

A person stands on a dark wooden deck, looking out at a vibrant sunset over a body of water. The sky is filled with orange and yellow clouds, reflecting on the water. A wooden bench is visible on the left, and dark tree branches frame the top and sides of the scene.

Get A Real Life

Tom Thiss

Get a Real Life

**Letting Go of Old Ways to Create a New
Way of Being in Stressful Times**

Tom Thiss



© 2023 by Thomas N. Thiss.

ISBN: 979-8-9856996-6-1

No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

For inquiries:

tthiss@aol.com

Design and layout by Russ Gurley.

Cover design by Tom Thiss and Russ Gurley.

Printed in Korea.

Front cover: Sunset on Lower Cullen Lake. Photo by Eric Thiss.

Back cover: Salvador Dali statue in Matera, Basilicat, Italy. Photo by Ralf Steinberger.

Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Introduction	iii
1. Real Management is Real Life	1
2. Spirit is the Essential Reality	5
3. The Jump	8
4. Wizard of Oz Revisited	12
5. Partly Right but Wholly Wrong	15
6. Vision Inspires	18
7. The Centered Self	21
8. Rightsizing the Self	24
9. Know Thyself	26
10. Society in Transition	28
11. For (Business) Men Only	31
12. Out There and in Here	35
13. Truth is a Pathless Land.	38
14. Who's in Charge of Me?.	41
15. Living on the Edge	44
16. The Present Moment	46
17. Letting Go of Everything	50
18. A Stroke of Insight	51
19. Effortless Being	54
20. Meditation and True Self	57
21. Earthing	59
22. Eating Rice and Raising a Water Buffalo	63
23. Yoga, a Mind/Body Connection	66
24. Body Wisdom	69
25. Intuition and Integration	72
26. Real Control	74
27. The Creative Process	77
28. Forgiveness	78
29. Accepting our Humanness	81
30. A Warm Heart	83
31. Living in Paradox	86
32. Paradox is not Paradoxical	89
33. The Meaning of Nothingness	92
34. Context Gives Meaning	93

35. Arouse the Being Within You	.	.	.	.	95
36. A Matter of Choice	.	.	.	.	98
37. The Power of Surrender.	.	.	.	.	99
38. The Flow of Impermanence	.	.	.	.	102
39. The Process of Allowing .	.	.	.	.	104
40. The Holotropic Mind	.	.	.	.	106
41. The Way Out is In	.	.	.	.	109
42. A Sense of the Sacred	.	.	.	.	112
43. Economy and Ecology	.	.	.	.	115
44. Change of Consciousness	.	.	.	.	118
45. The Great Work .	.	.	.	.	120
46. The Earth is Primary	.	.	.	.	123
47. The Great Mystery	.	.	.	.	126
48. Eulogy for the Modern Age	.	.	.	.	129
49. Moving Toward Wholeness	.	.	.	.	132
50. The Rise of Post-Modernism	.	.	.	.	134
51. Spirit is a Higher Truth .	.	.	.	.	136
About the Author	.	.	.	.	139

I dedicate this book to the favored five: my four sons — Eric, Ted, Peter, and Michael — and to my wife Cokey who have inspired me to champion the Real Life that I espouse in this book.

Acknowledgements

A sincere thank you to all of the wonderful photographers and artists whose images grace this book. Your eye for the beauty on this planet is inspirational. Thank you Sang Cai, Eugene “Gene” Cernan, Rajesh Dhungana, Ronald Evans, Itcho Hanabusa, Al Hanson, Carol M. Highsmith, Ewald Judt, Marko Kafe, Shawn Kent, Alan Levine, Jim Linwood, Jud McCranie, Basile Morin, Rajasekharan Parameswaran, Harrison Schmitt, Tim Steinberg, Ralf Steinberger, Abba Swaleh, Eric Thiss, Albert Witzel, and Toni Wöhr.

All of the other photos are by me or taken of me by friends and other travelers while on my many adventures. They are meant for the reader to enjoy and inspire you to experience nature.

Other books by Tom Thiss

The How To Be Book, Fairview Press, 1994

The Wizard of Is, Fairview Press, 1995

Introduction

“What is real is not the external form but the idea, the essence of things.”

— Constantin Brancusi

Nothing will ever be the same. Everything has changed. This is what we heard after the calamitous events of September 11, 2001. Then there was COVID-19 that was declared a pandemic March 11, 2020. In a sense we could say the same for every day. Each dawn brings a new day that will never be the same as the last. Life is impermanent. Every moment is different from the last. What made 9-11 so different was the magnitude and implausibility of the event. Our lives were impacted in an instant. With it we experienced the dislocating effect of sudden shock stress rather than the benign stress of incremental or evolutionary change.

What makes the 3-11 pandemic so different is that previous epidemics were either highly infectious or highly lethal. This one is both highly infectious and lethal. The subsequent losses of these calamities may prevent us from seeing the potential for new life inherent in all crises. The word crisis comes from a Greek root “to separate.” Crises tell us to let go, to separate ourselves from our old ways of doing things. Chaos surfaces in the form of crises when our systems fail, systems that we have paradoxically put in place to prevent chaos.

Chaos is the natural state of life. We ought not to be intimidated because chaos is the seedbed for the new order. The Chinese characters for crisis are twofold – danger and opportunity. Crises provide opportunities. The old must die for the new to be born and death throes are never pretty. We need to ask ourselves what needs to die for us to live. This is the cycle of life, as old as time – the passing of the old into chaos and the emergence of the new out of chaos. The good news is that a new epoch is emerging. Yet if all we see is fear, uncertainty, and disruption then we have lost a potentially transcendent moment. The fact that these events were so catastrophic offers us even greater opportunity for new life on a grander scale. Transformational events call for transformed lives and those may be better or worse, but never the same. The difference is attitude.

Get a Real Life! is about getting beyond fear and scarcity, about living more abundantly, appreciating the good that is present in our lives. There will be good times and bad times. One of the merits of aging is that we oldsters have been through those cycles and life goes on. I was born in the Great Depression and was a high school student in World War II. I’m not intimidated by these cycles. We will continue to have our own personal crises, so we need to be more grateful in the good times and more accepting of the hard times. If we can point

to those events as a time that awakened us from our complacent slumber and enriched our lives with a renewed commitment to life and to those we love, what a blessing!

This book is basically about release, about letting go and balancing our outer lives with a deeper awareness and appreciation of our largely ignored inner lives. This takes a change of consciousness, and these moments offer us that opportunity individually and collectively. We will make no real progress in our own lives, in world peace, or in planetary renewal without a change in consciousness. Those possibilities exist in times of crisis. In fact, I believe the purpose of crisis is to provide these windows of opportunity.

