't in the advice that was being given. It was that they really came in touch with a deeper kind of wisdom in the midst of the group."

—Deborah Vogele Welch

"In that space we started to say things that we never had thought before and started to let ourselves be influenced in ways and think in ways that we had never thought before. When someone would speak, something would become illuminated. Something would be revealed, and that would open up something else to be revealed."

—Beth Jandernoa

"There's a kind of amplitude of human capacity that arises in the collective that's very difficult and may, in many cases, be impossible for us to discover on our own."

—Michael Jones

about earlier—the spiritual strain, if I can call it that, and the practical strain. I have a growing conviction that we have to find ways of embodying our spiritual intelligence and wisdom in real, practical, useful and generative organizational and institutional forms and relationships, as well as in our personal lives and interpersonal relationships.

Specifically, then, I have to find a way to integrate those streams for myself, so that I again have a sense that my whole being is fully engaged and committed to moving this process forward. Whatever leadership I provide in my own organization or in the groups with which we work must be informed by every dimension of my being, must call on and engage every center of knowing, creativity and expression. You may also be hearing my sense of not knowing, my dwelling with the uncertainty that attends being on the edge of any grand adventure—or abyss—like this. And where I stand right now has the qualities of being both an abyss and a grand adventure.

Alan Briskin: What I heard earlier was, "for once and for all there has to be some way of coming up against issues of power and resources."

Tom Hurley: Absolutely.

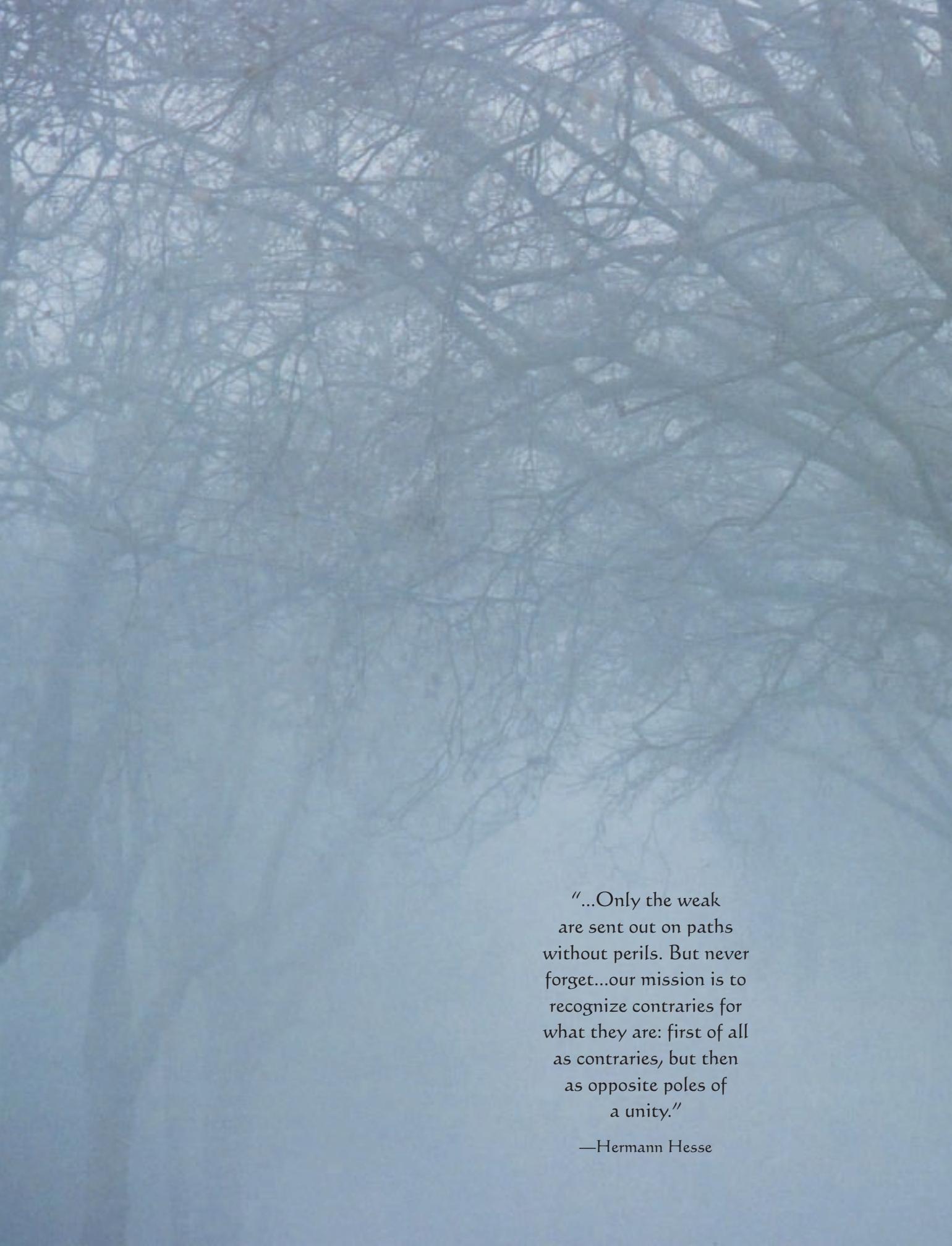
Alan Briskin: That we should be cautious in how we use spirit, or even conceptions like abundance, to mask what people struggle and kill over—which is access to resources, which is power in all its minute capillary forms.

Tom Hurley: Absolutely. There are tremendous forces at work in the world not guided by the kinds of values that you and I share. Those forces command enormous resources and enormous organizational and institutional power. The continuing centralization of power and resources that's taking place in the corporate world especially should be of tremendous concern to us all. Now, there is growing recognition in many of these circles that social responsibility, ecological sustainability and the human dimensions of organization must be made central. By and large, however, the center of gravity of our most powerful corporate, governmental and other public institutions has not shifted substantially enough to make a significant difference—in the time in which I think we have to start making a significant difference—if we want to have a beautiful, abundant world for our children and grandchildren.

At one level, what's needed is rigorous truth-telling about the realities in the world, the choices we face, and the paths that we have available to us for moving forward—for I do feel that there are very attractive pathways forward that offer enormous promise. I also think there are active efforts to make them appear less viable than they are, or to undercut their efficacy, and all of that needs to be addressed.

But at the same time that I believe there needs to be rigorous truth-telling, I would emphasize that we need to cultivate enormous compassion. It would be a huge mistake, as we take the next steps, to vilify anybody. Because in my view, most people want to do the right thing when possible, when they perceive themselves as having real choices. Of course, the "right thing" means very different things for different people, and that is precisely what we need processes to work with.

I take the view that we're making an enormous mistake if we think that any one group of people represents the hope for the world. I think we all have to be part of remaking our world, and that an essential and central part of that remaking of the world is reweaving the web of relationships that will sustain the world, finding ways not to carve the world up into groups that we then characterize as more or less right, more or less valuable, and so forth.



“...Only the weak
are sent out on paths
without perils. But never
forget...our mission is to
recognize contraries for
what they are: first of all
as contraries, but then
as opposite poles of
a unity.”

—Hermann Hesse

"What the work required was just sitting down with these individuals day after day and getting them to tell their stories, to talk about the truth of their experience. Which not only included the truth of their day-to-day work at sea or on land, but the truth of their lives as husbands, as parents, as sons and daughters, as citizens, and as members of a community whose health and vitality was threatened."

For me spirituality is not about a special experience. It's not the province of people who think in a particular way, who have a particular view, or who have studied with a particular teacher. Spirit is something that permeates and transcends every element of this reality, every particle of this world, every aspect of who we are. When I talk about becoming more transparent to spirit, I'm really talking about becoming more transparent to and expressive of our basic nature, the ground of reality.

It's our willingness to acknowledge, to express, and to work with the truth of our basic experience that is the most important work that any of us can be doing at any time—those often fumbling and imperfect attempts to understand, express, and work with the truth of our basic experience. Because the gifts of spirit most often flourish when we are most fully in contact with our basic nature and the truth of our essential experience. Spirit—I don't even know how to characterize it appropriately...a healing force, an intelligent presence, a creative energy, a generative source...is always offering the opportunity to heal and become more whole, more alive and more engaged in both an individual and collective sense.

I've come to feel that the essence of being human is our continually working with the creative tension between these pulls in different directions upon us. Whether we think about this in terms of good and evil, self and other, individual and community, freedom and belonging—or whatever apparent dualities we use to construct our experience—it's the dynamic, evolving relationship between them that's important. We're not called to reduce one to the other, but to blend them in some continually creative synthesis.

One way to understand the essence of our work...is [to recognize] that it involves the reconciliation of seeming dualities in a greater whole that transcends and enfolds them. And for me, this occurs through our listening to the call towards something more unifying, more whole, more seamless, if you will—something without a form that we can ever define, I think, and something fundamentally mysterious—something "not one, not two," as the saying goes. That's what intrigues me....

Alan Briskin: Tell me a story. Tell me about an organization. Tell me something that captures for you what we just described about sitting in reality, sitting with the tensions.

Tom Hurley: The first story that comes to mind involves the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance. This is a group comprised of fishermen of different kinds, environmentalists and local business owners whose livelihoods depend on the sea. These groups had spent years at war with one another. The fishermen and environmentalists, of course, had been in court a number of times, and in some cases the fishermen had literally been in shooting wars with one another, in disputes over fishing grounds and that sort of thing.

In working with this group, we brought people to the table who had a history of ill will, mistrust and resentment toward one another. We knew they'd never agree to any concept for a new organization that came from only one subset of stakeholders. The environmentalists could never have drafted a purpose statement that the fishermen would have accepted, nor would one group of fishermen have been trusted by the others to understand or articulate the interests of all.

What the work required was just sitting down with these individuals day after day and getting them to tell their stories, to talk about the truth of their experience. Which not only included the truth of their day-to-day work at sea or

on land, but the truth of their lives as husbands, as parents, as sons and daughters, as citizens, and as members of a community whose health and vitality was threatened as the marine ecosystem declined. Only in listening to the truth of the personal stories that individuals told, in beginning to feel the passion that all of them felt for their lives and the sea—whose well-being they cared deeply about—did they begin to get through the barriers... putting one another in a category.

Through such meeting there begins to be a basic respect, understanding, and eventually trust in one another that allows, over time, the articulation of a statement of common concern, a common purpose that is large and inclusive enough that everybody finds themselves in it. An aspiration that everybody sees as an expression of their own deep concern, yet that still allows room for, even requires, individual interpretation and expression.

That's just a very small example of the tension between individual experience and expression, and the coherence of a common and collective purpose. There were certainly moments of extraordinary insight and emotion—the experience even transformed some people's lives, and continues to do so—but none of it was achieved using any specific group processes designed to foster "collective intelligence" or "spiritual wisdom." This group didn't sit down and meditate together. They didn't chant or dance together. There was no poetry reading. They simply sat down and talked to one another, in increasingly open, honest and feelingful ways. We never could have talked with that group about "emotional intelligence"—but as they honestly expressed emotion, from anger and distrust to empathy and exhilaration, they developed a trust in themselves and one another that eventually supported a capacity for working constructively in the service of what they cared most deeply about, in ways that they couldn't have previously imagined.

Now the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance has actually struggled to form community alliances, which are the elemental "fractals" of the organization as a "chaordic" entity. Yet there has been at least one very interesting consequence of their experience. They have been very successful at serving as a creative context for conflict resolution and problem solving in the communities in which they are involved. Because people recognize that they themselves have learned something very different, and in fact very profound, about how to be inclusive, receptive and respectful in seeking ways forward that make room for everybody in their uniqueness, while also bringing people toward a sense of the common good—and then developing approaches to constructive action on issues or opportunities of immediate and practical import.

Alan Briskin: Sans poetry, sans ritual dancing, sans chanting, a group of people who have battled each other within and between groups, somehow formulate a way to move forward together, and something extraordinary happens. They engaged, and there are these different elements that may include screaming at each other. But something is happening. Some cauldron, some—

Tom Hurley: Cauldron was exactly the word that came to mind before you said it. A crucial element is that there was a container or cauldron in which everybody agreed to keep putting themselves. There were people who dropped out along the way, and new people who came in, but there was always a critical mass of continuing participants that enabled, if you will, the cooking to occur in the cauldron.

So the cauldron is important, together with...a seed crystal of some sort. I'm mixing metaphors here, but—

Alan Briskin: Mix, mix.

Principle

Significance of Gathering

Serving Wholeness

People come together in response to a natural impulse to work together, to build together and to create together. They come to experience how necessary it is for them to collaborate with each other. And so it is that humankind begins to learn how to leverage the infinite power of collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom.



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

—Bill Veltrap

"Most of the meetings where these moments happen are meetings that are called to look at how we can, as a species, evolve into the glory of which we are capable; and evolve beyond the cultures in which we are immersed."

—Rachel Bagby

"And when you become one with [the] Universe, you bring back from that experience an awareness of the whole that can guide you from then on. And as you touch that awareness again and again, it continues to guide you."

—Paula Underwood

"We need each other and we need the wisdom of our differences and our similarities, and the spirit that comes from group mind."

—Penny Williamson

"The transformation of institutions—their inclusion of various stakeholders, their ability to work through issues of power and resource flows, their models of governance—all constitute critical elements of genuine collective intelligence. Institutional change is the key variable and central means by which larger culture is shaped."

Tom Hurley: The container together with some sort of crystal of intentionality and—*vision* is not quite the right word—intentionality and sense of possibility. And perhaps *vision* too, because it helps if there are fluid, evolving images of the way forward. If these elements are present, along with a commitment on the part of people to stay with the process, to try to be constructive rather than to obstruct the process, then I think most groups will find a way forward. That of course can be easier or harder, depending upon the skills of the people in the group, or the skills of the guide or facilitator. But fundamentally the cauldron, the crystal—of intentionality, vision, possibility—and the commitment to sustained, constructive engagement are crucial. All the rest is just learning how to work with what comes forward.

What's the seed crystal? I characterized it earlier as a crystal of intentionality, of possibility, and perhaps of vision. Now, that kind of crystal can be present in the realm of the individual as well as in group settings. I have that kind of crystal for myself, in relation to my own life and work. It can be true for two people. I can have it with my wife, I can have it with a colleague. I can have it among a small group in an organization like my own. It's also present in our organizations, communities and perhaps even our cultures as a whole, which have at their heart images of the future that help or hinder.

In relation to all this, what interests me are contexts in which The Chaordic Alliance is making an intentional effort to bring very different kinds of people together. What "very different" means will vary from case to case. If we're working with healthcare, it would mean bringing healthcare consumers, healthcare providers, insurance company representatives, corporate payers, government officials and other health care stakeholders together. If we're looking at the Marine Alliance, it means bringing together fishermen of different kinds, environmentalists, business people. In a company it means staff, management, customers, clients, directors, service providers, strategic partners and others.

In each of these cases, what has brought these diverse individuals together is either that they are in an organization or field in crisis—and that has been in crisis long enough that they recognize the need for radical approaches—or that they're in a field whose emerging opportunities cannot effectively be pursued without some very new arrangements among the participants in that field or in that organization. In most cases there is both crisis and opportunity.

The crystal is important—intentionality—because everybody who is there has to have a deep, personal reason for being there that's going to serve as a touchstone when things get tough. That touchstone is usually both personal and professional, and the personal touchstone is always important. Participants who enter only with a professional rationale for their participation usually discover deeper personal connections to the issue.... So the touchstone of intentionality must be present.

The sense of possibility I mentioned—it's strange, even mysterious in many respects. In the kind of work we do, what brings people to the table and then what keeps them there, at least in part, is that, intuitively, they recognize the possibilities being explored—the goals being sought—as reflective of a deeper set of basic human values and higher human aspirations than we typically find in our organizations and communities. So the sense of possibility is important.

And vision—as I said, it's important early on to start developing some images of what a new organizational structure or chaordic system would

mean in practical terms for themselves, their company or their community. Vision is like a spark that kindles creative work of all kinds.

A tangent—we were talking earlier about how spirit manifests in many ways in our lives. The analogy that occurs to me involves our fascination with psychic phenomenon such as telepathy and psychokinesis. In my view, psychic phenomena are actually unusual expressions of very common experience, of capacities that typically operate unconsciously in most of us most of the time. Then, occasionally, there are these flashes, these unusual experiences where the capacity is heightened and becomes observable in a dramatic way. In a certain sense, perhaps these experiences of group synergy, collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom can be thought of in a similar way. Perhaps they are unusually strong or overt expressions of a set of experiences, capacities and ways of knowing that are very much part of our ordinary, everyday experience—relatively undeveloped perhaps, but capacities that we all use in different ways all the time. If that analogy is useful, play with it.