Calamitous events summon us to a much greater awareness beyond fear and suspicion. To be fully aware, alive and awake, is what life and consciousness change are all about. Every chapter in this book offers some insights. The question arises: How do we leverage crisis for a higher consciousness?

I would urge forgiveness and compassion although many will find this impossible. Keep in mind that forgiveness is for us as forgivers and compassion strengthens the core of our being enabling us to take the hits of life and move on. They free us from the toxicity of continuing fear and anger so we may savor the riches of life in the present moment and not worry about the future. These are teachable moments, times to let go of those parts of our lives that no longer fit our renewing selves. Times to step into a renewed self and to move closer to a fuller expression of who we are. This is making a life and it could be at the expense of making a living.

Life is too abundant to succumb to the scarcity mentality of fear. The pain of loss is real for all, but suffering may be avoided by not hanging on to what has happened. Any attachment in an impermanent world will bring suffering. Eventually we will lose all that we cherish, so cherish them now. Even if we are unable to find meaning in what has happened, we cannot afford to miss the experience of what is happening now. This is living in the moment and not being governed by events of the past. It's called the present and it is a present, a gift of new life. Savor it now.

Get a Real Life! is about letting go, about stepping into the open space of possibility and trusting the outcome. It is a summons to adventure, and all are invited. The book is not a quick read, but rather a thoughtful one. I would suggest the reader pause, perhaps after each chapter if needed, to reflect on its meaning before moving on.

One: Real Management is Real Life

In August of 1983 I moved my family to London to commit a substantial portion of my time with a company that had piqued my curiosity. In doing so I felt that all my adult life had been a preparation for this venture. I was in the business of management training and had been conducting seminars worldwide. While in London a year earlier I was approached by a seminar participant who wanted me to meet the president of his company. I was traveling extensively at the time and could not do it then. Upon returning home, the president called to urge me to come to Athens, Greece for their annual meeting. I thanked him for the invitation and told him that I would like to go, but that I was booked for that date and could not attend. He persisted in saying they wanted me to come and in telling me how important this meeting was for me to attend. His response was as if he had not heard my answer. I then said, "If you have to know now, the answer is no." I will never forget his reply, "Mr. Thiss, no is only one of several alternative responses."

I remember feeling stunned by his reply and not knowing what to say. This man would not take no for an answer, and for the first time I thought perhaps there was another way, but I could not think of one.

He invited me to come to London to talk about it. I recall having only a limited time between engagements and wondered if this would be sufficient time? Not a problem as they assured me that I could fly the Concord, the British supersonic jet. There would be time enough. Travel problem solved! I was suitably impressed and wondered how they would handle my seminar conflict with the Athens meeting. During my brief time with them in London, they met the person with whom I had the booking conflict and agreed to buy out the seminar. Problem solved!

I was off the hook and free to go to Athens and my seminar client was happy to be reimbursed for her cancelled program, and she would reschedule it. This man did things that I did not know were possible. I was intrigued and wanted to know more about the man and his company.

His name was Aga Hasan Abedi, an expatriate Pakistani and a gifted leader with an extraordinary capacity to enlist the support of others in his global dream. He founded BCCI, The Bank of Credit and Commerce International. His vision was a world bank that would link the agrarian South with the industrial North, and the individualism of the West with the collectivism of the East in a web of trade relations.

BCCI was founded in Abu Dhabi, licensed in Luxembourg, and headquartered in London. Abedi's native tongue was Urdu, the language of Pakistan. English was his second language. I felt that he wanted someone to communicate his management ideas throughout the company that was largely run by Pakistanis.



Guler painting showing an imaginary meeting of Sufi saints Baba Farid, Khawaja Qutub-ud-din, Hazrat Muin-ud-Din, Hazrat Dastgir, Abn Ali Kalandar, and Khawaja Nizamuddin Aulia. Origin and artist unknown.

I had taught communication skills at the University of Minnesota, had run a management development department for IBM, and now had my own training company. He had an exceptional leadership philosophy that he called Real Management, and he wanted it to be implemented throughout the company in order to compete with the big western banks. Real Management was an enlightened system, and more ennobling than any I had ever imagined. To him the practice of management reflected the level at which we practice life. Real Management was Real Life. To understand this, we must let go of the traditional system that he called "blind management" whose focus on parts obscured the whole. He was fond of saying, "Put a drop of water in the ocean and it becomes

the ocean.” The individual enhances the power of the whole, and the whole augments the power of the individual.

In London we leased a flat in Hampstead, a northern suburb of London and began a 5 1/2-year expatriate residency. I was given a company car and a chauffeur and would be the token “Yank” in a multi-national headquarter building in the City of London. My role would be to codify Real Management and to teach it. This was a bank that was founded in the Middle East after the oil embargo crisis and had emerged as the second fastest growing bank in the world.

At the heart of his philosophy was what Abedi called the Major Purpose.

I cannot recall any significant management meeting in which this was not discussed in depth. He stated it simply in four points:

1. Submission to God
2. Service to mankind
3. Success
4. Giving

The first principle, submission to God, reflects his Sufi origins. Sufism is a mystical sect of Islam. When Abedi talked about God it was about being at one with the unseen laws of the universe. These laws were superior to the laws of man and the organization needed to understand them and to be in accord with them. This required humility. Abedi knew the ultimate stage of self-development was to transcend, to let go, of our egocentric ways and re-birth the true self in accord with natural law.

The second principle, Service to Mankind, was Abedi’s mission. Chasing money was not the purpose of an organization. If you had a higher purpose, money would ultimately chase you. The third is a reminder that none of this is possible without success. Nothing succeeds like success. The fourth, Giving, is the key to the other three.

Abedi sent a letter to all employees saying that the company would give them a cash gift representing 2 1/2% of their annual salary. The idea was for them to give it to whomever they wished because he wanted his people to experience the joy of giving. The following year he increased it to 3 1/2%. In his letter to them he wrote, “Today, in a world so precariously balanced between conflict and cooperation, between prejudice and faith, between love and hate, I am sure you will all agree that it is in the delicate balance of the quality of giving that the quality of its (world) order and existence will survive.”

I called an acquaintance very involved in ecological issues and asked him to accompany me on a walk in Hampstead Heath, one of the “lungs” of London. We chatted about many things and on our return, I presented him with a check for several hundred pounds sterling. He was stunned and did not know what to say. Pausing to compose himself, he looked at me and asked beseechingly, “No strings?”