Alan Briskin: What came to mind immediately, a voice said—we are talking about hyper-ordinary events.

Tom Hurley: Exactly, precisely.

Commentary on *The Cauldron and the Crystal*:

In *Magister Ludi*, Hesse's final novel, the protagonist Joseph Knecht acts on an instinct that Hesse himself had come to believe: the futility of any spiritual realm divorced wholly from contemporary social reality. Hesse had come to believe that the existence of the spiritual realm gained meaning and momentum when it responded to the summons of the larger world.

Tom, in many ways like Knecht, raises the ante with his question of, "So what?" How is our knowledge of groups linked with a world that often seems still locked in a brutal struggle (more blood and ambition than collective intelligence and spiritual awakening)? How do the parallel streams Tom references as spiritual and practical flow together on behalf of accomplishing new alliances among competing factions? And most immediately, how is our very interest in collective intelligence and the transpersonal dimensions of group life furthered without deepening the rift between the spiritual and material worlds?

Tom's imagery of eating too much "rich dessert" with regard to the threshold experience of transformation in groups was echoed in various interviews. There is a danger of becoming enamored of the transformational experience in isolation from the world. There is a deep irony expressed by those we talked with between their own magical experiences in groups and caution about the field of collective intelligence becoming too esoteric. There was a consistent emphasis on the practical and demystifying elements of the field and a fear that a utilitarian or instrumental approach misses the point. There is an elusive alchemy between seeking truth and acting in the world. Tom's own struggle is a pattern story in itself of trying to reconcile dualities and seek an underlying unity among opposite pulls.

There is also in Tom's story the link between collective intelligence and institutional forms. As Parker Palmer has articulated, there is a difference between communities who share common interests and the stages of social change. To the degree collective intelligence remains solely the concern of those who are fascinated by group life—facilitators, organizational consultants, scholars of various disciplines—there is a disconnect with the world of business leaders, social activists, government representatives, and individual citizens. There is a direct call in Tom's vision of social change that these worlds do not remain divided. There is learning to be achieved in the interaction of these groups, sometimes through an educational model, but also through interaction as peers with

Principle

Element of the Experience

Love

People come to see each other in a very different way, with different eyes; not so much with the body's eyes, but with the more compassionate understanding of the soul's eyes. They find themselves able to look beyond appearances—dress, stature, skin color—to see a deeper reflection in, and connection with, one another. They begin to notice the myriad forms in which people offer their gifts.

People experience a connection with each other that goes beyond their initial experience—regardless of whether they have only just met, or have known each other a longer time. Depending on the context for the gathering the word "love" may or may not be used to describe this phenomenon. Nevertheless, it embodies a certain closeness, an unconditional caring, and an identification with and a deep desire for the well-being of the other.



"I've seen them come to love the other. Even though the other didn't get converted in any visible way. I saw that love at work and saw the relationship transformed."

—Parker Palmer

"When the participants are there [and] when I say "Welcome", and I make eye contact with everybody around that circle, I have actually noticed an absolute change. I see their faces, I see their eyes, and it feels like I see their souls. And I'm just filled with love."

—Pat Harbour

"So for me there's a sense of being willing to be open, and another word that comes to my mind for it is "love". There's a sense of just being open to another that is just incredibly erotic."

—Bob Forman

Metaphor Cluster

Spirit in Groups

hearing whole is like a flood •
holographic listening is experiencing
the whole in its parts • fractal zone •
clear heart • divine intelligence •
atmosphere of our minds • star
power • feedback loops in culture
adding up to a giant mind • culture
as DNA • carrier wave of love •
group synergy like a faceted gem •
cognosiniento, the Unity principle •
consciousness as center of gravity •
collective memory • worshippers
recharging their batteries • connecting
sparks of magic • magic in the
middle • air got thicker and larger
spirit entered • membranes thinning
to spirit • warriorship against what
crushes spirit • co-intelligence is what
intelligence looks like when we take
our interconnectedness seriously •
unscriptable authenticity • speaking
once for each ear and once for the
heart • the forsaken sacred •
Kundalini • stroke of genius • the
wondering strike • committees of
angels • ancestral energies •
centered on the edge • everything
that is here now was here at the
beginning • movements spawning •
whatever you do, if you have not
done it with Body, with Mind, with
Spirit, you are not done yet •

common concerns. The transformation of institutions—their inclusion of various stakeholders, their ability to work through issues of power and resource flows, their models of governance—all constitute critical elements of genuine collective intelligence. Institutional change is the key variable and central means by which larger culture is shaped.

Tom's story of the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance illustrates one picture of institutional reconciliation—the capacity of divergent and sometimes warring groups to create new institutional forms. What makes this story something more than conflict resolution or a model of negotiation among different camps is the foundation of common meaning that was sought. Tom makes clear that there was not the obliteration of differences but rather a personal touchstone that each participant had to find for himself or herself. The glue of common purpose had to be fashioned out of their own stories, making room for the truth of their whole lives, as advocates for their issues but also the “truth of their lives as husbands, parents, as sons and daughters, as citizens, and as members of a community that was threatened,” even as their own livelihood was threatened. The fabric of collective intelligence is made up of all these things, but especially the interior experience of these connections that Tom calls the “awakening to the truth of our experience.” This is where the fundamental expression of what is most personal calls and responds to the universal truths of spirit.

In Tom's metaphor of the thinning membrane, we sense the growing urgency in the world for the material and spiritual worlds to be in relation, not merged but in close enough alignment so that the personal can be informed by the apparition of a larger healing force that surrounds and moves through us. Spirit is found not only in the extraordinary experience of a walk in the Himalayas but in the hyper-ordinary events of our everyday life. He talks about it as a “knowing” in the body, as a deep form of listening, and a respect for intuition that is not mystical but commonplace.

He also extends Tom Callanan's metaphor of cauldron as a container that people put themselves into. They enter the cauldron with the truth of their experience and then collectively simmer until something new is created for the whole community—not just for those inside the container. And in Tom Hurley's imagery it is not spices or food, but a seed crystal that metamorphoses the group. The seed crystal holds certain qualities necessary for transformation. These include:

- intention – an understanding of why you are here and a belief in the betterment of the whole;
- vision – the skill of representing change in concrete forms;
- possibility – the faith that what is unknown will reveal itself for positive growth;
- commitment – the psychological stamina to maintain constructive engagement with what is difficult and unfamiliar.

These elements of the seed crystal were all consistent themes voiced by those we interviewed.

Finally, Tom hints at an element of the transpersonal realm that is mythic and primordial, associated with Celtic traditions but certainly not confined there. We do ourselves a disservice to talk only about the healing aspects of the transpersonal and not recognize darker aspects that “are not always good in purely human, moral, or ethical terms.” Collective intelligence must account for not only the positive mysteries but also the mystery of personal and collective violence and blindness that manifest in brutal acts, war, racism, economic division, and ecological harm. ■





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The Ramp and the Pit:

The Ecstatic Darkness in our Midst

(Excerpt from an edited
conversation of
Arthur Colman with
Alan Briskin)

"One does not become
enlightened by imagining
figures of light, but by
making the darkness
conscious."

—Carl Jung

"I insist not on the events,
but on their effect on the
persons of the tale."

—Joseph Conrad

Arthur Colman: I think this interview comes from, or comes at, a time of a very deep pessimism, which I hope isn't cynicism. I think a lot of it has to do with being in the very disturbed world of South Africa and seeing how processes of individual escape and denial and group genocide and horror can continue. Erik Erikson has this term, "pseudospeciation,"—really making the blacks and the coloreds and the Indians a different species, a lower species—which is what apartheid did, legally.

The issue that I'm working with now is [a belief] that in order for groups to work differently, they have to work in public. They can't resolve their issues behind a boundary. I'm saying that sort of categorically, but using this example [of apartheid], there's no way that people can engage in a negative group process and ask for forgiveness, without asking for it from the larger collective. I don't see people able to do that, individuals able to do that. There's such cost in doing that—to their individual identities. It happens with an occasional great person. And often they are slaughtered or scapegoated themselves for doing that.

I think that what I do is a kind of secret way of opening a door into a different group consciousness. But what I've found is that most of us are pretty much incapable of staying with that different consciousness very long. In order to do that, one has to gently or traumatically give up some of one's attachment to the individual ego in the context of a group.

[In groups] the hypnotic ways, the inductions, are endlessly varied and wonderful, and I think they have a lot to do with the spiritual practices of all human beings. But in my work, that's not the goal. You could take a bunch of the Afrikaners who engineered apartheid (along with the rest of the world) or a group who [planned something] very destructive, consciously. And you sit with them and meditate with them and listen to wonderful music with them, or talk with them about their personal lives. And they will become human beings in a nice way, in a gentle way, in the way we love humans—positive human beings. It will feel good and you will feel connected. They may even say some things about themselves—their painful childhoods. But as a group, they are still capable of perpetrating the worst horrors within and without.

There is something that happens in the group where you hit a boundary of darkness, of an ecstatic darkness that they've created together, either in the here and now, or in a political or work situation. And they have to face that and look at that. And it's often around a painful scapegoating or a painful stopping of consciousness of some kind.

It seems to me to relate to the great danger of accepting that one is in negative, shadowy, scapegoating processes. A great danger to the person. The collective rule will have its way with you, and your life will be changed. You may be put in prison. You may have to deal with public guilt. And people don't want to do that.

There are innumerable [stories] where one individual or a group cabal of individuals will, to protect a secret, devastate thousands or millions of people. It's understandable, again, because you're not going to want your children to know what you've done. You don't want to even think about what you've done yourself as an individual. So that sort of fact of dual consciousness, the development of ourselves as individual and as a collective—the protection of ourselves as an individual, combined with what seems a larger,

much more enduring consciousness—our connections to subgroups, to whatever the larger group of our life is, to our species—the collective consciousness that is really running our fates. That duplicity that is part of our human character and potential....

I think that connecting with South Africa briefly, seeing the immense horror of what happened there and the tiny impact of a creative and caring attempt to change it—has shocked me. So, you're getting me, as you know, at a time of relooking at what I've been doing. Is my kind of work with consciousness in groups play and curiosity for some randomly interested people? Or is it a beginning of something more, part of a movement, people who will change themselves and whoever they touch?

Alan Briskin: Tell me about the ecstatic darkness.

Arthur Colman: Groups that I can characterize, in a positive way, as New Age groups or groups that are about improving group or individual consciousness can be very wonderful—they're lovely to be in and that lasts for a finite amount of time. If they want to go deeper, they have to get into personal stories of some kind. And that's done, and groups have learned that. For example, AA has learned that. [Groups learn also] to cut off the group consciousness of the negativity through things like talking sticks. Talk and you can't be interrupted or no cross-talking—multiple ways to keep the group voices at bay.

That also works up to a point. That works very well, actually. But what it can do is shut off the scapegoating issues in a group, but not the actual scapegoating. People drop out and people keep quiet. Or they'll gossip and talk after the meeting. But in the group it feels warm and good—controlled and powerful. And it's valuable.

But if you challenge that system what you get is all the cross-talk, all the cross-angers, all the cross-love, all the danger, the jealousy, and all the dark ecstatic. You get conflict. The group reengages with reality and power. But even beyond that, there is a place where the group does its natural thing which is, I think, to exclude the dissident, dissident defined any way you want to. But it's to exclude the other.

That's called scapegoating, the way I think about it, projecting what one believes is negative into one person or into a subgroup, and getting rid of them. Killing them, ejecting them. Or just keeping them around and conflating oneself, in the mind, by having them there. That process is very unconscious. No one wants to feel they're part of that. Unconscious in the sense that some people know they're doing it, but as a whole, it's pretty below the surface for any number, for the majority of the group at any given time.

To open the specifics of that up in a group is to really hit that ecstatic darkness of the group. Very much, because you're getting into an underlying collective species process that's really like a drug. It gets beyond the ego and suddenly there's a new reality, a new matrix.... You see that humans are a group phenomenon, a multi-phenomenon. And that some of it is gorgeous, and some of it is just dark night.

It's a beautiful horror. And looking into the face of that is the spiritual, the ecstatic. It often feels like a deep spiritual darkness, because we identify the light with the individual in us. I don't know what words to use for it. It's the root of so much of the creativity of great music and great art. You have to know about that part to be creative for the us. It's not just your own personal pain or abuse or evil. It's being part of a group pain, darkness, evil, love—of a species. It's who I am, we are. Us.

"You see that humans are a group phenomenon, a multi-phenomenon. And that some of it is gorgeous, and some of it is just dark night."

"There're always secrets at the heart of this dark ecstasy. Otherwise it wouldn't be a mystery. And it's very rare for organizations to take on its important individuals, its important subgroups, and try to work with them. Too much risk."

So we're looking, really, at this incredible mirror of something that we're a small part of, but definitely a part of. And once we get there and know more fully who we are, we can transform consciously as a group.... Keep it awake. It's paired with the positive ecstatic. So it makes the whole thing work better. That's my hope.

Alan Briskin: And as you're talking, I'm reminded of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, repeating to myself "The horror, the horror!"

Arthur Colman: Brando did that so well.

Alan Briskin: But what does it mean? To stay for the moment with the horror. What is it?

Arthur Colman: The times in my life, personally, when I've tried to do that, I've gotten terribly, terribly hurt. I've been terribly scapegoated. And even when I was absolutely clear that that was going to happen, it hurt—a lot.

We all have examples of groups that are just impossible, or corrupt, too scapegoating, too boring. And we're going to take off and leave it. We do it. You don't have to stew in this horror that's not truly of your own making. We have in this culture individual responsibility but....

Suppose you're in an institution that you love, as I've been a couple of times. Each time—because I get to be a leader—I get to a point where I just see stuff. It may be my particular vision of that, but I see stuff from this group perspective. And that's really dangerous to myself and others. And saying something about it may disrupt what's seen as creativity or flow, or is going to disrupt individuals in power who have a lot at stake.

Because it always relates to secrets. There're always secrets at the heart of this dark ecstasy. Otherwise it wouldn't be a mystery. It's very rare for organizations to take on its important individuals, its important subgroups, and try to work with them. Too much risk. So I exclude myself or I get excluded. It's very easy to stay in and just go along, which I've done also. But given my interest in this, after a while it just becomes.... I feel like a hypocrite, and I think a lot of other people do too.

Alan Briskin: We've talked in the past about your dream of seeing all these groups you've been part of and of your dream voice saying: "You don't have to do this anymore." [You can stand back and reflect.] So I think that we're at the beginning of exploration. And when one starts an exploration, one can't run away from the disturbing elements.

I've heard Tutu speak about his work with reconciliation. When he talks of his learning, there is a dynamic movement from opposition to paradox. That he learned how humans can be so systematic in their evil toward each other. What disturbed him more than any of the individual horror stories was the systematic planning to sterilize black men. He said that emerged for him as another level of darkness, to collaborate strategically for that purpose. But then he learned this other piece—about this glorious element of the human.

Arthur Colman: What's wonderful, and the reason I went to South Africa, was the amazing concept he made happen—that of the public world being involved. He's not fooling around with redemption, by going off and confessing to a priest alone, or meditating in a cave alone, or even doing service, or penance when you don't know what it's about. That's not enough. It just isn't enough.

I think generations of people have fallen into that, trying to figure out ways to help people feel better about themselves, to get rid of some of this

conflict in group. To sort of paper it over, which is a very understandable thing—out of a holocaust or apartheid.... Dark ecstasy has a lot to do with sacrifice—of others. A moral genius like Tutu creates a form. Fifty years ago we created Nuremberg, but that—

Alan Briskin: That's different.

Arthur Colman: Different, very different.

Alan Briskin: There was an exquisite clarity about Tutu's premise when he was asked by Mandela to do this. It was the premise that, just as torture and murder were problematic, denial was problematic, at a social collective level. I suspect it wasn't simply that this would all go well. How could it? Would it be argued about what was really being accomplished? Of course. But he was able to demonstrate... truth and reconciliation.

[SILENCE]

Arthur Colman: So where does that lead? It's like, these great institutions, Catholic confession has this. Yom Kippur has it.

Alan Briskin: That's right.

Arthur Colman: It's interesting, my own part of that Yom Kippur business is, as a child, speaking a largely foreign tongue. All these sins, all these remarkable sins. Everybody's supposed to be responsible for all of the sins. So we're collectively responsible. That's the place I first learned about collective responsibility on that level.

But, of course, the prayers were in Hebrew and said at lightening speed, too fast to understand them. But there's something powerful about it anyway because it's public, because it's in community. And if you're in a Catholic church community, you see a priest. It's private within an institution—it's private but it isn't private. It's a very interesting mystery.

In my own life, I took the service out of the temple and made it for my family. Every year we would all go up Mt. Tamalpais and fast, and we would recite the sins described in the prayer book and talk about each of them. Confess to each of them as part of the human race. And talk about collective as well as personal responsibility. It was fascinating. Because all of us would have secrets. And you could share most of them. One of the kids had taken 25 cents out of my pocket and had been worrying about that for six months and now he could say it, and there was absolution. And could one say one had an affair? Well, yeah, you could possibly even do that. Very interesting possibility. The rule was no recriminations afterwards. Yeah. It pretty much worked.

I think there's something so real about reconciliation gotten in exchange for the public confession, and even humiliation.... We all have those things that, if we spoke aloud, cause a breakdown in our minds, and possibly reality. Deal with your secret in public, voluntarily, and you don't have to go to jail, you receive amnesty, which is what South Africa's program was about.

Alan Briskin: I'm seeing that without any equal understanding of reconciliation, there can't be a deepening of truth...meaning the revealing of the secrets. That there is almost always a relationship between the two. That if you can't go that deep in the reconciliation arena, you should not expect to go too deep into the secret areas.

Arthur Colman: I think that's really the thing.... Then you get to what we call the pit, the place of this ecstatic darkness, which is where transformation could occur. And it is a mystical journey. Absolutely mystical journey. It's the

Principle

Element of the Experience

Facing the Darkness

People are unafraid to go deeper together, to turn around and face the darkness in themselves, in each other, and in humanity as a whole. They are able to do this because of the safety and connection they experience in the group setting, and they do it without judgment or recrimination. They draw on the strength of the collective to acknowledge and face that which would surely overcome them if they were to each look upon it alone. Together, there is a willingness to look fully and fearlessly at the inexcusable insults, atrocities, and pain people regularly inflict on each other and on themselves, in moments of fear and weakness. In the looking—directly, without flinching, and with compassion—the pain begins to dissipate, giving way to the impulse then to move through and beyond the fear and separation, into forgiveness and collective healing.



"There is something that happens in the group where they hit a boundary of darkness, of an ecstatic darkness that they've created together, either in the here and now, or in a political or work situation. And they have to face that and look at it.... It's a beautiful horror, that deep spiritual darkness. It's being part of a group pain, the darkness, the evil of a species. It's who we are. It's part of us."

—Arthur Colman

"If we're willing to sit in the discomfort and work through the discomfort, until there's a clearing, and we can see the other side...it's amazing what happens!"

—Pat Harbour

labyrinth that you mentioned in the beginning. A journey into the center of your collective self.

But it's more, the image I have is really walking down the ramp, and it's darker and darker and scarier.... Finding that place, the amazement and horror and joy being inside that world of truth where all the collective secrets are revealed. Darkness yes, but also freedom. Freedom without a consciousness of personal recriminations and punishment...because it's no longer personal. It's when you come up for air that all the recriminations are right there again. It's not a legal agreement to give up vengeance. Aggrieved people can't agree to that. They must no longer want that.... It would be borne out over time.

Alan Briskin: It may be that the group has to be informed increasingly by the individual, to take this next leap, but that the individual also has to be reconnected with his or her existence as member. That there's a greater unity.

Arthur Colman: And that may be painful. But it often feels hard to be limited by being an individual when you see beyond it. You know I have this construct that the individual's consciousness is a brilliant creation of the collective, that gives it consciousness. The individual is the spokesperson for consciousness, the voice for the collective consciousness.

So I see myself as sort of chipping away at these collective mysteries. How do you get at the collective consciousness? How do you help transform it? There are a lot of other people asking these questions. It seems to me that the more people who do it, the closer we'll...maybe this is the goal of the 21st Century. All our depth knowledge about the individual isn't enough.

I do my work...and hope that it's part of a critical mass of enough people to change things. So I actually see myself part of a movement, which is the first time I've seen that so clearly. I've always felt more occult and more [on the edge of things], a curiosity for others, and something of a researcher. I trust now there are a lot of people that are interested in this. And they're going to do it in much more creative ways than I do.

But I do know that the heart of it is going to be that look into the pit. Not papering it over with any induction techniques. There has to be a way to sit there a while. If I had to do it over, I would start with just beginning to teach this in elementary school, to the kids at the place where it begins.

Alan Briskin: What do you think this movement is? How would you give it initial language?

Arthur Colman: It comes as a sort of primacy of truth...some spiritual notion of social reality. The individual joined in collective consciousness, our species journey.

Commentary on The Ramp and the Pit:

"Every so often I feel as birds must before their first migration—a gut instinct that something is wrong where they are, a strong sense that they must now go where they have never been before."

—Andy Goldsworthy

How might we engage these reflections? What are the feelings and ideas surfaced by a discussion of the ecstatic darkness and the metaphors of the ramp and the pit? During a conference in Vancouver on collective intelligence and new terms of engagement, I had the opportunity to listen to the renowned violinist, Miha Pogacnik, play Bartok's third movement of the solo sonata

*"The capacity to love,
teach, heal, and build
coexists with our
capacity to hate,
repress, wound, and
destroy. How do
we take responsibility
for that?"*

Principle

Significance of Gathering

Witnessing

It is in the group setting that we are called to stand witness for each other—to notice, to acknowledge, to name and to give meaning to what is unfolding for us, what we are learning, what we are remembering, and what we are becoming. One aspect of witnessing is simply the creation of shared understanding and experience, through deep listening and understanding of each other's perspectives. A second aspect of witnessing lies in being a mirror for each other's learning. People release a kind of collective sigh as they relax into knowing that they have revealed themselves, and have been validated; even as they stand in validation of others. This aspect of witnessing takes on critical importance in the collective healing of humankind. Where atrocities have been perpetrated against whole communities, whole countries, and whole peoples..., public witnessing has a critical role to play. To publicly acknowledge (to stand collective witness) to the horror and the darkness of what has happened, enables people to participate in reconciliation and forgiveness.



"They have gained new insights into each other's perspectives. They have shared the knowledge of each other's perspective.

"I know that you know that this is my perspective."

—Finn Voldtofte

"My mental understanding alone is no comfort to me. What I've been learning recently is that I can't grow without witnesses. I need witnesses for my personal transformation."

—Joan Lederman

"Truly serving as sacred mirrors to each other, of witnessing each other's journey, of deeply listening to each other."

—Marilyn Veltrop

Melodious. Miha's art is to create an integration of feeling, impression, and rationality in the service of the whole. Closing my eyes, I sensed something of the ecstatic, a soaring feeling but also a screeching, a high scream. Arthur's words emerged in my thoughts and in the moment, I experienced something of the awe in mystery, a total freedom and also a disturbance which I felt in my heart. This mix of emotion moved through me and I imagined descending into darkness.

What are the forms and rhythms of this place? What is it personally and collectively we must face? Music touches the soul and creates a sensory field that allows us to hold the sphere of emotional life. Internal to each of us is a cauldron of colliding elements, our personal biography and the archetypes of our species' consciousness. Arthur's inquiry into the collective takes us to places we have not been before or simply places we would not want to go. Yet, here in the darker chambers are critical elements to mapping a field of collective wisdom.

In many of our dozens of discussions we have come across overlapping references to collective intelligence, collective wisdom, collective insight, collective consciousness, and the collective unconscious. Arthur adds to this the idea of collective responsibility, bringing to bear moral and ethical dimensions of group life. What exists in the whole exists in each of us. The individual is a small mirror of the whole, linked in a myriad of ways with his or her immediate group associations—family, work settings, community, society—but also with an underlying species identification. The capacity to love, teach, heal, and build coexists with our capacity to hate, repress, wound, and destroy. How do we take responsibility for that? How do we recognize these polarities in ourselves and still protect our fragile personal identities? The archetypal theme of inclusion and exclusion plays itself out in the scapegoating process, where the instinct is to exclude the dissident, the "other."

For Arthur, collective consciousness has two aspects. First, within each of us, there are expressions of the psyche that are collective in nature. Lauren, Angeles, and others have described these archetypal elements that exists within each of us in numberless interconnections. In 1949, Jung and the Hungarian classicist C. Kerenyi jointly identified this "mythological heritage" and wrote that these mythic elements are "collective (and not personal) structural elements of the human psyche in general, and, like the morphological elements of the human body, are inherited." We sense these elements in dreams, in literature, in meditations, and in groups.

The second aspect of collective consciousness is more here and now, tied to our being members of groups. When Tom Callanan and Finn talk about becoming aware of group mind and the collective intelligence of the whole, they are describing a shift that takes place from being inside our own individual skins to a sensing of how we are members of a larger whole. We see that thought (including emotion) has a certain movement, wholeness, and coherence that is not perceivable from within one's own opinion, perspective, or wishes. Physically, one relaxes and becomes more alert as the "group as a whole" becomes more apparent. Patterns become discernible and the degree of fragmentation or coherence surfaces in how members interact with each other.

This second aspect is at the core of Arthur's startling hypothesis that the individual is a brilliant creation of the collective. We act out of this group consciousness but we are unaware of it. "To the individual," Arthur reflected, "the collective is unconscious." We are not so separate as we think. This is unsettling to the modern mind, which understandably prides itself on its capacity for differentiation from the group. Yet something is unfinished. The achievement of the individual to differentiate him or her self denies the linkage with others and the archetypal patterns that play out in group life. "What's running us is our nature, the collective, the species collective," Arthur noted—"humans are a group phenomenon, a multi phenomenon. And some of that is gorgeous and some of it is just dark night." There in the dark night of the soul lies the history of human atrocities, the ancient stories of swords so thick with blood of the enemy that it

Metaphor Cluster

Light and Dark

like watching a city at night • collective reflection • our hearts of darkness • big blind spot flashing • ecstatic darkness • becoming translucent to basic nature • courses in dark arts • shadow costs • igniting separation or breakdown • hitting a flash point • burning questions • brilliant compromise • static darkness • shedding light • reflect into memory • internal knowing lighting us up • sun dance • shining light on the invisible field of imagination • shadow dragging people down to be recycled • dancing with the shadow • avoid, kill, convert, or offer hospitality to the stranger • ignited memories • shimmering space • an aureole, a halo of rainbowed light • enlightenment kingdom • an aha! in zero time • thunderbolts of insights • flame of understanding • clarity like a pearl • insight at the core • being within an exploding star and realizing it hit like a ton of bricks • energy field bursting into bloom • seed crystal of intentionality • magnetized in a field of allurements • co-incarnational universe of light and air • connecting sparks of magic • broadening horizons • dark moving silences •

stays glued to the hand. Stories of barbarism, of slave trade, of women burned to death for refusing men of the same caste, of concentration camps and of horrors that still haunt us because they are happening today, not in some distant past. Colman's work asks [that] we account for the darkness without minimizing or spiritualizing it away as old behavior that simply exhausts itself and disappears.

He also outlines its dynamics in groups as day to day occurrences. We see evidence of scapegoating in all institutions—religious, business, therapeutic, government—even in intentional groups that seek to be inclusive and aligned with higher values. Just as there is a blind spot in the physiology of the eye, there is a blind spot in how we see ourselves in groups.

The thread that leads us deeper into the collective mind also leads us into a new awareness of ourselves as members of groups. In whom have I consciously or unconsciously placed evil? What emotions or reactions in others do I ignore or remain disconnected with? What assumptions allow me to place a boundary between myself and the behavior of the group? Do I even step outside myself to become aware of the group as a whole?

In the metaphors of the ramp and the pit, we have visual icons reminding us that there is both fear and promise in making the darkness conscious. Fear that a secret revealed or an ill feeling expressed will destroy the group or lead to personal ostracism or even danger. But promise that a deeper connection among members is possible and that more of who we are can be expressed. Beyond the benefit of "good feeling" there is also the possibility that collective awareness will help avert harm—to someone inside or outside the group. The choice to risk new behaviors grows with the belief that new terms of engagement are necessary to genuinely move forward as part of a larger collective—whether a business, a community, or a society.

Arthur's evocation of a spiritual notion of reality opens a door to healing. He suggests that collective issues cannot be resolved behind a boundary of private interactions or even legislative efforts. The healing takes place in some kind of public forum, where secrets can be revealed and witnessed. Forgiveness becomes a possibility in the context of both truth and reconciliation. We can participate in healing past atrocities and misunderstandings that as group members we have inherited and are still subject to. Similarly, the silencing of conflict within groups and the witnessing of gossip outside the group become more familiar phenomenon that we can interpret. The roots of scapegoating are deep within us and the shame of becoming aware of our participation in scapegoating is deeply disturbing. We may even blame the "collective" for the ills that trouble us. Yet, there is a certain kind of liberation in knowing that we are capable of scapegoating and can examine it together. There is a deep humility associated with this process and a greater knowing on the part of the individual that he or she can be a voice of the collective. The illusion of separateness is revealed and a spiritual notion of social reality indeed becomes possible.

The idea of collective responsibility adds a critical dimension, a necessary doubt, that provokes deeper inquiry. And paradoxically it suggests that even within the most morally compromised situations lies the potential of other choices. Nelson Mandela's actions echo from the heart of collective responsibility when he noted that "to the extent that I have been able to achieve anything, I know it is because I am a product of the people of South Africa."

Is there any data or pattern story that suggests the pairing of the ecstatic darkness and the transpersonal dimension to group life that we are exploring? This is where we next turn our attention. ■





The Group as Sphere of Hope and Healing: *Sitting in the Silence*

(Generon Consulting report entitled "Crossing the Threshold," from their Forum on Institutional Renewal, at Mohonk Mountain House, 1999.

Discussion of story based on an edited conversation of Adam Kahane with Sheryl Erickson.)

From 1954 until 1996 Guatemala lived in conflict. In that period, 40,000 people disappeared; 200,000 were killed; and 2 million were internally displaced. We suffered a terrible war. Since 1996 we have been trying to come together as a society and rebuild.

Vision Guatemala started in 1997. The idea of the project was to bring together a group of 44 prominent people from all sectors of society—the media, the church, the military; indigenous and political leaders—to think about a future for our country.

It took a lot of logistical work and a lot of trust building to get the group together. When I arrived at the hotel for the initial meeting, the first thing I noticed was that the indigenous people were sitting together. The military guys were sitting together. The human rights group was sitting together.

I thought, "They are not going to speak to each other."

In Guatemala, we have learned to be very polite to each other. We are so polite we say, "Yes," but think "No." I was worried that we would be so polite that the real issues would never emerge.

One night something happened.

A woman, the most outstanding human rights activist and well-known fighter against impunity in the country, sat next to a guy wearing glasses. She belongs to an upper class Guatemalan family. He is a retired colonel who had worked for the Army's feared intelligence unit: G2. (Eight years ago, her sister was stabbed 27 times by an Army specialist. The man in glasses had been on duty when she went to the Army to find out what had happened to her sister.)

She stood up and said to him: "Do you remember the day I went to the Army? The day I went to ask about my sister? Do you remember what you told me?"

We were Guatemalans, and we were not being polite.

It was amazing that these two people should be able to talk. Other people started to tell their stories. You can't imagine what that meant for us. Just to be able to listen and be able to hear other people's stories and to feel empathy. We put ourselves in other people's shoes and started to understand one another.

I didn't sleep much that night. The next morning we decided to continue the storytelling and that's when the next turning point occurred.

A man who worked for the Archbishop described his experience and his feelings when he went to one of the cemeteries and found the bodies of children and women who had been massacred there. He told his story in complete, vivid detail. When he was finished, we were silent, completely silent for five minutes.

The biggest learning I had that day was the power of silence. After the silence, everything had changed. After the silence, we felt that we had an opportunity for an emerging future. I believe it was because at this point all of the reality that was ours together had been heard. That story and the silence that followed it revealed to everyone why we were there and what we needed to do.

—Elena Diez Pinto

Commentary on The Group as Sphere of Hope and Healing:

Elena Diez Pinto's story brings into strong relief a pattern story of people coming together to create a different future out of past atrocities. In this story, sitting next to each other, are a man and a woman who have met before. "Do you remember the day I went to the Army? The day I went to ask about my sister? Do you remember what you told me?" This first action challenges the secret cultural agreement to be polite. Without prelude, opposition is heralded and a common polarity, that of victim and victimizer is set into motion. Significantly, the action does not polarize or scapegoat but evokes other stories, other truths from within the group. The conversation remains grounded in personal experience, not recrimination. This is the first mystery.