I replied, "No strings."

With that he wrapped his arms around me and said that just last night he and his partner had talked about canceling a rainforest initiative for lack of funds and this was a godsend. This moment is seared in my memory as the most joyous response to giving that I can recall. I was with the president one day when a manager reported that some of the people were cashing the checks for themselves. His forgiving response was typical of the man, "Perhaps their need is greater."

Abedi loved to talk about the intangible, the unseen, and the invisible. In a management address that I helped him write he said there are four fundamental laws that are the very essence of creation and sustain the order of existence:

1. The Totality Principle: The universe operates as an integrated system. All parts are interrelated and interdependent.

2. The Flow Principle: The whole system, the dynamics of existence, is in constant flux. The universe is continuously evolving as are we.

3. The Relationship of Existence and Non-existence: Non-existence, which is infinite, is the source of finite existence. All matter evolves from this.

4. The Unity of Moral and Material: The moral, or qualitative, laws govern the quantitative material realm. Together they form a whole.

We live in an ever-evolving, interdependent world and we derive our life from an unseen source. This illustrates the unity of the moral and the material. Abedi believed that if we give more than we receive, we make a "moral profit." We will see examples of these four principles in the chapters that follow. They are not mere abstractions, but rather very fundamental principles of Real Life.

Real Management visualizes people as living energy systems subject to these four principles. Abedi would squint his right eye as he looked at us and we knew he was looking into our soul. Energy flows in human interaction. Thoughts alone are static unless they are energized with feelings. He wanted all of us to be restless with our own sense of possibilities and he had no time for the sodden slog of bureaucratic procedures. Without a sense of possibilities he said, "We become fodder for time."

He saw all managers as chief executives, as CEOs, as leaders, as owners, and as entrepreneurs and addressed them as such. One manager told me, "The way I see it, we are either mercenaries or missionaries. I've been a mercenary, but now I'm a missionary." He went on to exclaim with great zeal the impact his region was having on the GNP of a small Caribbean country.

Two: Spirit is the Essential Reality

In July of 1986 I attended the International Symposium on Organizational Transformation (OT) in Tarrytown, New York. OT advocates wanted to create methods of changing management practices faster and better than OD (Organizational Development), the current favorite modality. This was a gathering of professionals devoted to quantum change in the workplace. Harrison Owen, founder of the conference, presided with his version of OT called Open Space Technology.

Three years earlier Owen let go of the planned format for the conference he had organized when he discovered that the people liked the coffee breaks and the after-hours gatherings better than the meetings! The proactive format wasn't meeting their needs. It wasn't that they disliked the conference, but rather they found the open space between the planned meetings to be more productive. To create a more interactive setting like the more fluid in-between gatherings, he reconfigured the conference with minimal structure and maximum open space. They would convene in a circle, the center being open space. There would be a theme but no guest speakers. The participants would be the only conference resources. They could then connect with anyone and talk about things that mattered to them. Passion and responsibility were all that were needed.

Owen says, "Open Space is just what the words imply... time and space for participants to meet in whatever configuration seems appropriate in order to pursue the business at hand." Those who want to address the theme with a session of their choice would simply write a title for their session on a piece of paper, step into the circle (open space), present the idea briefly, and post it with a time and location on a large blank wall – the Community Bulletin Board. A conference of 100 people may generate 40-50 offerings in as many minutes. The whole process seldom takes more than an hour to create the entire program for the next three days.

I was gobsmacked by what I saw. I approached Owen when the participants broke to attend their first session and said, "This must be an unusual group to come up with so many ideas in so little time."

He replied, "Not so. It works every time with all groups," and he regaled me with examples. I was hooked.

Owen believes that Spirit is the essential reality, and Open Space is its optimal forum. The critical moment in Open Space occurs when we feel sufficient passion to step into the circle and to take responsibility for our offering. Stepping into the circle to present an idea makes your inner commitment public. Therein lies the risk. It works brilliantly. No session planned could produce a richer and more diverse assortment of offerings specifically tailored for the needs of the group.

After the seminar I wrote in my journal, "In business we are stuck in the proactive state – rational, linear, planned. To get to the interactive state, the



“The Spirit Catcher” by Ron Baird (1986) is a beautiful sculpture in Barrie Ontario, Canada that overlooks Lake Simcoe. Photo by Shawn Kent.

natural state of things, we must let go of the rational and enter open space. This offers the potential for transformation.”

As for rules in OT, Four Immutable Principles of Spirit are stated and posted:

- 1). Whoever come are the right people.
- 2). Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.
- 3). Whenever it starts is the right time.
- 4). When it’s over, it’s over.

These lighthearted guidelines don’t make sense to meeting planners, but they have stood the test of time. They simply say:

- 1) We need not be concerned with people who are not there.
- 2) Nor with things that might or should have happened, and
- 3-4) Spirit has its own time and we would do well to respect it.

Owen says, “The Principles apply because they are descriptive of the way that Spirit works.” In Open space people experience genuine self-managed work teams, true empowerment, shared leadership, and the capacity to deal with high levels of change, complexity, diversity, and ambiguity. Open Space introduces a radical new way of being in organization. For kids in school, open space is

recess that they fill with creative activity. Nobody orchestrates recess. Open Space is adult recess.

Open Space departs from our traditional concept of organization. It is simply doing intentionally what works naturally every day. In sales we create space for people and the sales process to merge. Managers create space for people to do things their own way. Negotiators create space to find common ground. Breakthroughs seldom occur at the table. They happen in the informal spaces – on a walk in the woods, in the hallways between sessions, or after hours when parties meet privately to resolve differences and break deadlocks. These are the open spaces, the downtime of events, where the real action takes place. They are the same cracks through which things drop when one does not attend to them. Congress operates the same way. The formal sessions merely confirm what has already taken place in the antechambers and informal gatherings before and after the sessions.

Three: The Jump

As we stepped out of the car at the Stanton airfield on a sunny July day in 1989, my buddy Frank quoting the immortal words of Low Dog at the battle of The Little Big Horn said, "It's a great day to die."

I replied, "It's a great day to dive"

We had come to this little airstrip in southern Minnesota to skydive for the first time. It was a birthday present I had promised myself five weeks ago, and Frank had made the arrangements through his son Steve, a veteran jumper.

I have learned that when life loses its edge and gets bit stale, I need to let go of the familiar, to face the unfamiliar, and to trust the outcome to be renewing. Skydiving offered that possibility. I had spent an adult lifetime traveling in airplanes, but the doors had always been closed. How would I feel when the door popped open at 9,500 feet? I wanted to find out.

Steve introduced us to our jump master Brad Northrup, a cherubic faced 34-year-old with 20 years jumping experience. When I asked him how many jumps he had made, he said he lost count after 2,000. I figured he was good for at least two more. The Minnesota Skydivers Club had been at this for 27 years. We felt we were in good hands.

Tandem jumping is the method of choice today for first time jumpers. With this technique you can experience free fall while harnessed to the belly of your tandem master. You are, in fact, a passenger attached to your instructor with four 15,000 pound-test strength clips. It was all very reassuring.

The day was sunny and clear. Brad squinted as he looked up while packing my chute stretched out before him on a large blue tarpaulin and exclaimed, "They're out!"

Four jumpers had exited the aircraft nearly two miles above us. I strained to see the plane, now just a tiny silver cross in a vast blue expanse. Brad had heard the telltale throttling back of the engine, a sign that the jump was imminent. Seconds later, four colorful canopies blossomed above us. Various exclamations of joy and relief were expressed, and all eyes returned to the business at hand.

Brad nonchalantly commented that this was his thirteenth jump of the weekend. Not being superstitious, I was undeterred. We rehearsed a simulated exit exercise, and I practiced the free fall position on the tarpaulin. My instructions were, "Arms out, belly out, head up, feet up, heels together, and smile!"

When the Cessna 182 returned, Brad cinched up the crotch and belly straps of my yellow jumpsuit and introduced me to three other jumpers. He had put together a "four way" for my first jump. The three others would exit with us and hook-up into two formations, a diamond and a circle. This was a real treat, not for beginners, but I had a master on my back. I quickly calculated we had 53 years of experience and over 4,500 jumps among the four, and the oldest was 36. I was the novice at 60.



Brad Northrup, instructor, on the author's back. Photo by a fellow skydiver.

The Cessna had no passenger seats, only wood paneling and blue carpeting with a canvas and clear plastic zip sided door cover. I sat in tandem with my instructor, facing the rear. As we circled to reach altitude, the wind slapped the loose cover of the door, and I could feel the air getting cooler. Lower clouds were moving in below the nearly total high cloud cover. Nobody talked. I felt very calm and committed. There was no turning back. I had visualized this in my mind hundreds of times in the preceding weeks. Now it was happening. At 8500 feet Brad attached the four buckles. We were now in this together. One thousand feet higher, the pilot throttled the engine back, and lifted the canvas door. I inched myself into position moving in an awkward, synchronous manner with my instructor, literally on my back. I sat on what seemed like the edge of space with a panorama of southern Minnesota farmland below. The wind was buffeting my legs and I felt like the only thing that kept me from falling was my forehead that was pressed hard against the top of the door opening. I could not have fallen out without my instructor, but my body was not yet convinced. As I raised my arms to grasp the sides, Brad gently pulled them down and shouted, "Let's go!"

Head-first we pitched out of the aircraft. All the awkwardness of moving in concert with another while in the plane immediately vanished, transformed into a feeling of freedom unsurpassed in my sixty years. As soon as we had stabilized ourselves in the free fall position, Brad deployed a small drogue chute

to slow our descent to 120 mph, the speed of a single jumper. Regardless of what Galileo proved at the leaning tower of Pisa, two jumpers fall faster than one. For the first time I noticed the other jumpers at assorted distances from us. I was riding a column of air at 120 mph and had no feeling of falling and no awareness of the man on my back – after all, I was taking all the air blast! And blast it was. That was all I could hear, like sticking your head out the car window when you're maxing out on the motorway.

Soon the jumpers converged on us with amazing speed and agility and hooked up in the prescribed diamond position, then the circle. All were smiling. I tried to shout and realized immediately why nobody was talking. It's no use. In the jumper's world, language is non-verbal. The goggles, the movements, and the inability to speak are like scuba diving without the regulators. The medium is air, not water, but the flap of loose clothing tells you something is different. I gave my mates a thumb's up, and as quickly as they had assembled, they were gone. I felt like a little kid on the playground whose new friends had just deserted him. I didn't know it, but Brad had signaled them away. The rules of the sky say that beginners pull first.

If you have never decelerated from 120 to 5 mph in three seconds, you cannot describe what the G-forces do to your body. It's a strange mixture of competing feelings – total exhilaration and complete reassurance. Like that little kid again, playing, and suddenly being hoisted swiftly and securely upward by a pair of all-encompassing hands – it was a total surrender to forces that momentarily leave you breathless. It's as if God had said, "You've fallen far enough. It's time to stop this child's play," and commanded it to cease. We had fallen a mile in less than half a minute. At 3,800 feet we were 19 seconds from impact. It was time to change our mode of descent.

Once the canopy deployed, it was a gentle four-minute float to earth. For the first time since I exited the aircraft, I was aware of my instructor behind me. Brad handed me the steering toggles and showed me how to steer the crescent shaped, cellular wing above us, pulling down hard on the toggle in the direction I wished to turn. As we approached the ground, Brad gave a "three-two-one" count and I pulled both toggles at once to flare the canopy, just like the big jets, for a softer landing. It was a gentle touchdown, like taking the last two steps of a staircase in a single step. What a rush! Never had my body been through such a kaleidoscope of sensations in so short a time.

I had done this with the expectation of renewal and smiles came more easily in the weeks that followed as I thought about this event that had exceeded all my expectations. I had a short video made of my experience and titled it, "Letting Go." The lesson for me was that you could not experience the phenomenal "rush" of free fall without letting go of the aircraft. Yet in doing so, you had to leave the security of a stable aircraft and step intentionally into open space, the great abyss, and trust. This was a metaphor for life – let go of the known for the unknown with intention and trust. Skydivers joke about fingernail scratches along the fuselage of the aircraft left by reluctant jumpers still trying to hang on.

Intentionally stepping out of an airplane two miles above the earth and trusting is not a rational thing. Very few pilots are skydivers. They are trained to create a stable platform with the aircraft and stick with it. They ditch it only in an extreme emergency. It doesn't make sense to leave something stable for the unknown. Yet this departure from the rational into the unknown has the potential for transformation.

Four: The Wizard of Oz Revisited

In 1994 I wrote the *How to Be Book*. I wanted the title to be *The Wizard of Is*, a title that popped into my mind while driving through Wales and ruminating about *The Wizard of Oz*, but the editor demurred. A year later after adding three new chapters I had the name I wanted. My inspiration for the wizard was Abedi. On one occasion while addressing a group of top managers he said, "Don't be concerned about what you do. Pay attention first to what you are, and then bring those qualities into all you do." That struck me as profoundly wise and exceedingly uncommon for a chief executive. We would say, "Get yourself together before you act." The book had many streams that gave rise to it, but that statement seemed to set its course.