On the second day, Ronald Ochaeta, formerly the Director of the Archbishop's Office on Human Rights, told his experience of investigating a massacre. The site he visited was one of the many hundreds of "cementorios clandestinos" (or clandestine mass graves) that had been found, evidence of the army's past atrocities against rural communities. The Bishop, Monseñor Juan Gerardi, had been assassinated the day after their report was published, one year earlier.

Ochaeta's story, like the ramp in Arthur's evocation of the ecstatic darkness, takes the group down into the horror. In complete and vivid detail, he describes the exhumation of the graves. The secrets buried in the ground now are brought back to the surface of consciousness. "Here it is," he seems to be saying, "this is what we are capable of doing." The group in the room does not wallow in his words, or make speeches about injustice, or try to make meaning out of the horror. Instead there is an unfathomable silence. What is five minutes may feel like an eternity. Here, in a public space, the group is a collective witness to the unspeakable. What is happening in this silence? This is the second mystery.

Adam Kahane, who facilitated the session, recalls the silence:

"I really didn't know what to do. That's a kind of silence I'd never experienced before and I was a little flustered thinking I'm supposed to do something as a facilitator, but didn't really know what to do. So I didn't do anything. I remember looking around the circle and one man, the oldest man in the group...looking at me with a look that I interpreted to mean 'you don't need to do anything....' So I didn't do anything until some time had passed, seems like quite a long time had passed, and then I called a break."

If this was a made up tale we would certainly have an older man take up the seat of wisdom, communicating that this place in silence is what is supposed to be happening. We would understand, as the violinist Miha has said, that there is in both music and life the "holy zero"—the pause that magnetizes what has come before and what is still to unfold. The silence, and there are so many kinds of silence, is where transformation and magic can happen in groups. But this is no made up tale and not all magic has happy endings. This time, however, a transformation took place, birthing individuals with a deepened collective awareness. Many who were there remain today a force for positive change. In this pattern story, the group acts as a sphere for the whole—the good and the horror, and from its womb-like silence something new is born.

Principle

Element of the Experience

Silence

People describe the importance of silence. From the silent spaces between the words, new meaning arises and fresh insights emerge towards healing and unity. People speak of having the courage to allow the pauses to lengthen and deepen, despite their discomfort.

Stories are shared, and in the sharing, sometimes reveal the deepest darkest secrets of the collective, and the shame that cries out for understanding and release. People stand silent witness, mute in the face of the extremes of cruelty and generosity that together, make up the collective soul of humanity.



"There was a silence, that went on for a very long time. A kind of silence I had never experienced before. That was the moment where something happened that many people recognized was very significant. It was the turning point of the project."

—Adam Kahane

"When the silence hits the room or the environment collectively, the shift has already happened. And the people are just becoming collectively conscious of it."

—David Isaacs

"There's a third energy...it's not just you and I, but there is a presence that is the mystery of life that is the Divine. And our willingness to be in silence allows that to be part of our communion."

—Diana Whitney



Adam recalls that at the end of the day in which there had been the silence, many of the participants spoke of its power, including Adam:

"I said, and it's sort of an unusual thing for me to say, I said that I thought it had been a remarkable moment and that there had been, I had the impression that there had been a spirit in the room, which is sort of an odd thing for me to say. Somebody else said that he thought it was a moment of communion. Now, I don't really know what the word means, but in a Catholic country [it has] a particular meaning.... I think [it's] the moment where the spirit is within us or we are connected to God. And then after that meeting one of the young guys, one of the young Mayan guys, came up to me and said, "Mr. Kahane, why were you surprised there was a spirit in the room? Don't you know that today is the Mayan day of the spirit...." So that was a moment where something happened that everybody recognized or that many people recognized was very significant. My explanation of it, to use Otto Sharmer's language, is that was the moment where the shared will of the group became apparent to the group. Where the group knew why they had come together and what they had to address."

In Adam's reflections, there is a delightful interplay of the diversity of ways we comprehend the transpersonal. For Adam, he could hardly imagine himself speaking of a spirit in the room. For a Catholic participant, these moments are when we recognize our visceral connection to the divine. For the young Mayan man, there is surprise that someone might find the presence of spirits surprising. And in Otto's words we see the outline of a group phenomenon that might be understood as collective wisdom—the moment of perceiving group will and knowing group purpose. Arthur spoke of the moment when the ecstatic darkness is paired with the ecstatic religious. And Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi's words return to me as well. He said we are always speaking in the presence of God and that at an even higher level, we and God are one—and together we are responding to the need of Earth to heal herself. The group is a portal to and a container of the transpersonal element. This is a final mystery. ■

"Manganese Nodule"

© Dean Powell

Found at an ocean depth of 5,420 to 4,680 meters (about 3 miles deep), latitude 24° 24' North, longitude 50° 45' West. These nodules take many millions of years to form. One millimeter forms per one million years.

Manganese Nodule actual size: 2" in diameter

Principle

Significance of Gathering

Healing

People experience a deep level of healing, for themselves personally, and for their community as a whole.

There is a deep sense of forgiveness, a release of past hurts and pain, however atrocious.

And in its place remains an all-encompassing peace, which is felt embracing all present, and extending beyond the gathering deep into the communities represented. From this place of stillness then, people feel able to move forward in new and productive ways.



"There is a flow-through of shared meaning, emotion, relationship that is actually quite intangible, but very perceptible. The group tends to sense or recognize or feel aspirations that seem common to the group—underlying what people share in common before they came to the group, or that might be emerging as a result of their being in the group."

—Mitch Saunders

"People understood that they all shared the same experience. But it's not describable in words. It felt like a brotherhood. That they had gone through some initiatory process and that they really became brothers and sisters in that room."

—Sharif Abdullah



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"As I saw gifts to the report appear, I could love them and also want to exclude them because my clearest intention is to deliver a report that is absorbed, and also offers a source for continuing learning. 'Let's keep to basics,' I said, and I wasn't heard because the words were not as articulate as this imagined image of earth pigments. I hung up the phone, went to my studio, and created this photo. As raw material, what do we bring to our circles, and what creative tension/potential is celebrated in our diverse beauty?"

—Joan Lederman

Principles Circumscribing the Field of Collective Intelligence and Spiritual Wisdom

ELEMENTS OF THE EXPERIENCE:

WHAT it feels like to enter into and move through the experience of this group phenomenon, holding a collective intent for unity and a receptiveness to spiritual wisdom.

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LISTENING DEEPLY

People listen to each other in a deeper way—they lean forward and listen into each other. They are willing and able to put aside differences and evaluations, and relax into listening for the meaning being conveyed behind the words, and for its significance in the life of the speaker. They stay with the speaker for as long as it takes, trusting that all that is being said is needed for the group as a whole, even when they disagree, or don't yet understand its implications.



"It's a way of holding and being willing to be there in paradox with others with whom you don't necessarily agree. There's a willingness to be quiet, a willingness to disagree and not let that bother you, a willingness to hear, a kind of willingness to be empathetic. Not listening for the words per se, but listening for the sort of humanity that drives them, the fears and desires and loves and needs that drive them. There's a willingness to go to a place of openness with each other." —Bob Forman

"You have to sacrifice your attention to your own well-being and what you consider to be your own agenda or your own identity, reputation or whatever it is. And you have to give your attention freely, totally, as much as possible, to the other person. What really helps is the quality of attention that has been exchanged. My attention has been given to you and yours has been given to me. And when that happens, another life has appeared. Another quality of human attention has appeared that is more balanced, higher, more full than my individual one."

—Jacob Needleman

"When you listen at that level, then you can hear not only the people; if you really pay attention, you can hear what the universe is saying."

—Paula Underwood

"It's what happens when you listen to people as if what they're saying is a window into the whole rather than only an expression of a part."

—Adam Kahane

"Attention to inner work, to one's own inner state in any kind of group, is profoundly important. It's been overlooked in many kinds of groups."

—Penny Williamson

"It makes an enormous difference to spend time prior to the engagement, remembering—to sense into, to feel into the intention for the engagement, and to the best of my ability, to try to tune my instrument for the nature of the music that we're going to engage in together." —Mitch Saunders

"You concentrate on the group as a whole, tuning into the highest possibility that is emerging; you make yourself an instrument for this emerging whole." —Otto Scharmer

HOLDING THE SPACE

People speak of many different forms and purposes for gathering—teachers concerned for the quality of schools, world leaders addressing a territorial conflict, conservationists addressing the preservation of rainforests, a family meeting to resolve issues. A common underlying factor in all these meetings where collective holistic functioning is experienced, is a deliberate and consistent holding of a fundamental intention for unity. "Holding of the space" is offered sometimes by a facilitator, and sometimes by participants; sometimes explicitly assigned and sometimes invisible to the group. In whatever form, there is a kind of spacious inclusiveness, which results from the work of holding the space or the intention for unity regardless of the specific content or purpose of the meeting.

CLEARING

People recognize the importance of inner preparedness. They speak of various forms of personal practice—meditations, quiet, walking, and music—to get as clear as possible within themselves in preparation for a meeting. They are keenly aware that the clarity of interaction in any group endeavor, and the richness of the outcome, is very much dependent upon the clarity of each participating mind, and that a special responsibility for this is borne by the conveners or facilitators.



PRINCIPLES
Practices
for
Preparing
and
Opening

"The café host offers an impulse of consciousness that is taken up by the field of consciousness in the group, and then it (collective intelligence) manifests. I think of it as a knowing that is taken up from the presence of the host." —Finn Voldtofte

"We really maintain relationships strongly all the time and we believe that we have generated a field into which we bring people. This is a critical piece, which contributes to the depth of the experience that people have. We establish relationships as strongly as we possibly can. We speak about all the people in the group in the invisible territory before the event." —Glennifer Gillespie

TRUSTING INTUITION

People make a choice to live the group experience through the instrument of their personality or "self," while drawing on the more expansive perspective of the inner "Self." They trust their intuition and rely on their natural ability to be channels for divine guidance or a voice of wisdom for the group.

"It's knowing the pattern of patterns and knowing one is just a part of that pattern. It's dwelling in the intuitive. It's sensing the energetics of the whole. It's tracking and moving on intuition. Not always listening to your rational mind."

—Anne Doshier

"I have a deep trust in my own intuition. I can turn to my own source of guidance in any moment and immediately know what I'm being asked to do. So that's always present and I use that." —Tom Hurley

NON-ATTACHMENT

Gatherings almost always begin with clear hopes, goals, or some form of result in mind. Paradoxically, however, a consistent theme is that the facilitators at least, and sometimes the participants, practice as best they can a non-attachment to specific outcomes; a kind of balanced detachment with commitment; a relaxing and a surrendering to a higher wisdom, while still holding a clear intention for the desired results.

"It was important that we got there, but we weren't trying to get somewhere, which was also one of the important pieces."

—Beth Jandermoa

"It's a trust. It's a trust in the synchronicity. It's a trust in the spontaneity. It's a trust that this particular organic organization will be able to surface and resolve the things that matter to them." —Leilani Henry

NOT KNOWING

People describe a stance of not knowing; of surrender to the larger collective wisdom and to the inflow of divine intelligence in the moment. They undertake a certain and necessary amount of research, planning and organization in preparation for a gathering, and create a certain amount of structure to enable a free flow of collective wisdom, rather than to contain it, or to control what happens.



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"I always know what the purpose is, I don't know what it's going to look like. It's that staying crisp to the purpose and the letting go of what it's going to look like that allows me to be present in the moment of what's happening in order to make use of it in that moment in time."

—Ann Hoewing

"The sense of not knowing what's around the corner and being willing to be with that and actually be energized by that, is essential; especially when we're talking about exploring, opening ourselves into learning something that we don't know. It's like the next step in our evolution."

—Glenna Gerard

"To be without preconceived notions. To be without answers. To be open to possibilities. To be willing to discover in relation to one another. Those are higher ways of being."

—Diana Whitney

NON-JUDGMENT

People describe how they work to hold themselves centered in a neutral or impartial place of non-judgment. This is a constant practice as it is all too easy to find agreement or disagreement, irritation, impatience, and any number of other judgmental reactions arising during a group gathering. People speak of noticing these personal feelings and judgments arising, looking at them clearly, discerning if a response is needed for the larger whole, and otherwise consciously discarding them—choosing instead to return to their center, to their openness, and to their stance of non-judgment in service of the group.



“There’s a kind of settling amongst the people in the group so that the listening and the talking is coming from a deeper place, where people are able to relax and suspend judgment and be curious and open, and a meaning emerges from the group that’s greater than any individual would have made.”

—Penny Williamson

“I allow myself to feel the sting of the indictment, and I let it wash right over me, or through me. I try not to get attached to it. So there’s a little moment of internal clearing to let go of what I had been fixed on, in order to taste, to feel, and maybe even to smell what might be behind the indictment.”

—Mitch Saunders

ART, MUSIC, SOUND AND MOVEMENT

Art, music, sound and movement enable access to insight and offer means of expressing the forms it

takes. People describe how they prepare for and enter group experiences with a certain fearlessness and light-heartedness. There is a sense of humility in their stories, and a joyful gratitude that they are privileged to be doing this work. They don’t take themselves too seriously, for with all the preparation in the world, they know that the only way is to place their trust in the group and in ever-present divine consciousness. Art, music, movement, and other forms of physical sensory activities are often used as enablers of lightness and play, through which the whole person, individually and collectively, may be fully engaged.



“Art is a vital form of communication. It is spiritual. It is political. It is fundamentally the way in which human beings communicate their deepest essence. Now, can you understand the power of [art] to change the world in an intentional way, to bring us together in an intentional way, or to raise issues in an intentional way? Then I think we will have crossed a major kind of threshold.”

—Ysaye Barnwell

“Each of us would bring our creative expression into the group and share it collectively. That was a very powerful experience, which allowed the tacit knowing in the group to surface.”

—Marilyn Veltrop

“A particular kind of intelligence got shut off when the singing was shut off. If you look far enough back in the history of most people, part of how we were together and worked together and celebrated together and mourned together, was through song.... To bring this forward again opens up the possibility, it primes the pump for certain other kinds of creativity to come in.”

—Rachel Bagby

“There’s some way that participating in all of the other [creative, playful] activities actually expands the field of view of whatever the question or task is.”

—Glenna Gerard

WHOLE BODY SENSING

There seems to be an emerging new understanding of the role of the human body in learning and transformation, both for the individual and in gatherings. People speak of how the western culture we live in usually places too strong an emphasis on logical, orderly, cognitive processes—verbal and written—for learning and communicating. This has left us somehow disembodied—the brain with little awareness or connection to the cellular intelligence that permeates the body; the senses with little ability to pick up on the finer signals coming through to us from the body as conduit for our collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom. Movement of the body is not only about relaxation and releasing of tension. It is utilized as a serious discipline for the integration of the human system—mind, emotions, and body; for right and left brain integration; and essentially for the integration and completion of collective learning, in a way that engages all the senses in the richness and fullness of whole-body functioning. It is the fully aligned and integrated human system—individually, collectively, and as a species—which will best serve as a clear channel for the manifestation of divine wisdom for healing and evolution on the planet.



“Anything that brings people together where their bodies, their minds and their imaginations are engaged simultaneously, has the potential to go deeper.”

—Peter Hawes

“The body doesn’t lie. There is wisdom that’s locked into the body.... So we’re not using words, we’re using movement and sound.... There’s a rhythm, there’s a coherence in the body if you let the body move.”

—Leilani Henry

“When we are sitting in those circles together and calling forward for more wisdom to do something else as a species, to be another way, to live more restoratively; then when I hear or see some kind of opening, a kind of shining—it’s almost like a portal—then I will sound until I feel like a tuning fork—opening, amplifying, deepening the tender new insight that is ready to be born.”

—Rachel Bagby

SYMBOLISM AND METAPHOR

Many people speak of using objects, symbols, and metaphors, as powerful avenues for creating shared meaning within a group. The introduction of a physical object, or use of metaphoric language seems often able to facilitate a dramatic shift in the collective consciousness of a group enabling ideas to coalesce and the group to come together with a sense of movement, direction and/or resolution. Many people speak of a pioneering spirit they feel, as if charting new territory in an emerging field of group practice. The natural language often used when people speak about these experiences—try to

describe the indescribable—is often metaphoric and rich with symbols, images, icons and turns of phrase.