Here then, is *The Wizard of Oz* as a life management text.

The Tin Woodsman, the Scarecrow, and the Cowardly Lion all knew what they needed - heart, brains, and courage. These powers lay dormant within them. Lacking confidence in themselves and feeling disempowered, they looked outside for answers seeking their dreams in the Emerald City from the Great Oz. The Great Oz, however, would not see them until they brought him proof that the Wicked Witch of the West was dead. To do this they had to pass through a haunted forest and perform feats that evoked the very qualities they sought from the Great Oz. This is the Hero's Journey, the classic mythical quest for the Holy Grail or spiritual enlightenment.

Having melted the Wicked Witch with a bucket of water, they returned to the Great Oz to make good on his promises. Imagine their confusion, disillusionment, and sense of betrayal when they discovered that the Wizard of Oz was merely a bumbling old man. Having their illusions shattered and not knowing what to believe, they found themselves in limbo, their lives in chaos. This is the mythical dark night of the soul.

Oz, no longer The Great, tried to persuade them that they already had what they wanted but he had lost his credibility. They demanded hard evidence so Oz fashioned some tangible symbols – a heart, some brains, and a bit of courage – so they could feel their new source of power internally. They were now in charge of their lives with their newly discovered inner control.

The search was over. The wizard was now within, no longer "out there." Brains, heart, and courage are all we need at any time. It is instructive to note that only the authentic Oz was able to help Dorothy and her friends. Like a good manager he created the external conditions for their self-empowerment. As such, the kindly old man had the power to change their lives, not the phony, all-powerful Great Oz who proved to be impotent.

This timeless story illustrates real control through empowerment, the essence of Real Life. Contrary to popular opinion we cannot empower others. The Wizard of Oz tried but lost his power when Dorothy's little dog Toto exposed



Publicity photo from "The Wizard of Oz", 1966. (L-R) Jack Haley, Ray Bolger, Judy Garland and Bert Lahr. Photo courtesy of MGM and CBS Television Network.

the illusion. Empowerment comes from within. Dorothy could only empower herself. If deprived of the illusion that power and control lie outside of us, we would find ourselves as Dorothy did, confused and bewildered. The good news is that having put to rest the illusion that others know what's best for us, we now can get on with trusting what we know is best. When we put all our confidence in external solutions, we forfeit our power and suffer the consequences of not living our truths. The real work begins with a simple shift from in front of our eyes to behind our eyes where we find our truths.

In the Emerald City the great Oz ruled with tribal authority. A tribal society has only one mind, the tribal mind. Departures from tribal thinking are interpreted as disloyalty and suppressed. Individuals are secure so long as they buy into the implicit contract. The tribe is responsible and in control. As such, the individual is off the hook, dependent, and not responsible.

Like Dorothy and her friends, many of us are in limbo suffering from withdrawal symptoms from tribal power. We are discovering that tribal power, like the Great Oz on whom all depended, was illusory. Now we are responsible, and the tribe is off the hook. That's the good news, but until we feel empowered like Dorothy and her friends did when they felt the power of the wizard within, we will feel confused, disillusioned, and betrayed.

Nothing is more stressful than the feeling that we are not in charge of our lives. When our mindset allows others to decide what's best for us, we abdicate our right of choice. If we are not aware that this is happening, only a crisis can save us. Fortunately, this is the nature of crises. A crisis reveals the false assumptions that The Great Oz – the government, the company, Medicare, the stock market, etc. – will solve our problems and take care of us. Not so. It's up to us. This awakening is the good that is inherent in crises. As the adage says, "We are the ones we've been waiting for."

Five: Partly Right but Wholly Wrong

We worship at the shrine of science, and rationality is its handmaiden – an ordered structure that we have imposed upon our world to give it meaning and to make it more predictable. This same rational order, however, often limits and suppresses Spirit in Real Life. Candace Pert, formerly with at the National Institute of Mental Health, says the scientific community thinks soul is a four-letter word. Spirit is also off limits. One reason why Spirit likes open space is its naturalness. The natural world is not rational. The interstices, those gaps between things, are more natural than the planned events that precede or follow. The coffee breaks and after-hours connections are more spontaneous and real than the programs we orchestrate.

My neighbor took a group of Cub Scouts on a three-week camping trip to Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons. Upon their return I asked one of the boys what was the highlight. He said, “Minot, North Dakota.”

A bit surprised at the response and curious, I asked, “What happened in Minot?”

He replied, “We saw a movie and went bowling. That was cool!”

I’m sure bowling and the movie were not the reasons for the Yellowstone trip. The fact that they were not may well be the reason why it was so memorable. As a young father, I can remember buying fancy battery powered toys for my four young boys only to find their fascination more captivated by a bag of clothespins. It’s hard to predict what kids will like most, but chances are it won’t be the things we plan – and you won’t find clothespins in the toy store.

Kids live in the gaps. We orchestrate their lives with programs and planned activities, but in the gaps between these events, they are at their natural best. Open space is their turf. Send them outside and they will find more to do in less time and with fewer resources than you and I can imagine. The natural world and the accumulation of detritus from our civilized setting have all the resources they need. This is because kids live in the present time. They are captivated by the moment, and the moments are always there, each one different from the last. Nothing is more fascinating than what is happening now, wherever they are! It is called play. This is living in the truth of what is – Real Life most sublime.

We have it all as children – curiosity, wonder, spontaneity, joy, intuition, love, adventure, fun, sensitivity, candor, trust, laughter, acceptance, and imagination. These are the qualities we love in children; yet paradoxically, in our attempt to socialize them, we deactivate most of these qualities. In time, we make a business out of life and call it making a living. It is a long cry from making a life which children do so well. Making a living is a subset of making a life. If we are fortunate to discover our loss, we try to recapture our natural birthright through attending seminars, doing youthful activities, and reading self-help books. These can help, but they are all external.

Ashley Montague, considered to be the world's foremost cultural anthropologist, never lost the magic of childhood. At the seminar he was 82 and the author of 50 books. Montague championed a new science called neoteny (*neos* = youthful, *teino* = retention). This is literally the retention of youthful traits into adult life. Montague believed that most adults are disasters. Women will be pleased to know that they have deteriorated less than men. He says, "Man descended from the apes and has been descending ever since!" Montague believes that virtually every adult is a deformed child, and he urged us to "grow and develop as a child all the days of our lives."