“One of the people who had died in the conflict was a relative of his, and he starts crying; and he’s holding the stone...it’s like he’d forgotten to pass it on.... So after a couple of minutes, the stone moved on and we continued the session, and each one of them in this four-hour session indicated that this was a life-changing experience.... They took the stone and they built this Plexiglas case for it; and so there’s this shrine... for those who had done that level of sharing. They knew what the stone meant, and didn’t need any words for it.”

—Sharif Abdullah

“We use the labyrinth as a spiritual tool, as a huge metaphor for the spiritual journey.... Labyrinth walking is archetypal. The return home, the hero’s journey, or more of the feminine sense of you go out into the world, you don’t necessarily slay dragons, but you awaken, you open, you receive, you allow, you expand. And then, you take the return back to the real world.”

—Lauren Artress

DISCERNMENT

Inner preparation before a gathering allows people to more easily discern when action is needed, and when stillness and listening are needed. And so they tend not to engage in overly busy preparatory activities that are based on past learning and experience. People describe the awareness they have of being in a relationship with everyone and everything that is going on in the group. All external happenings



Photographer Unknown

carry messages, clues, directions as to the learning that is unfolding inside for the self as well as for the group. It is in the interplay—in the spaces in between the self, the other, and the group as a whole, that the richness of collective wisdom reveals itself. And so the actions that people take come from a deeply trusting place of being with whatever is happening in the moment.



“It’s a knowing—the recognition that the decision point will happen, and you need to recognize it in that moment. It’s kind of like it’s own hypertension, to recognize when that moment is that’s best suited, and when the shift needs to happen.”

—Ann Hoewing

“One of the learnings is to continue sharpening one’s ability for distinguishing between what is picked up from being here that is about the process field, and what is not about the process field, but is about myself.”

—Finn Voldtofte

“If I’m not clear on what to do, or people are seemingly in conflict; I just pray that the highest good would be revealed, and try to get my ego out of the way by doing that. So, this prayer will be going on inside of me at the same time someone else in the room is talking, or maybe even while I am talking.”

—Diana Whitney

By means of a short survey, we began to ask thought leaders, practitioners and artisans to answer a series of questions that we expected would make more visible some of the otherwise invisible centers of gravity and sense of direction and movement throughout the field. We asked:

- What is the nature of your work related to this field?
- What has brought you to this work?
- What is your approach or practices you use? Based on what theoretical frameworks or schools of thought?
- What is a central organizing question that is underpinning your work?

On these two pages you will find an array of the responses we received to our query about core intention and focus, i.e. answers to the question "What is the central organizing question that is underpinning your work?"

(In a separate document we are compiling responses to all of the four queries listed above.)



"What do we need to know to bring the next level of conscious collective organization and work into the world?"

"What is the Will for the unfolding of the earth? How do we "divinize" the planet?"

"What would cultivation look like in a collective situation if it included commitment to contemplative practice, to study and to service, i.e. dedicating one's life as a group to something beyond oneself? Can a body of people working together, be committed as a collective to this type of cultivation?"

"How can we best organize ourselves to realize our highest aspirations, both personally and collectively, guided by our most essential values and beliefs?"

"How does a group discover what it is to do together? What are its compelling questions? Veins of curiosity?"

"How can we collectively generate the wisdom we need to deal elegantly with our massive collective problems and opportunities while simultaneously, leaping to our next level of evolution?"

"How can we better cooperate with Life's retuning of our whole beings in order that we learn to respect the rest of Life and live more restoratively?"

"What is needed to move forward in wholeness and balance? What is needed—in *this moment*—to move forward in wholeness and balance?"

"How can I participate to realize or reveal the inherent coherence in this situation which is not yet apparent?"

"What is ending and what is being born here?"

"How does collective consciousness act in our lives and in the life of our planet?"

"How can we expand and transform our understanding and experience of ourselves, each other and the world through dialogue?"

"What portal within us needs to be opened to enable us to enter the collective field and channel life's current movement?"

"How can we best embrace all that life offers—differences, joys and sorrows—and act within a transcendent spiritual awareness?"

"Can we experience our connectedness so deeply that we can begin to think and create 'as one', without any loss of our individual uniqueness?"

"How can spirit be evoked in any organizational setting regardless of culture?"

"How do we make room for the work of the imagination in our lives and work? How do we trust the validity of our own experiences and engage in conversations with others that bring us to the frontiers of this experience?"

"How can experiences of communion in groups help create a global culture, in which people respect, cherish and love all beings and Nature?"

"What will enable us to act upon the realization that we really are connected?"

"How can I/we learn to live 'divided no more'?"

"How can I be of service in helping individuals develop and integrate a high level of consciousness in terms of mental, intellectual, and spiritual processing in their daily practical lives so that collectively, we can co-create a society and a world culture based on such capacity?"

"How to develop collective mastery in eliciting and facilitating the self-organizing intelligence and systemic wisdom in communities?"

"What does it take for people to meet together in a way that they face the really important issues creatively and collaboratively and that they achieve breakthrough solutions?"

"How can we cultivate our collective capacity to listen into the new story which is emerging such that our individual actions in the world contribute more to the well being than degradation of social and ecological systems we live within? "

"How can I/we better invite and support more generative, emergent forms of leadership in the world?"

"How do I consistently—in every moment, in every encounter in my life—choose to listen for and act on the Voice for Love?"

"How to foster people's ability to connect with Spirit, provide purpose and evolve critical consciousness?"

"What can I do to bring about the conditions that provide for the possibility of generative, sacred space?"

"How can I best serve pathfinders who are awakening to their essence and committed to the transformation of personal and global consciousness?"

"What is needed (in this work, in this session, in this moment) that will call forth individual and collective authentic presence, love, energy and capacity in service of the work at hand?"

"How can we elicit a synergistic relationship between the collective and the individual, so that 1) groups nourish and support the individual genius of heart and mind of all of their members; and, in turn, 2) the collective intelligence of the group is enhanced?"

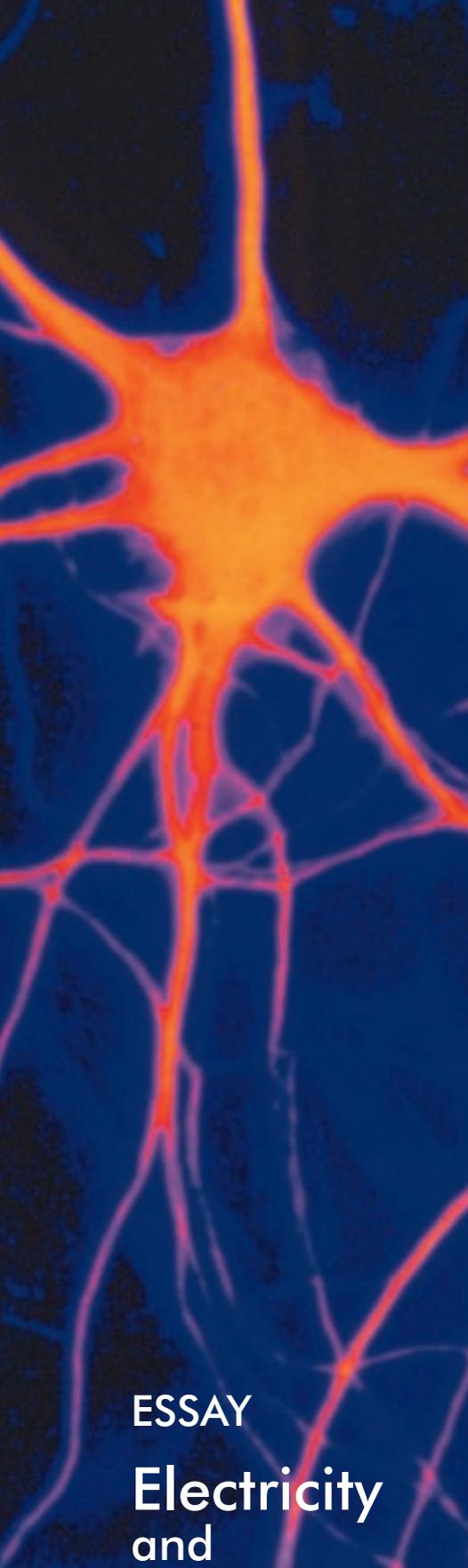
"What is trying to emerge?"

"How can we contain diversity and difference, so that in place of both deadening consensus and destructive conflict, a higher form of intelligence is allowed to come into play?"

"How is it that the deep spiritual wisdom that is available to each soul can be linked together and manifest itself through action in the world?"

"What is required to build a more sustainable, sociable, and soulful future for the human family and the larger ecology of life on Earth?"

"How can the evolution (and the punctuated equilibrium!) of consciousness be facilitated and supported for both individuals and groups?"



ESSAY

Electricity and Groups

This paper experiments with the assertion that collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom is the flow of energy through the conduit of a human system, much like electricity is the flow of electrons, or electrical energy, through a system of circuitry. It begins to explore the basic laws of physics as applied to electricity and as applied to groups; perhaps enabling us to understand and explain more fully in scientific terms this phenomenon we sometimes experience in groups of an effortless synergy, harmony, and flow. At the very least, exploring the phenomenon of electricity as a metaphor for group synergy is fun and illuminating; and at best it might perhaps yield a direct and concrete representation of the phenomenon.

Principles of Electricity

Here are the basic principles of electricity, which is essentially the flow of electrons:

- V – voltage, measured in volts, is the **POTENTIAL** across a system
- I – current, measured in amps, is the **FLOW** in a system
- R – resistance, measured in ohms, is the **RESISTANCE** in a system
- W – wattage, measured in watts, is the **WORK** produced by a system (e.g., **BRIGHTNESS** in a system designed to light the world)

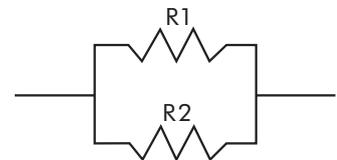
Key relationships are:

$I = V/R$, meaning that, given a constant **POTENTIAL**, the **FLOW** in a system is inversely proportional to the **RESISTANCE** in the system. In other words **FLOW** increases as **RESISTANCE** decreases.

$W = I \times V = (V \times V)/R$, meaning that, again given a constant **POTENTIAL**, the work (**BRIGHTNESS**) produced by a system, is inversely proportional to the **RESISTANCE** in the system. In other words, **BRIGHTNESS** increases as **RESISTANCE** decreases.

So, in simple terms, taking **POTENTIAL** (voltage) across a system as a constant, we can see that **FLOW** and **BRIGHTNESS** are always improved where conductivity is higher, meaning resistance is lower. Insulators are very poor conductors because they have very high resistances; metals are good conductors because they have very low resistances, and semi-conductors such as silicon lie in between. In ordinary household light bulbs, tungsten wire is most often used in varying lengths and thickness to produce the brightness desired. One more very important relationship is that when a system is set up with more than one resistor in parallel, the total or equivalent resistance of the system is measured with the following formula: $1/(1/R1 + 1/R2 + 1/R3...)$

So in the example (see illustration right) of a system with two parallel resistors, each say with a resistance of 100 ohms, the equivalent resistance of the system is:
 $1/(1/100 + 1/100) = 1/(2/100) = 50$ ohms



In other words, simply by grouping two equal resistors in a parallel arrangement reduces the resistance of the total system by 50%. This means of course that the **FLOW** across the system, and **BRIGHTNESS** produced, is doubled!!

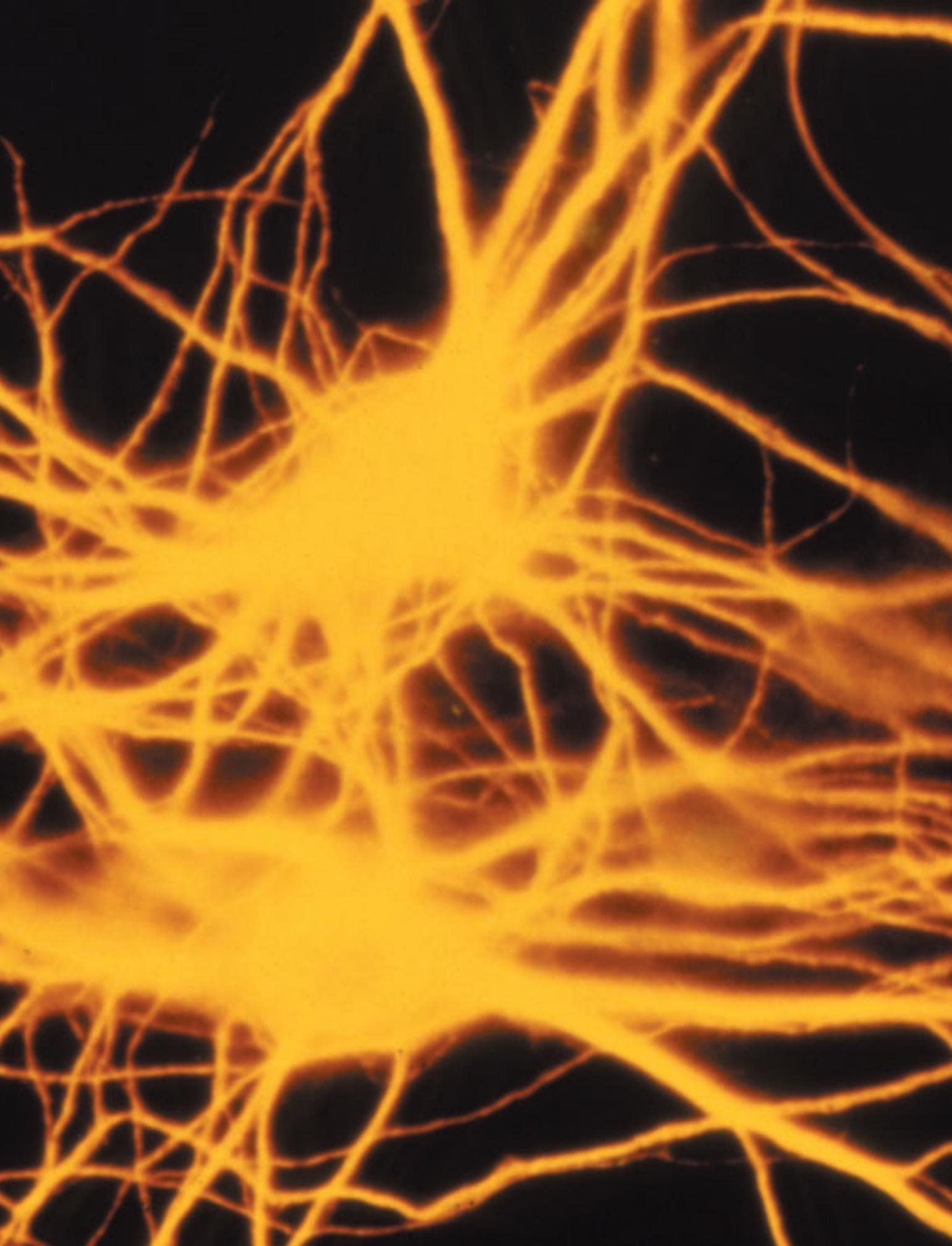
“Single Human Neuron”

(color enhanced)

© Tim Kennedy

“Human Nerve Cells
Dancing Dendrites”

© Tim Kennedy



Metaphor Cluster

Mind Brain Connection

there's electricity in generative emergence • unformatting the mind's trance of consensual realities by which we are hypnotized • dendrites are brains of neurons* • dendrites are the principal signal reception and processing sites on vertebrate neurons* • dendrites are membrane cylinders connecting with each other to form a tree* • power in minute capillary forms • co-intelligence is what intelligence looks like when we take our interconnectedness seriously • synapses are the contacts between neurons* • thunderbolts of insights • synapses need proteins for learning* • ribosomes are protein factories; synaptic activity boosts synthesis* • dendrites respond to signals by strengthening or weakening synapses* • dendrites develop after birth in concert with neuronal circuitry* • cross-call is when the hemispheres of your body talk to each other and hook up your electromagnetic fields • action potentials can be amplified by dendritic oscillations and blocked by inhibition* • changing the channel • synapses alter electrical properties of dendritic membranes and interact non-linearly* • yoking cpu's and sharing peripherals to do parallel processing • synaptic inputs play music with dendrites*

* SCIENCE, 27 Oct 2000, Vol. 290, No. 5492

Principles of Groups

Now let's apply these laws of physics, these principles which govern the flow of electricity in our world, to the human system—individuals and groups as conductors for the inflow of divine intelligence to the world. The new definitions for the elements involved in this dynamic of communication would be as follows:

- V – is the POTENTIAL across a human system; the potential with which we all arrive on this earth, to be perfect vessels, conduits, conductors for divine guidance.
- I – is the FLOW of divine intelligence, guidance, through the human system; the degree to which the transpersonal (gifts of visionary intuition, unconditional compassion, and unceasing action in service of humanity) is consistently expressed through the instrument of the personality.
- R – is the RESISTANCE in the human system; we all have our fears—the obstacles, the blocks our ego has made, in this lifetime and in others; exquisitely constructed defenses which appear essential in order to protect our autonomy, but which in actuality conspire to stop us from seeing and experiencing our divinity, our true autonomy of wholeness and oneness.
- W – is the WORK produced by a human system; our only real work being to allow our BRIGHTNESS through, to allow our healing light to shine away the pain and separation in the world; to extend love into the world with wisdom, compassion and collective action.