Montague contends that love is the most important force in our lives. An absence of love can stunt bone growth in a child. His challenge to us is to be the warm, loving creatures we were designed to be. If we are not, he states emphatically that we are not only a failure but also a great danger. We might contaminate others! Montague believes it is not that difficult to be the kind of person you want to be. Just see yourself as being so and act as if you are.

If Spirit is the essential reality, then the rational element is but a very narrow manifestation of reality. We have been led to believe that something is true only if it can be proved scientifically. Classical science, a product of our western rational tradition, starts with the assumption that by studying all the parts we will know the whole. That is not so. We have been studying parts in ever increasing detail and complexity and, in the process, have often lost sight of the whole. The whole is the starting point of Real Life.

Frijov Capra, a physicist and systems theorist, says that sugar is composed of three molecules – carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen. Where then is the sweetness? Essence is not in the parts but in the collective emergent properties of the whole.

Most of us subscribe to an outdated worldview, an obsolete paradigm. New paradigm thinking requires that we shift our attention from the parts to the whole. In *Belonging to the Universe*, he writes, "...it was believed...the dynamics of the whole could be understood from the properties of the parts." The new paradigm reverses this: "The properties of the parts can be understood only from the dynamics of the whole. Ultimately, there are no parts at all. What we call a part is merely a pattern in an inseparable web of relationships." Capra's new paradigm is first law of Real Management, the Totality Principle. In order to know the part, you must know its relationship with the whole.

We have been looking at the world through a microscope. We need to start with a wide-angle lens. The *Blind Men and the Elephant* written over a century ago illustrates the folly of what Abedi called blind management. Six sightless men grope about the beast and grasp a part proclaiming they know the whole. The author concludes that while "each was partly in the right, all were in the wrong."

Peter Vaill has written a contemporary version of this timeless fable with an elephant on the move. If the parts can only be understood from the dynamics of the whole, it is appropriate that we update this old tale with a dynamic elephant.



“Blind men examining an elephant” 1888. Woodcut and color by Itcho Hanabusa.

Vaill writes, “The blind man clinging to the leg experiences an elliptical forward motion. He who has the misfortune to have hold of the tail is jerked and whipped about in random fashion. A few feet forward, his colleague, in the crotch, is periodically flooded and/or pasted with output that seems to have nothing to do with the beast’s motion or with the feel of the surface clung to. At the front end, another observer rides the probing trunk, jerked and whipped like the tail man, but it seems to him, in a somehow ‘purposeful’ manner. Clinging high up on the massive haunch is another perceiver subjected to none of the motions or indignities of his fellows and wondering what their gasps and protestations are all about. And the observer who is astride the neck, an accidental mahout, finds that the flexing and shifting of his own body seem to correlate with the gait and momentum of the beast. This leads him to think he is steering it and thus uniquely qualified to say what it really, really is.”

What a wonderful metaphor for our time! Each one clinging to his little reality, buffeted by forces he cannot understand, and unable to see the larger whole. And the person on top, who just happens to be in the right place, mistakenly thinks that he is in control and therefore more qualified to lead. If these blind “parts” observers were asked to describe their experiences, each would be right in part but wholly wrong. It doesn’t make rational sense to deny the reality of each man’s experience. But viewed from the dynamics of the whole, each felt only a singular pattern in an inseparable web of components that we call an elephant. Real Life starts with the elephant.

Six: Vision Inspires

Etched in stone on the California state house are the words of its early governor and railroad tycoon Leland Stanford: "Give Me Men to Match My Mountains." This ringing call to action does not resonate well today in our gender sensitive times, but he made a point. Stanford had a vision of what the Golden State could be, and he wanted lofty spirits and massive ambitions to match his majestic Sierras.

The need today is much the same. With so much focus on organizational change, one wonders why there is so little successful change. One reason is that most organizations fail to understand the rise of an interactive post-industrial world. We are undergoing a seismic shift and we need lofty spirits who think and act interactively.

This is a profound shift of consciousness from independent parts to interdependent wholes. Regrettably most people are locked into linear thinking that is no longer adequate for the complex, systemic issues of our time. The bumper sticker, "Shift Happens!" portends the future.

I had a hard time understanding the nature and power of vision. It seemed so abstract. Abedi taught me that it all begins in your imagination, a mental image that you envision happening. I recall sitting in a management meeting in London when Abedi was presiding in 1987. He opened by saying, "I am sitting in Hong Kong in 1997." No one questioned the fact that he was there in his imagination visualizing himself ten years from then when Hong Kong would leave the British empire and new opportunities would open. Abedi "managed" the unknown future by making it live in the present moment when he could do something with it. Energizing it presently would begin the journey to action. This shift of thinking demands an equally bold shift in execution when leaders marshal the words to inspire others to see the possibilities of their vision.

As a nation we had a rare opportunity after the tragedy of 9-11 to take the high road of peace and justice when we had the sympathy of the world on our side, but our leadership lacked a larger vision and squandered it on a costly and ill-advised war that has become what we now call the forever war. We have another opportunity as we struggle with the consequences of the devastation caused by the coronavirus pandemic. It yet remains to be seen if our leadership can see beyond a return to normal and take a longer look at a greener post-industrial time.

A visualized whole requires new ways to bring its fullness into being. Change falters when organizational visions are stuffed into traditional business models that succumb to lifeless and uninspired business jargon. Proactive thinking with its left brained, linear manner is the ultimate in rationality. Its scope, however, is too narrow, its methods too controlling, and its process too slow. We must take the bold leap into the interactive realm to walk our visionary talk.

Visions are living things - subtle and intentional, vital, juicy, and pulsating with possibilities. Interactive thinking is whole brained - fluid, organic and without boundaries. Visions cross boundaries indiscriminately like African wildebeest in their annual migration. Recently I read of roads being closed for political purposes between Kenya and Tanzania, but the wildebeest didn't get the message on their annual migration. They were moving to a deeper impulse than the laws of state.

Visions are like that. Undifferentiated in their wholeness, they know no limits and see all boundaries as permeable. Visions arise in imagination and roam at will with no space/time limitations, neither submitting to arbitrary authority nor limiting themselves to traditional constraints. Dr. Angeles Arrien – cultural anthropologist, author, and educator – says, “If we can see it, we can manifest it; and if we can say it, we can change it.”

Native American tradition was ahead of us with this leadership quality. Vision Quests were among the oldest of traditions where seekers sought direction in life. The original purpose of the quest was to assist the seeker in finding a way to contact the state of Inner knowing. They believed that when truth was found inside the self, there was no need to look further. On the vision quest they stepped into the void of silence and trusted the outcome – ready to recognize and accept the truth when it came. Then it was up to them to act on it and take responsibility for their action. Gandhi said it best, “Be the change you want to see in the World.”

When working with a major oil company I was shown a thick book that spelled out in detail with whom you could communicate and with whom you could not. It was all about reporting channels, above and below, in the management hierarchy. We were on the thirteenth floor of their office building, and after expressing astonishment I told them to toss that book out the window!

Visions roam beyond the reach of reason and are not restrained by levels of power or egocentric turf boundaries. They have no space/time limitations and intrude at will. As such, they invite us to interact, to collaborate and co-create. With vision as a dimension of leadership, the inner values of being permeate the doing business community. Being houses the values that we cherish in relationships and infuses the doing with purpose and meaning. We are human beings and being is essence. Doing is the form that reflects that essence in its execution.

With visions we engage the whole person and that demands a more holistic, interactive means of execution. For this we need to let go of our need for control and flow with interactivity. For visions to transform organizations, the people must first transform themselves. We transform ourselves when we shed our egocentric preoccupations and serve a cause larger than ourselves. Leaders articulates the vision, and the people commit to this larger cause. This subtle connectedness forms a bond from self to other in an interactive community, a link that the 1960s generation lost in an orgy of self-indulgence.



Buffalo hide Northern Plains drum by Sonya Holy Eagle. Photo by Tom Thiss.

If we stubbornly remain problem centered and focused on control as the tectonic plates of social change shift beneath us, we will be largely dysfunctional in an interactive world. What's needed is not to be problem centered but rather possibility centered, grounded and open to all possibilities. Being problem centered only gets us back to where we were before the problem surfaced. Being possibility centered, however, opens new vistas inherent in any crisis. The key is to solve problems in the context of possibilities that are inherent in all crises. We must ask ourselves: How can I leverage this issue to something better beyond?

Seven: The Centered Self

Centering is key as it provides the space we need to be creative, to focus our intent, and to direct our energies accordingly. Sometimes all it takes is a pause and a couple of deep breaths in order to clear our minds and center ourselves. It aligns us inwardly and opens us to our intuition and the flow principle, the second law of Real Management. Intuition is inner knowing that provides real-time insights beyond the realm of rationality. These time stopping moments of insight help us to stay true to the spirit of our vision and not get lost in the parts.

The centered Self is quite capable of directing us, but we need to know it in order to speak its truth. For most of us the corporate world is not a truthful setting. Personal stress stills the inner voice and when we do hear it, we may ignore it for political reasons. Upton Sinclair said, "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it." How true this is when we read accounts of the sugar industry's executive and scientists who suppressed data for years about the deleterious health effects of excessive fructose. They were just taking a page from the oil industry that refused to accept the data on climate change, or the cigarette industry that turned a blind eye on the cancer data.

We focus our attention externally and fail to listen to ourselves and to speak our truth. Our ego preoccupations throw us off center, dissipate our power, and deplete our energy. We short-circuit ourselves allowing our energy to wane and then we wonder why our job has lost its edge. Unlike bleeding, a tourniquet will not staunch an energy hemorrhage but living our truth will. Many of us fear doing this and lack the will for this to happen. Speaking truth to power does not come easily.

In 1998 an astrologer told me that this year was about "you meeting you." My mission was to become more discerning about who I am. Then she said something very profound. "First be and then do. Find out who you are and then let that person set the goal. If you set your goal now, you'd be getting your identity from the goal rather than getting the goal from your identity." I had written a book about being (*The Wizard of Is*), yet she had said it all in two sentences.

We live in a culture where people get their identity from what they do. We are fixated on doing. We are human beings masquerading as human doings. When we meet someone, we want to know what they do rather than who they are. When we get our identity from our goals, we are vulnerable having subjected our inner life and our peace of mind to the whims of the outer world. If we don't make our goals, our identity suffers. If the goals are not ours, as often is the case in corporate life, achievement is less satisfying. We can only be as good as our accomplishments.

With our identity tied to our job we are on shaky ground. If we lose our job, we lose our identity and with that loss goes our confidence and self-esteem.



The author kayaking at Prince William Sound, Alaska. Photo by Al Hanson.

Not so if our goals emerge from our essence, our centered Self. The authentic Self is who we are. No matter what happens to the goal, the Self as the source remains unaffected.

Recently I talked with a young man who had just sold the largest order of his career and simultaneously announced he was leaving. He said he recalled the great satisfaction he had with his first big sale, but the joy was no longer there. The fact that the new order was twenty times greater was immaterial. The zest was missing. He searched inside himself and decided his real love was his avocation and he chose to make it his new career.

Our Self is our reality. It's all we have and yet we ignore it like a second cousin. We need to ask tough questions of the Self and listen for answers. It's hard work and often painful to realize our limitations and imperfections. We find it much easier to blame others "out there" for our shortcomings. The only way for us to know the Self is to pay attention to our thoughts, feelings, and actions and to ask ourselves questions such as:

What brings me joy?

What am I passionate about? What "juices" me?

What is it in me that gives rise to frustration? To anger? To guilt?

Why do I find it hard to reveal my true feelings?

Why do I persistently avoid confronting my boss on certain issues?

Why do I find it so difficult to talk openly with my wife/husband/kids?

When we get honest with ourselves, our toughest relationships become our teachers. (“Why is it that I am not effective with this person?”) We are more truthful with others as denial fades and authenticity emerges. Self-management is about being clear and keeping our locus of control within us. We have our own navigation system not unlike the birds that know when to migrate and the salmon that return to their streams of origin.

The Self is connected to all living things, to our personal unconscious and the collective unconscious that holds the wisdom of the world. It is a hologram of the universe. The part contains the whole. Put a” drop in the ocean and it becomes the ocean.” At any moment the clear Self knows what is best for us. Intuition gives us relevant information in real time. Many have experienced this intuitive hit in moments of creative inspiration or in sports.

Eight: Rightsizing the Self

Business is very faddish. Corporations are quick to pick up the latest fad and run with it. One would think these bastions of rationality would be more discriminating. In the name of staying competitive they embrace each new idea as if it were going to save them from the perils and pressures of forces that they dimly understand. It is time to stop looking for cures on the outside and begin to look inside to right-size ourselves.

The most important social relationship we have is with our Self. All our conflicts arise because we doubt our ability to deal with situations. In *The Truth Option* Will Schutz says we have only one fear, our inability to cope. Our troubles arise when conditions cause us to doubt ourselves. If we felt confident in all situations, we would have few relational problems. The truth lies in realizing that all our problems are in here, not out there. When problems are in here, we can do something about them. We cannot solve our problems when we persist in thinking the causes are all out there. With this startling realization, most of our external problems cease to exist.