Applying the rules of physics then, the key relationships are:

$I = V/R$, meaning that, given a constant POTENTIAL, and I do believe that every human being shares the same infinite potential to be a super-conductor for divine guidance; then the FLOW of divine intelligence in the human system is inversely proportional to the RESISTANCE being maintained in the system. In other words FLOW increases as RESISTANCE decreases.

$W = I \times V = (V \times V)/R$, meaning that, again given a constant POTENTIAL, the work (BRIGHTNESS)—the light, the insights, the clarity, the new ways of seeing and doing—produced (apprehended) by a human system, is inversely proportional to the RESISTANCE in the system. In other words, BRIGHTNESS increases as RESISTANCE decreases.

The good news for us as human systems is that we have choices. We are not at all like a piece of tungsten wire in a light bulb, which pretty much has a fixed resistance depending on its thickness and length! On the contrary, we have the ability to choose, instant to instant, to either hang on to our defenses or to surrender them to a greater knowing. For most of us, I imagine, we live like semi-conductors, flip-flopping, one millisecond to the next, buffeted about by external circumstances which we often allow to govern our inner state. Yet as we learn from each other and grow, we find perhaps more and more often that we are able to empty out our obstacles, release our defenses and have experiences of almost magical harmony, peace, joy, and productivity...both on our own and with others in groups.

In a group setting, then, individual human systems come together and work in parallel as it were, acting as a collective human system. When this is done, the new system (the group) has a collective resistance of the inverse of the sum of the inverses of each individual resistance, that is: $1/(1/R_1 + 1/R_2 + 1/R_3 \dots)$

To take a simple example of a group of two people—two parallel resistors, each say with a resistance of 200, the equivalent resistance of the combined system is: $1/(1/200 + 1/200) = 1/(2/200) = 100$

In other words we're seeing that the simple choice, made consciously by two people, to join together (in a parallel arrangement) for a common purpose

can be enormously powerful as a tool for increasing the flow of divine insight into our lives. Though each person is struggling with their own fears at an equal level of resistance (200), the very act of joining with another reduces the resistance of their dyad by 50%. This means of course that the FLOW of divine intelligence through them, and hence their BRIGHTNESS, is doubled!

Collective Intelligence and Spiritual Wisdom in Groups

For the purposes of this study the focus has been defined to be gatherings of five or more people, depicted in the illustration at right.

Applying these principles we now have a more concrete way of examining how such groups might or might not achieve the enhanced level of elegance and graceful functioning that we're calling Collective Intelligence and Spiritual Wisdom; and we can explore some strategies for how we might even facilitate such functioning.

It has been my conviction for a very long time that there is a certain "critical mass" that has to be reached before a group may experience this magical flow. There has to be a certain level of collective capacity for holding the space, maintaining a stance at a certain level of expansive and inclusive awareness; a certain level of compassionate being, fully present in the room with both the resonance and the dissonance, in order to discern the harmony.

The question remains: How is this capacity realized? What exactly is it that contributes to or detracts from a group's ability to reach this threshold? If we look at a group as a collection of parallel resistors, we could say that the challenge is not so much to build up to some critical mass of capacity, but rather to become aware of and remove our defenses, reducing our resistances to sufficiently low a level, in order to allow the inflow of divine wisdom. In other words, given the constant transpersonal potential or pressure inherent in us and surrounding us, our work is simply to tear down our blockade, and surrender to the flow. So the capacity the group needs to strive for is in fact one of emptying out, rather than building up on anything.

Strategies for Opening to Collective Intelligence and Spiritual Wisdom

I wonder if there is some minimum level of resistance below which Spiritual Wisdom can freely flow? Let's imagine that the average person carries a normal resistance of 200. And let's say that Spiritual Wisdom flows freely across systems whose resistance is 15 or less.

Example: A group of four people, each with a resistance of 200.

Their group resistance

$$= 1 / (1/200 + 1/200 + 1/200 + 1/200) = 1 / (4/200) = 50$$

How can we create group synergy in this group? In other words, how can we reduce the group resistance down to 15 or less?

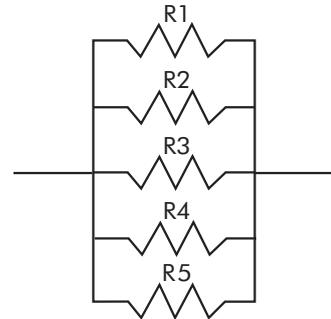
Strategy 1: We could add a fifth person to the group, who is highly committed to his/her spiritual clarity, and has a resistance of 20. Then the group resistance

$$= 1 / (1/200 + 1/200 + 1/200 + 1/200 + 1/20) = 1 / (4/200 + 1/20) = 1 / (14/200) = 14.3!$$

Strategy 2: We could add ten people to the group; people of average normal resistance (200), but who choose to come together for a particular purpose. Now the group resistance

$$= 1 / (14/200) = 14.3!$$

Strategy 3: The four people in the group could engage in practices that dramatically lower their individual resistances to 60, as they commit themselves to the group process and join together in defenselessness.



How the Essay "Electricity and Groups" Came to Be:

"In early dialogue on this study I noticed we often used words such as 'flow,' 'resistance,' 'light,' 'conduits.' As an engineer, my thoughts turned to their use and established meaning in the scientific world. Was there a connection? One day in August my husband (also an engineer) and I had a long conversation about the physical laws governing the flow of electricity. The next day, this rather playful approach to the field flowed lightly onto paper."

—Chris Strutt

Now the group resistance

$$= 1/(1/60 + 1/60 + 1/60 + 1/60) = 1/(4/60) = 15!$$

Strategy 4: One of the four people in the group in a moment of great clarity and deep compassion, opens him/herself to the divine, lowering his/her resistance in that moment to 19. The group resistance

$$= 1/(1/200 + 1/200 + 1/200 + 1/19) = 1/(3/200 + 1/19) \\ = 1/((.015 + .053)) = 14.7!$$

There have to be infinite possibilities for how to create group synergy. Looking at the phenomenon through the laws of physics might help us recognize, understand and experiment with creating some of those ways.

Divine Intervention

One last notion that has engaged me is the belief I stated earlier, that POTENTIAL is a constant across the human system. I do truly believe this from our perspective, in our somewhat limited view of things as it were. However, from the vast perspective of the Divine, I can imagine quite possibly a scenario, where I, the much-loved child, am totally and absolutely blockaded into my resistances. I have no intention of budging even one inch, so great is my mistaken terror of moving forward. I do believe that these are the times when the Divine in its infinite compassion ups the ante by changing the rules. The Potential or pressure on my system is cranked up dramatically! One moment I'm smugly going about my everyday business, cocooned in my fears and defenses, and the next, I'm cracked wide open. It could be a tragic loss of some kind—a fatal illness, a traumatic injury—something that ups the POTENTIAL across my system. Now V, the POTENTIAL, the pressure, is no longer constant but increased. And even though R, my RESISTANCE, didn't change, I, the FLOW, suddenly and dramatically increases across my system. My system is suddenly a superconductor—insights, learnings and growth flood my being—I am potentially a dazzling light.

Going back to the principles of electricity, remembering that

$$V = I \times R \text{ and } W = I \times V = I \times I \times R \dots$$

Therefore when V (POTENTIAL) is doubled, even though R (RESISTANCE) remains constant, I (the FLOW) is also doubled, and W (the BRIGHTNESS) is actually quadrupled. For example, a 25-watt bulb in the U.S. grid of 110 volts would actually shine at a brightness of 100 watts in the European grid of 220 volts, resistance being constant, and most likely quickly burn out.

So it is that Divine guidance can and does intervene, causing the potential or pressure across a human system to be doubled, as in times of great crisis. This allows a corresponding doubling in the openness of the system to the inflow of Spiritual Wisdom, despite its resistance remaining constant. This in turn results in a four times increase in the brightness of the system—its clarity, its light, and the work it produces. This is as true for an individual as it is for a group. People, unlike tungsten wire, have the capacity not to burn out but to rise to the challenge. This is in fact what we see in the human spirit as whole communities respond in times of great crisis, after an earthquake or other "natural" disaster. Looking at tragedy this way, perhaps we can see more clearly that deep within suffering lie the gifts of grace, strength and wisdom. Embracing the darkness leads us to hidden blessings, creating the readiness to open to the eternal divine spark that burns in each one of us, and which burns even more brightly when we are gathered as one.

Ultimately therefore, it is not our free will to determine *whether* we will collaborate with the Divine, but rather, only *when and how* this will happen. Would we not prefer joyfully to surrender to this ultimate collaboration on our own behalf and hence on behalf of the evolution of all of humanity? What gentler way to do this than within the safety and turbo-charged functioning of truly gathered meetings? ■

"...Divine guidance can and does intervene, causing the potential or pressure across a human system to be doubled, as in times of great crisis. This allows a corresponding doubling in the openness of the system to the inflow of Spiritual Wisdom, despite its resistance remaining constant. This in turn results in a four times increase in the brightness of the system—its clarity, its light, and the work it produces. People, unlike tungsten wire, have the capacity not to burn out but to rise to the challenge."

Over the course of eight to ten months of this study, an original list of 40 names of informants multiplied by ten—to well over 400 people recommended by their peers as potential sources of experience and expertise related to this field. Practitioners and activists began to become visible. As we contacted them, we discovered that many are already known to one another but generally not linked or aware of the specifics of one another's work, talents, gifts or approach.

They are thought leaders, researchers, spiritual leaders, elders, healers, teachers, professors, mentors and guides, facilitators, writers, artists, engineers, scientists, business persons, organizational and systems consultants, musicians, entrepreneurs, community organizers, social activists, environmentalists and more.

The list of names grew from a predominantly American group based in the United States to an international one. With time, as we continued to ask "Who else could speak from a depth of experience with the group phenomena of collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom?" the array of potential informants became more global and then more multi-dimensional.

On the two pages that follow (pages 72–73) you will find a listing of the first people to become visible to this study as practitioners, artisans and thought leaders. There will be more. This list is a beginning.

How to read the listing: (Key to coding)

Name in:

■ Sentence Case

All of the names are in alphabetical order. The list represents people who have become visible as of March 1, 2001. The list started with 40 people and grew by these identifying others who they considered experienced and active in this field.

■ UPPER CASE

People interviewed in this study as part of the seed grant from the Fetzer Institute from June 2000–June 2001.

■ blue

People identified through survey results by their peers as having been their teacher, mentor, guide or thought leader for practice in this field. (Results as of March 1, 2001)

■ purple

People most often identified as thought leaders or provocateurs in this field of practice. (Results as of March 1, 2001)

*"Who else could speak from a depth
of experience with the group
phenomena of collective intelligence
and spiritual wisdom?"*

© Pia Davis

The
People



The People

- **Sentence Case** recommended by peers as informants and resource persons
- **UPPER CASE** interviewed as part of the seed grant from the Fetzer Institute

Aeshah Ababio-Clottery **SHARIF ABDULLAH** Deborah Admiral Yvonne Agazarian **Betty Alexander**
Verna Allee Janet Allen A. H. Almaas Marti Anderson Sherry Anderson **ANGELES ARRIEN**
LAUREN ARTRESS **TOM ATLEE** Richard Austin **Christopher M. Bache** **RACHEL BAGBY** Christina Baldwin
Judy Barber Susana Barcieala Laura Baring-Gould **YSAYE BARNWELL** Richard Barrett Cedar Barstow
David Belle-Isle Roger Benson Marianne Bentzen Deanna Berg Barbara Bernstein Wendell Berry
Sue Bethanis Dick Bettinger Dale Biron Anthony Blake **Jude Blitz** Peter Block Gary Boelhower
Linda Booth-Sweeney Jim Botkin Ingrid Bredenberg Lu Rachele Brim-Atkins Lynn Brinkerhoff **ALAN BRISKIN**
Greta Bro **Joanna Brown** **JUANITA BROWN** **JUDY BROWN** Jerilyn Brusseau Robin Bryant
Gloria Burgess Judy Burgio Michael Burns **Mirabai Bush** **TOM CALLANAN** **ROB CAHILL** Liz Campbell
Carol Caton Roslie Capper Doug Carmichael Pat Joy Carver Tim Casswell **Michael Cecil** Dinesh Chandra
SARITA CHAWLA Barry Childs **Rita Cleary** Kokomon Clottery **Kristin Cobble** **BARBARA COFFMAN**
Elizabeth Cogburn Karan Cole Janet Coleman **ARTHUR COLMAN** **David Cooperrider**
Diane Cory Kathy Cramer **Linda Crawford** Margarita Crocker **Larry Daloz** **Tom Daly** Marian David
Kay Davidson **Philip Davidson** Edward DeBono Kate DeHaven Anne Deveson **Freeman Dhority**
Elena Diez Pinto Connie Dicus **John Dicus** Peter Donaldson **ANNE DOSHER** Judy Dubin
Virginia Duncan **ANDREA DYER** **Saul Eisen** Duane Elgin Linda Ellinor John Epps Sheryl Erickson
Dorothy Ettling **ELIZABETH FADDELL** Suzanne Fageol **FIREHAWK** Roger Fisher **Craig Fleck**
BOB FORMAN **AMY FOX** Matthew Fox Lorain Fox Davis Tom French **Carol Frenier** Lee Fuller Lynn Fuller
PETER GAARN Tim Gallwey Gabriele Ganswindt Greg Garbarino **Charles Garfield** **Peter Garrett**
Judith Gass **Robert Gass** **GLENNA GERARD** Rosalie Gerut Mark Gerzon Steve Gildersleeve Jack Gilles
GLENNIFER GILLESPIE **JULIE GLOVER** Carol Goldman Chloe Goodchild Kaz Gozdz **Jeff Groethe**
Herman Gyr Sheila Hajji Kalen Hammann **Robert Hanig** Dan Hanson **PAT HARBOUR** Sally Hare
Roger Harrison Sara Hart Johann Hartkemeyer Martina Hartkemeyer **PETER HAWES** **Barry Heermann**
CAROL HEGEDUS John Heider **LEILANI HENRY** John Heron Walter Hildner Dee Hock **ANN HOEWING**
Lois Sekerak Hogan **Peggy Holman** David Horne Marianne Houston Mark Hower Mary Hudak Fritz Hull
Vivienne Hull Stella Humphries **Michele Hunt** **TOM HURLEY** Annika Hurwitt Schahn Michael Hutton
Sherry Immediato Rick Ingrasci **Bill Isaacs** **DAVID M. ISAACS** **MARCY JACKSON** **Rick Jackson**
BETH JANDERNOA Dadi Janki Joe Jaworski Jon Jenkins Maureen Jenkins Greg Johanson
PETER JOHNSON-LENZ **TRUDY JOHNSON-LENZ** **Charles Johnston** Mark Jones **MICHAEL JONES**
Susan Jordan Kertzner **Anthony Judge** Jon Kabat-Zinn **ADAM KAHANE** Janet Kahn Prasad Kaipa **David Kantor**
Robert Keagan **Will Keepin** Stanley Keleman **Myron Kellner-Rogers** **ROBERT KENNY** **Ron Kertzner**
Charlie Kiefer Daniel Kim Jon Kinghorn RainbowHawk Kinney Linton WindEagle Kinney Linton

■ **blue** identified by peers as teacher, mentor, guide or thought leader

■ **purple** most often identified by peers as thought leaders or provocateurs

John Kloepfer Amina Knowlan Marianne Knuth Peter Koenig Peter Koestenbaum Fran Korten
Doug Kruschke Nina Kruschwitz Joseph Kruth Satish Kumar Ipek Kursat Marianne LaBarre David LaChapelle
Sharon Lamm Joe Lauer JOAN LEDERMAN Bob Lengel Joel Levey Michelle Levey Roger Lewin Bernard Lietaer
Michael Linfield Ann Linnea Kanta Lipsky Wendy Lombard Jim Lord Sue Lotz Suzanne Lovell Gay Luce
Nomathemba Luhabe Margaret Lulic Nusa Maal Joanna Macy Laraine Mai Bob Mang Pamela Mang
Clarence Mann Nancy Margulies Margo Mariana Dawna Markova Danny Martin Barbara Marx Hubbard
Humberto Maturana Steve Maybury Suzanne Maxwell Harris McCarter David McCleskey Ann McGee-Cooper
Nadia McLaren Toni McMurphy Beth McPherson Donella Meadows (deceased) Mukara Meredith
Rick Mignone Elise Miller Sue Miller Hurst Amy Mindell Arnold Mindell Phil Mirvis Maggie Moore
Toke Mueller Wayne Muller Michael Munn Ken Murphy Michael Murphy Gayatri Naraine CRAIG NEAL
Judy Neal Patricia Neal JACOB NEEDLEMAN Lara Nuer Jennifer O'Donnell John O'Donohue
Terri O'Fallon Kate O'Keefe Kenoli Oleari Patrick O'Neil JOHN OTT Harrison Owen Eileen Palmer
PARKER PALMER Sid Paneco Marjorie Parker Sharon Parks Perry Pascarella Fran Peavey Scott Peck
RED PELE Claude Pepin Reola Phelps Linda Pierce Cornelius Pietzner Rose Pinard Tom Pitman
Miha Pogacnik George Por Nancy Post DAVE POTTER Ike Powell George Pransky Omi Preheim
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Diane Robbins Michele Robbins Charlotte Roberts Ocean Robbins Vicki Robin Dennis Roblee Judy Rodgers
Jim Rough TERESA RUELAS Ned Ruele Peter Russell Agota Ruzsa Stephanie Ryan Bob Saar Anil Sachdev
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Sobonfu Some Barbara Sowada Jeff Spahn David Spangler Scott Spann Karen Speerstra CINDY SPRING
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Eric Utne Peter Vaill ROBERTO VARGAS Margaret Vaughan Bob Veazie BILL VELTROP MARILYN VELTROP
DEBORAH VOGELE WELCH Eric Vogt FINN VOLDTOFTE Larry Ward Jean Watts Barbara Waugh
Marc Weiss Margaret Wheatley White Eagle Woman DIANA WHITNEY Ken Wilber
PENNY WILLIAMSON Isabel Willshaw Jon Winder Ellen Wingard Marion Woodman
TENNESON WOOLF Metta Zetty Karen Anne Zien Rosa Zubizarreta Gary Zukav





“What we know about individuals, no matter how rich the details, will never give us the ability to predict how they will behave as a system. Once individuals link together they become something different.... Relationships change us, reveal us, evoke more from us. Only when we join with others do our gifts become visible, even to ourselves.”

*—Margaret Wheatley and
Myron Kellner-Rogers*

"Start anywhere; follow where it leads." The group of ten authors, artists, and practitioners who guided the evolution of this study did just that: started with the interviews and followed where they led.

We do not have statistically significant data to support any of the reflections that follow. What we do have, however, is a deep intuiting, a collective discernment that has emerged within us in response to the hundreds of hours of interviews, the thousands of transcribed pages, the myriad symbols, metaphors and principles that suggested themselves through the interviews, and the hours of conversation and dialogue we engaged in with each other.

SO WHAT...IS THIS PHENOMENON?

Throughout our work together we experienced abiding inspiration and joy, accompanied at times by feelings of being overwhelmed, of being deluged by torrents of energy and complexity. In his book, *A Theory of Everything*, Ken Wilber writes:

"This book is a brief overview of a Theory of Everything. All such attempts, of course, are marked by the many ways in which they fail. The many ways in which they fall short, drive specialists insane, and generally fail to achieve their stated aim of holistic embrace. It's not just that the task is beyond any one human mind; it's that the task itself is inherently undoable: knowledge expands faster than ways to categorize it."

Exactly. Each time we tried to create a single, coherent analysis of this phenomenon, we immediately sensed the inadequacy of our attempt. Most fundamentally, we struggled even with how to talk about what we were doing. People who have explored this phenomenon have called it many different names: group synergy; group mind; collective intelligence; spiritual wisdom; collective knowing; group wisdom; magic; "being in the zone"; *kairos*; the transpersonal realm; *koinonia*; divine intelligence; and on and on.

When we first began working together, the language we used was *magic*, as in "how can we understand what helps magic occur in groups?" Over time we settled on a different phrase—*collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom*. Building on Jacob's question, we started to ask, "what helps groups access the collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom they need to do their work?"

We have not attempted to develop a precise definition of the phenomenon we explored. Instead, we started with the interviews, and followed where they led. In doing so, we believe we have documented the existence of this phenomenon, and, through the weaving together of stories, commentaries, principles, metaphors, images and poetry, have begun to discern some of its contours and dimensions.

While we cannot precisely define the phenomenon, we can describe a basic structure through which the phenomenon unfolds. Interview after interview told the same story. People come together. Sometimes they know each other well, often they don't. They come together in situations where the stakes are high—either individually or collectively or both. Through processes of connection and exploration, the group experiences a profound, collective expansion in understanding and capacity. Consequently, the group produces results literally unimaginable when the group first convened.

SO WHAT...DID WE LEARN ABOUT THIS PHENOMENON?

So many things.

Every person we talked to believes that people are gathering together more often—in dialogue groups, ceremonial circles, retreats, cafés, and countless other forms. They believe that more and more people are seeking, and can bear witness to, experiences of collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom.

CLOSING
REFLECTIONS

So

What?

This data leads us to hypothesize that experiences of this phenomenon are becoming more common.

The principles that surfaced from the interviews, helping us to understand more clearly some of the elements of the experience, the significance of gathering, and some of the practices of preparing for and opening to the phenomenon, reflect another dimension of our learning. The metaphor clusters reflect yet another cohering pattern, and suggest more questions. Why these metaphors? What might be seeking to be seen in the interplay of these images?

The stories and commentaries suggest many more patterns and common themes. For example, a number of the stories spoke to the crucial roles that intention and invitation play in helping to evoke the phenomenon. Others spoke directly to the movement from opposition to paradox that both assists, and is a hallmark of, the phenomenon.

As we continue to engage with this data many more markers of meaning will no doubt emerge, particularly, we expect, through the interplay of the various forms within our individual and collective imaginations. For now, one of the most apparent patterns to us is this: most of what we know, as a field, about how to evoke this phenomenon involves processes of initiation. That is, practitioners around the world know a great deal about how to help groups experience initial moments of this phenomenon, where groups experience a loosening of the tethers of habitual thought and reflex; where identities expand; and where collective connections evolve into new patterns of knowing and action.

This is no small achievement...and...we heard no story about a group that sustained its encounter with this phenomenon over prolonged periods of time. What more is possible?

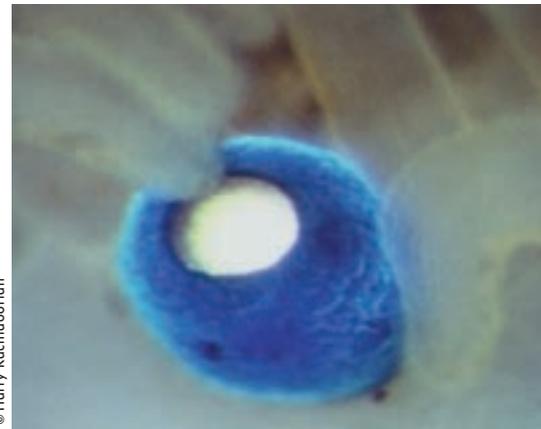
SO WHAT? WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

This is the question that has driven us from the outset. We wanted to answer this question convincingly for ourselves, and at least suggestively for others who may have never experienced this phenomenon or who are skeptical that we should attempt to more fully study and understand it. Over time, we began to articulate the following hypotheses.

HYPOTHESIS 1: The **group** is an organ of perception. A wisdom resides in the web of relationships and intentions that forms a group, a wisdom that is related to but distinct from the knowing that may reside in any one member of the group because of his or her position, knowledge, or past experience. Like a single scallop's 32 iridescent sensing organs, individual members can each be a sensing organ on behalf of the group, and at moments, a collective intelligence can emerge to weave transcendent meaning from these individuals' stories and perceptions. As David Abrams writes: "We are organs of this world, flesh of its flesh. The world is perceiving itself through us."

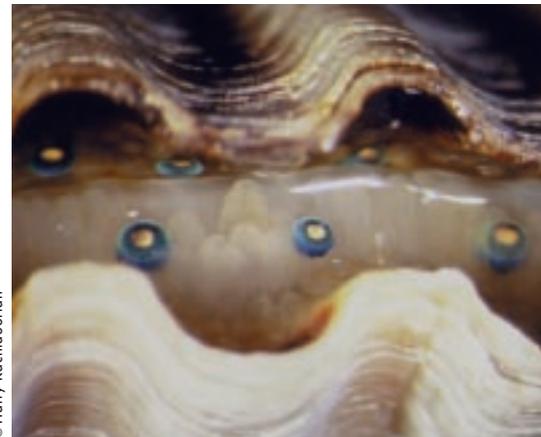
HYPOTHESIS 2: The **group** can alter the trajectory of history, and the trajectory of our own evolution. This hypothesis challenges so many of the tenets of at least western culture, but Juanita's story, Finn's story, Tom Hurley's story, Arthur's story, Adam's story, and many others we heard all bear witness to this hypothesis.

One implication of this hypothesis is that the group is not only a conduit for individual transformation, but for collective transformation as well. But what makes collective transformation possible? Myriad spiritual traditions document individual paths to enlightenment. The unspoken assumption to many, if not all, of these paths is that while groups can help accelerate individual transformation, transformation only happens one by one by one.



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"...Individual members can each be a sensing organ on behalf of the group..."



© Harry Kachidoorian

"...A collective intelligence can emerge to weave transcendent meaning from these individuals' stories and perceptions."

Single scallop eye with tentacles that continually bathe and protect it (top); Cotuit Bay Scallop Shell with multiple iridescent eyes (bottom)



© Alan Briskin

"If the group can alter the trajectory of history, and of our species' evolution, it can do so for better or for worse."

The stories we have heard challenge this assumption, but we are aware of no systematic exploration and documentation of paths that make possible sustained collective transformation.

A second, more subtle implication of this hypothesis is named clearly by Arthur in his reflections on the ecstatic darkness. If the group can alter the trajectory of history, and of our species' evolution, it can do so for better or for worse. We have the capacity not just to create spaces of exquisite connection and spiritual knowing, we can also give birth to horrors unimaginable to any other species. No other species has the capacity to systematically plan the sterilization of one of its kind. As the evolution of our technological capacities continues to outstrip the evolution of our capacities for collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom, we court the destruction of our species and life on this planet.

HYPOTHESIS 3: The **group** can generate spheres of hope and healing, both for individuals and the collective. Tom Callanan's story, Lauren's story, and Angeles' story all testify to the individual dimensions of this hypothesis. But Tom Callanan goes further, asking whether we are discovering "social form[s]...aimed at healing our collective consciousness." And Arthur suggests that the reconciliation work unfolding in South Africa begins with a premise that *individual* redemption is not enough, that profound healing from the tragedy of apartheid will require processes that facilitate *collective* acts of publicly bearing witness, accepting responsibility, and seeking forgiveness.

HYPOTHESIS 4: The **group** is an art form of the future. Our first three hypotheses, supported by our collective engagement with and making sense of the data we generated, led us to embrace Jacob's provocative image as a fourth hypothesis. That is, we believe that the group can be an art form, and as such, is worthy of study, reflection, and experimentation as an art form, a form perhaps crucial for the survival and future evolution of life and Spirit on Earth.

Taken together, these four hypotheses answer, for us, why the phenomenon is important, why we should devote substantial resources and energy to exploring the phenomenon more systematically, and why we should strive to deepen our collective capacities to engage with it.

SO WHAT? FOR THE FIELD, WHAT NEXT?

This question is very alive for us now. Here are some initial inclinations.

We believe the field we are sensing could benefit from the development of more consistent language, language to describe both the phenomenon and the field itself. We discovered that our use of the phrase "magic in groups" invited immediate, almost instinctual responses from people, responses that resonated initially more in feelings and intuition than in analysis. The phrase "collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom" invited more systematic analyses from people, but sometimes did not invoke their more intuitive knowing. The very nature of the phenomenon will resist any simple categorization or description; still, we can do better. That people use many different names to describe this phenomenon makes its exploration particularly challenging, and suggests the truth of Anthony Judge's observation: "What we need to understand may only be expressible in a language that we do not know"—yet.

We also believe the field could benefit from systematic opportunities for practitioners to learn together about each other's methods, and the ways their methods converge and diverge. Is there a core set of practices and structures that define effective processes of initiation? Do particular contexts call for different modes of practice? Understanding the centrality of context to this work, are some practices effective regardless of context? Are there ways beyond intuition and instinct that will help us make sense of what different contexts require? What creates "sufficient intention"?

The framework called "Spiral Dynamics", developed by Don Beck and Christopher Cowan suggests another realm of exploration for the field. This framework, which has been used to guide some of the reconciliation work in South Africa, posits that human consciousness evolves through at least eight distinct stages. Along with the work of Ken Wilber and others, this framework invites us to ask: does the level of consciousness of individual participants affect the capacity of a group to engage this phenomenon? How would we assess this?

Moving further into the unknown, we believe the field could be enhanced by disciplined work to explore what is required to sustain a group's encounter with the phenomenon. Initiation must come first; but once a group passes through a portal and begins to consciously experience collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom, what practices can help it stay on the other side? What implications might such practices have for the life of our social institutions, and for the evolution of our larger societal myths and narratives?

All of these potential next steps suggest that we take more seriously the role of convening, in groups, in institutions, in the larger culture. If the group is an art form of the future, then convening is the artistry we must cultivate to fully explore the promise of this form.

SO WHAT...MIGHT WE DO NOW?

The ten of us who joined to midwife the birth of this book are now holding this question, talking together, and with many others, about what may want to happen now. We hope this question is also alive for each of you holding this book.

One image that has emerged is that each of you might be moved to share this book with friends and colleagues, people who are familiar with this terrain, people already on this journey, as well as with people who may just be sensing they want to join the exploration. Perhaps you would convene small gatherings to share with each other what this book provokes, what you have learned on your own journeys, what collectively you discern about this phenomenon and the field.

Perhaps some of us will feel moved to create opportunities to systematically explore the artistry of convening, to experiment with different ways of moving beyond initiation to helping groups sustain their experience of the phenomenon. Perhaps others of us might work with Chris' principles, inquiring together how these principles might inform the work we do.

Start anywhere; follow where it leads. If you want to communicate with someone about some ideas and next steps that make sense to you, or just want extra copies of the book, page 83 offers several people to contact. The ideas we offer here are initial imaginings...no doubt there will be others as each of us continues to listen deeply for the tone, struck long long ago, seeking to be heard again, now.

For as long as we can tell, human beings have gathered in groups: for survival, for play, for learning and work and creation. The provocative possibility that reverberates through the words and stories and images present in this book, is that this impulse is not wholly of our own, nor in service only to our ends, but moves in service to the unfolding of that which animates all that is.

Thank you for bearing witness to our journey. We look forward to the time when our paths may bring us together, when we may learn from each other about the promise and the power of collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom.

Namaste

"If the group is an art form of the future, then convening is the artistry we must cultivate to fully explore the promise of this form."

© Alan Briskin







"The world and everything in it is being strained to the breaking point... strained to the point of transformation. It's our being brought to a point...closer to contact with our essential nature, to the truth of our own experience."

—Tom Hurley

"We are participants in a vast communion of being, and if we open ourselves to its guidance, we can learn anew how to live in this great and gracious community of truth. We can and we must, if we want our sciences to be humane, our institutions to be sustaining, our healings to be deep, our lives to be true."

—Parker Palmer

"The capacity to honor the collective aspect of consciousness and to act on behalf of the whole is truly the work of the next 100 years."

—Alan Briskin



"Some of the most significant problems of humankind can only be fundamentally approached as matters of conscience, commitments of the human spirit, and endeavors of whole communities, local and global."

—Thomas S. Inui

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cover **At the Edge** Photo image by Dann Blackwood, U.S. Geological Survey, Woods Hole, MA, USA: given as a gift to Joan Lederman. From Joan: My love of dendritic patterns led me to discover Dann Blackwood and his photography when I was seeking a slide version of a computer-modeled aerial image of the Mississippi River, because it mimicked the fractal patterns of the Indian Ocean sea mud glaze I was using on my pottery. Dann surprised me by including an extra slide, this "At the Edge" image...a gift from one pattern lover to another. As our book, *Centered On the Edge*, began to take form, I intuitively knew this photo was to be its cover image.

1 **Ophthalmic Iris** Winter 1998. Photo image by Harry Kachidorian, Worcester, MA, USA. From Harry: Photo of the iris of a dark pigmented person that I took as part of a study of the muscles of the eyes. Working in an ophthalmology clinic where we see so much pathology, it is nice to see variations of a normal iris or retina. This photo is of a normal iris.

2-3 **Shadow Bulb** Autumn 1997. Photo image by Pia Davis of Cambridge, MA, USA. Photo of a hand blown glass ornament made by Ed Nesteruk and Ed Kachurik. From Pia: How is it that we so often do not or cannot see what we are looking at? When this image first "appeared" through my lens, I felt a deep shaft of warmth touch my soul—where had such beauty been hiding? The more and deeper we look, the more we will see and experience... we must look through and beyond and differently.

4 **Reflections in Blue and Amber** September 1996. Photo image by Pia Davis of Cambridge, MA, USA. Photo of a hand blown glass ornament made by Ed Nesteruk and Ed

Kachurik, taken at Reflections Gallery in Geneva, Switzerland. From Pia: The discovery of how to elicit different hues and shades of color and light came almost by accident, an unsteady movement of the hand, which was followed by an explosion of moving images and colors and shapes peering through the lens of the camera. Such a simple, unpremeditated gesture resulting in such richness—so much waiting to be discovered, as it always is if we take the step and the time. (Portions of image also on pages 64–65, 76.)

7 **Mandala** November 2000. Logo designed by Peter Strutt on his 17th birthday. From Peter: The image is a representation of the iris of a single human eye. The eye stands for clarity and individualism. Within the eye are the abstract forms of six human beings, gathered in a circle. The tops of their heads touch the outer circle of the iris. Each person is holding hands with the person on either side of them, representing the connection and togetherness of collective intelligence. The six pairs of joined hands are resting on the central aperture of the eye. This aperture, the pupil, represents the gathering's opening into spiritual wisdom. The human form in the eye is adapted from the figure eight, the symbol of infinity; and the six forms are drawn in one unbroken line—representing a continuous flow.

8-9 **African Tree** August 1999. Photo image by Alan Briskin of Oakland, CA, USA. From Alan: I was with a group of people at Phinda Game Reserve, part of Conservation Corporation in South Africa. At the beginning of the day, I asked Walter, our driver and guide, if he might take us to a beautiful part of the reserve for seeing the sunset. We both shared an interest in photography and he said he knew the perfect place. We stayed late into the afternoon, watching a pride of lions, and by the time we got going, the sun had begun to descend. I knew that if we waited to get to the perfect place, there would be little light left. I asked Walter if he might pull to the side of the road, where I photographed this tree. I keep this image in my home and office, reminding me not to wait for the perfect place, because there is so much beauty along the way.

10 **Live Foraminifera** (Its shell is in the middle.) Photo image by Dave Caron, University of Southern California, Department of Biological Science, Los Angeles, CA, USA. Foraminifera are single-celled organisms that construct shells. They live today, and have lived for millions of years. Their shells settle to the sea floor from where scientists gather them to use for studying evolution, and for paleo-climate research.

13 **Petal Red** May 2000. Photo image by Pia Davis of Cambridge, MA, USA, of a hand blown glass ornament made by Tim Lazer, taken in Founex, Switzerland. From Pia: The element of surprise is ever present when looking through a macro lens at hand blown glass in the sunshine. You cannot predict how the variables will respond—to the texture of backdrop, to the sun playing on the leaves in the background, seen through the prisms and curves of the glass—truly a magical discovery on each journey through the lens.

17 **Elegance and Economy** December 2000. Vernal Falls, Yosemite National Park, CA. Photo image by FireHawk, Aptos, CA, USA. From FireHawk: The creation of this image was inspired by my dear friends Bill & Marilyn Veltrop who wrote: "Throughout all of nature from the smallest of life-forms to our grandest and most awesome ecosystems, there is an elegance and economy of design, an awe-inspiring capacity for evolving to ever-more complex and wondrous forms and functions."

18 **Blue Drop** May 2000. Photo image by Pia Davis of Cambridge, MA, USA, of a hand blown glass ornament made by Robert Eickholt, taken in Founex, Switzerland. From Pia: My first experience photographing hand blown glass through a macro lens was one of astonishment and surprise, at the unexpected emotional landscapes, mysteries and messages hidden in these stunning, deeply beautiful pieces of art. We just need to open our eyes, and be willing to see within, to discover the treasures of every day.

20 **Leaf with Water Droplets** Photographer unknown.

NOTES



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- 22 **Alpine Perspective** August 1986. Photo image by Pia Davis of Cambridge, MA, USA., from the Dents du Midi, Vaud, Switzerland. From Pia: The photo was taken climbing one of the Dents du Midi peaks, in Vaud, Switzerland. This vista, with the group of climbers on the next rise, brought so clearly into perspective our immense vulnerability as human beings in the face of nature. And yet, we continue to be driven in search of what might be on the other side.
- 25 **Stone Person** December 2000. Valley Floor, Yosemite National Park, CA. Photo image by FireHawk, Aptos, CA, USA. From FireHawk: Spending time with these magnificent stones, I remembered that the Old People spoke of them as carrying all of the memories of life from the first moments of time—and that they would tell us what they know—if we learn to listen.
- 26 **Dialogue** February 2001. Marine Biological Laboratory, Woods Hole, MA, USA. Photo image by Joan Lederman, Woods Hole, MA, USA. From Joan: In the transcripts, so many words were spoken by so many people in so many ways referring to flowing together. I can't see these water spouts without hearing human voices, or sensing a merging into a river of meaning.
- 31 **Of Water and Spirit** February 2001. Manresa State Beach, Rio Del Mar, CA. Photo image by FireHawk, Aptos, CA, USA. From FireHawk: As a part of healing my own heart, I'd been spending many many days at the Pacific Ocean, singing, dancing, praying and making images. On this day at 4:30pm hundreds of birds flew down the beach overhead and I walked along with my head and camera turned up to the sky for about a half a mile. When I stopped and looked down again, this image appeared—it sang to me of the awesome power of fire and water together.
- 32–33 **Art blocks** January 2001. Twelve original oil paintings each 8" x 10" by Margaret Vaughan, Gloucester, MA, USA. Photo images by David M. Barron of OXYGEN group photography, Marlboro, MA, USA.
- 34 **Lava Bowl** October 2000. Bowl and photo image by Joan Lederman of Woods Holes, MA, USA. From Joan: Evenly applied Atlantic Ocean sediment self-organized into this glaze as it melted on stoneware clay. The sediment was collected from 4,500 meters deep (about 2.5 miles), latitude 32° 21' North, longitude 68° 50' West.
- 35 **Cauldron** Fall 1978. A flameware clay pot tied with copper phone conduit, made by Joan Lederman of Woods Hole, MA, USA. Photo image by Tom Kleindeinst of Woods Hole, MA, USA. From Joan: I was living a question, "What would a pot look like if it was sustaining to the body and the spirit?" The *I Ching* said that wood feeds the flame of spirit. The flame heats the cauldron which cooks food, and nourishes the people.
- 38–39 **Trees in Fog** February 2001. Photo image by Alan Briskin of Oakland, CA, USA. From Alan: I am always taken in by mist and fog. This is a place where I walk often, but there are certain mornings when the mist descends and all bets are off. This one particular morning, I saw that the mist had come and I grabbed my camera. One can try to find images in the mist a very long time and come back with very little. This image held for me both mystery and invitation, a quality I think many of us seek.
- 45 **Underwater Galaxy** Spring 1999. Photo images of the detail from Josh Simpson Planets, seen through the macro lens of Pia Davis, Cambridge, MA, USA. From Pia: Josh Simpson has had a lifetime fascination with satellite photographs of the moon, the earth and other planets, as well as with the aquatic underworld. These have been a driving force behind his beautiful glass planets, with their secret universes and mysterious landscapes. Josh lives and works in Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts, and his work is exhibited across the world. Josh Simpson's glass planets offer magical views of villages, landscapes, underwater treasures, continents, moons and new worlds, inviting our imagination and our soul to explore new vistas and experiences. These macro views of his planets provide us with an emotional journey, surrounded by a fascinating interplay of light, color, texture, surprise and delight.
- 46 **Burning Embers** February 2001. Photo image by Joan Lederman, Woods Hole, USA. From Joan: I built this fire to photograph an image of embers for our book. As I loaded my arms with logs and saw the dwindling wood pile, I wondered where I might get more wood. I lit the fire. Moments later when I checked my e-mail, there appeared this note from a friend, "How would you like to help yourself to my firewood pile darlin'? Happy Valentines Day." Another gift of synchronicity!
- 53 **Peacock Gold** Spring 1999. Photo image of the detail from Josh Simpson Planets, seen through the macro lens of Pia Davis, Cambridge, MA, USA. (See Underwater Galaxy on page 45 for commentary about this piece.)
- 54 **Kudu Listening** August 1999. Photo image by Alan Briskin, Oakland, CA, USA. From Alan: I had just arrived at the Phinda Game Reserve, South Africa and was settling in to the forest lodge where I was staying. Putting away my things, I stared out my window and saw this Kudu staring back. When I came outside to photograph, this magical creature waited utterly still. It felt like a greeting from another world. I had to calm my hands. That night I experienced a rush of joy and wrote in my journal that I must remember the feeling.
- 56 **Manganese Nodule** Fall 2000. Photo image by Dean Powell of Lowell, MA, USA. Thanks for this artifact to the Core Lab, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. From Joan: The first time I got brown dust on my hand from handling a manganese nodule, a scientist told me I had just touched 10,000 years of deposit. Wow—that was that a new experience of numbers!
- 58 **Palette** January 2001. Photo image and palette by Joan Lederman, Woods Hole, MA, USA. Center: olivine sand. Colors from top, clockwise: cadmium orange, ultramarine blue, kaolin, chromium oxide, bronze, cadmium red, strontium yellow, alizarin crimson, bone black, cadmium yellow, cobalt oxide, phthalocyanine green.

- 60 **Orange Flame** October 1990. Photo image by Pia Davis of Cambridge, MA, USA, of straight cactus Dahlia, taken in Buchillon, Switzerland. From Pia: A garden of meticulously tended flowers can have a stunning impact or appear to be simply another garden, if that extra moment to appreciate is not taken. This applies also to the individual flowers that make up this garden. When each bud is noticed separately, with open curiosity or even silently, a new world emerges, full of color, intensity, softness, delicacy, passion. And so it is with us.
- 61 **Young Garlic** August 1997. Photo image by Pia Davis of Cambridge, MA, USA, taken in Luci's garden in Denver, Colorado. From Pia: The early garlic buds evoke a sense of delicacy and elegance, as they sway in the breeze, clustered together. And yet they show their strength and their trust in nature by standing tall and proud in the face of the late spring squalls.
- 63 **Open Water Lily** Photographer unknown.
- 66–67 **Single Human Neuron and Dancing Dendrites** (a pair of human neurons). Photo images by Tim Kennedy of McGill Neurobiological Institute, Montreal, Canada. From Joan Lederman: My dendritic questing brought me to Toronto choreographer, Rebecca Todd, who had collected these dendrite photo images in the research phase of creating her dance, "Dendrite." Seeing these human chemical and electrical transmitters gives me external imagery for an internal sense that mass interconnectedness is always a flash away. Whether it's within my brain, among many in a human group, or among other forms of life or living systems...the patterns that connect us are branching.
- 71 **Cobra** May 2000. Photo image by Pia Davis of Cambridge, MA, USA, of a hand blown glass ornament made by Tim Lazer, taken in Founex, Switzerland. From Pia: In Chinese astrology, snakes are said to be sagacious, clairvoyant and compassionate. How true of the contributors to this original and thought provoking invitational book, *Centered On The Edge*.
- 74–75 **Stony Beach** December 1999. Photo image by Alan Briskin of Oakland, CA, USA. From Alan: This image was photographed early morning on a beach in Mendocino, California. The feeling is of wonder. I imagine the spirits of the water greeting the land, the stones glistening and mist all around. If I close my eyes, I can hear the gentle water rushing, teasing wave of stone. Where are the edges? I am fascinated in the points of overlap.
- 77 **Cotuit Bay Scallop Shell with iridescent eyes and an enlarged single eye of scallop** Fall 1999. Photo images by Harry Kachidoorian, Worcester, MA, USA. From Harry: I found this scallop shell while wind surfing in Cotuit Bay, Massachusetts. I was very interested in it, because in my work in ophthalmology I understood that scallops had many eyes. I brought the scallop back to the clinic, kept it alive and patiently waited for the shell to open. To my surprise, there was a mantle full of eyes! As I photographed the opening shell, it was exciting to see all of the colors and to discover there were tentacles bathing the cornea of each eye as I added salt water to keep the scallop alive. After taking the photographs, I brought the scallop back to Cotuit Bay and returned it to the sea.
- 78 **Yin-Yang** August 2000. Photo image by Alan Briskin of Oakland, CA, USA. Clouds, Telluride, CO, USA.
- 79 **Reflection** August 1998. Photo image by Alan Briskin of Oakland, CA, USA, taken in Tofino, British Columbia, Canada.
- 80–81 **Light and Dark** January 2001. Yosemite National Park, CA. Photo image by FireHawk, Aptos, CA, USA. From FireHawk: I walked out that day with my son Kevin, who had just begun studying photography, to do a "father and son" photo shoot. I was amazed at the way the snow was mirroring the millions of stars in the night sky—as above, so below.
- 82 **Eye Bowl** Photo image by Tom Kleindeinst, Woods Hole, MA, USA. Stoneware clay bowl by Joan Lederman, Woods Hole, MA, USA. From Joan: Evenly applied Atlantic Ocean floor sediment, filled with shells of foraminifera, is actually a transplanted community of organisms...which self-organized into this patterned glaze during melting at a temperature similar to that of the Earth's core. (See page 10 for photo image of a live foraminifera.)
- 83 **Lion Pride** August 1999. Photo image by Alan Briskin of Oakland, CA, USA. Phinda Game Reserve, South Africa.
- 84 **Woman's Journey** Australian Aboriginal Art, Dreamtime Gallery, Santa Fe, NM, USA.
- Inside Back Cover **Waiting** December 2000. Manresa State Beach, Rio Del Mar, CA. Photo image by FireHawk, Aptos, CA, USA. From FireHawk: I made this image when I first "discovered" this beach, which is invariably deserted in winter. The heavy storms had not arrived yet and so this large piece of driftwood looked to be a permanent fixture. The waves that came a few weeks later moved it and completely changed the way that it sees the world—it reminded me of the power of waiting and being ready for sudden change.

The Sea Accepts All Rivers
Poem by Judy Brown, Hyattsville, MD, USA from her book *The Sea Accepts All Rivers*, Miles River Press. From Judy: The first line of this poem was given to me by my friend Dawna Markova who said that the words came to her during meditation, and she thought the message was meant for someone else. When I wrote down that one line all the rest came to me as if dictated, as if it were a single thought.

"The sea accepts all rivers."
So she said. The phrase
had come to her in meditation.
She passed it on to us
not knowing why.

The sea accepts all rivers.
Of course.
Why shouldn't it?

It wouldn't barricade
itself against the flow
of that which is its source.

It wouldn't grade and judge
each tributary, choosing some,
rejecting others,
requiring that a stream
follow a different course
before it flows into the sea.

It wouldn't close itself to
that which by the means
of gravity and river banks
flows naturally into its midst.

I guess the sea
has boundaries
but not where
rivers are concerned.

With rivers, it is always open
to the flow,
accepting what comes forth
as if it were
a part of self,
without the possibility
of closing off.

Perhaps the sea has always known
a calm acceptance
of the rivers which
renew, wash,
fill, pollute, enrich
and even rearrange it.

—Judy Brown

The Sea Accepts All Rivers



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"...centered on the edge...at the limits of what the world judges possible or rational." —Cargile (1672)