I believe that if we fully understood and accepted the oneness of our cosmic origins that connects us genetically to all life on Earth, many of our systemic social ills would fade. The veneration for the Earth that comes with this understanding would hasten the healing of our savaged Earth. That in turn fosters healthy lifestyles.

Personally, I feel more together following a meditative moment when I no longer feel threatened if I don't have the answers. I can then be more creative if I'm not pushing a solution or defending a position. It is surrendering to the moment in a come-what-may state of acceptance and an openness to any outcome. This is being in the flow. Some would say "out of control," and I would agree. That's precisely why it works because the creative process cannot be controlled. Our job is to stay open to all possibilities, fully present in the living moment. Intuition and an open dialogue are all we need to move on any issue. This is what the Self brings to the table. In doing so, we have died to our egocentric preoccupations.

In an interactive world, being in communion with others precludes my need to have all the answers. We must do, but we are not alone in doing so. Collectively we can come up with the answers. The good news about my being responsible in community is that I've got a lot of help. In Washington they say you can get anything done if you don't have to take credit for it. As the saying goes, "A good idea doesn't care who has it."

Conversely, they say that if you want a friend in Washington, get a dog.

Native Americans were in community with everything in nature – trees, rocks, animals, wind, and the earth itself. They were never alone. Everything was seen as having life. These beings were an extended family of allies and



Trail markers at Spur Cross Park, north of Cave Creek, Arizona. Photo by Alan Levine.

helpers on The Good Red Road. They were taught to observe and to intuit lessons from these helpers and always to express gratitude for their teachings. Nature was ever present to help them make the inner connection. Community was ever present. Most were never able to assimilate fully into the dominant white culture because they could not forgo this pervasive sense of community that nurtured their whole being, which they in turn devoted to the larger whole. As we reflect on this communal connection, we must remember that many tribes also had highly developed warrior cultures. The oneness of all life did not always transcend tribal boundaries.

In business our rush to become customer focused has caused us to lose sight of our priorities by focusing exclusively outside ourselves. Customers may well be our most important external relationship; but if we are not comfortable with ourselves, we won't be with customers, or anyone else for that matter. Our primary relationship is the one we have with our higher Self. External initiatives will continue to fail at an unacceptably high rate until we right-size ourselves.

In his classic book *The Inner Game of Skiing* Timothy Galway talks about Self 1 and Self 2. The critical mind is Self 1 and the body's innate wisdom is Self 2, a higher Self. He says, "When the critical mind of Self 1 is in a quiet state, our awareness increases and we discover the innate wisdom of Self 2, that part of us that can respond to any situation instantaneously with its fullest capabilities." The rightsized Self is a centered Self. Competitive athletes know the importance of centering body and mind and they have their own rituals for doing so.

Nine: Know Thyself

“Know Thyself:” The ancient Grecian Oracle at Delphi had it right. Everything starts with knowing ourselves. When we know our strengths, biases, limitations, predispositions, expectations, beliefs, and behavior patterns we know what “spin” we project onto the world and what filters distort our perceptions. Without self-awareness, an understanding of the external world will continue to elude us. Meister Eckhart, a 14C Dominican mystic said, “Your outward work can never be small if your inward work is great.”

The task at hand is daunting, no less than redefining the American dream. This vision had its origins in frontier America where people could create something out of nothing and begin life anew. For immigrants it was freedom from social or economic persecution and religious intolerance that presented equal opportunity in return for their labor. Abraham Maslow taught us long ago that a satisfied need is no longer a motivator. We have moved up the pyramid of need satisfaction and we long for community and a personal sense of self-fulfillment. Beyond our basic needs, the external world can only provide short-term satisfaction. There is a void in our center. That void is an unrealized Self. Yet we continue to believe that more things and more success will fill that void. We talk about jobs, the economy, and security not realizing that real security has little to do with jobs and economics. Economic success can only help us feel financially secure, a small part of our whole. For greater satisfaction we must turn inward and examine ourselves from the inside out.

The new emerging dream is that of a whole, well balanced human being. This is where the people are spending their time and money outside of work and this is what they want from their career. The quantitative values of the old American dream, more material success, are giving way to a new set of qualitative values – ecological sustainability, feminism, spirituality, and social optimism. I see many of these values in the millennial generation.

This embodies the third law of Real Management, unity of moral and material. If this sounds too soft and utopian, hang on. It is not. Take note. In the emerging new order, soft is hard. In computer terms we are reprogramming our mind and increasing our memory so we can handle more contemporary programs.

Native tradition also sought and taught wholeness and balance in their lives. Ceremonies and rituals, indeed everything in their ambient universe, sought to instill these values. The Pipe Ceremony is a good example. The Pipe signified peace among all people - tribes, clans and nations. The stem represented the male aspect of all life forms and the bowl the female aspect. When joined the act represented creation, fertility, and the union of opposites. It was the balance that honored opposites - male/female, teaching/learning, pride/humility, and all aspects of living in harmony. Peace was not just the absence of war. It was



Native American peace pipe. Photo by Tom Thiss.

a way of living that came from within. Subjectively it was the capacity of the heart to remain open, serene, and unafraid.

Since every atom in our bodies was once the stuff of stars, we are in truth children of the universe. Our bodies are galaxies of atoms whose origins go back 13.8 billion years. We are, therefore, not just living in the universe; the universe is living in us. This realization gives us unimaginable power, but only if we feel it deeply. If this escapes our awareness, it has no potency. Einstein talked about “the kingdom within us.” The connection inside us is going on-line with the universe. Everything is available to us through intuition and our inherent psychic powers. And it’s all free! Our home page is the Self, and it becomes what we make of it. If we attend to it, it grows with nourishment. If we love it, it becomes more loving and lovable. If we ignore it, like a child, it will find a way to get our attention when we are least willing to deal with it.

Ten: Society in Transition

Paul Ray, a lifestyle researcher, has documented the rise of an emerging Integral Culture. This new group of "Cultural Creatives," 44 million strong, constitutes a surprising 24% of the population with women outnumbering men. This is our growing edge. The rapid rise of this group indicates a society in transition with values focused on spiritual transformation, altruism, ecological sustainability, holism, alternative health care, feminism, and a healthy social conscience. Ray writes, "That new subculture includes people who perceive all too clearly the systemic problems of today, all the way from the local level to the national and to the planetary." This systemic assessment is the elephant that the "blind" failed to see.

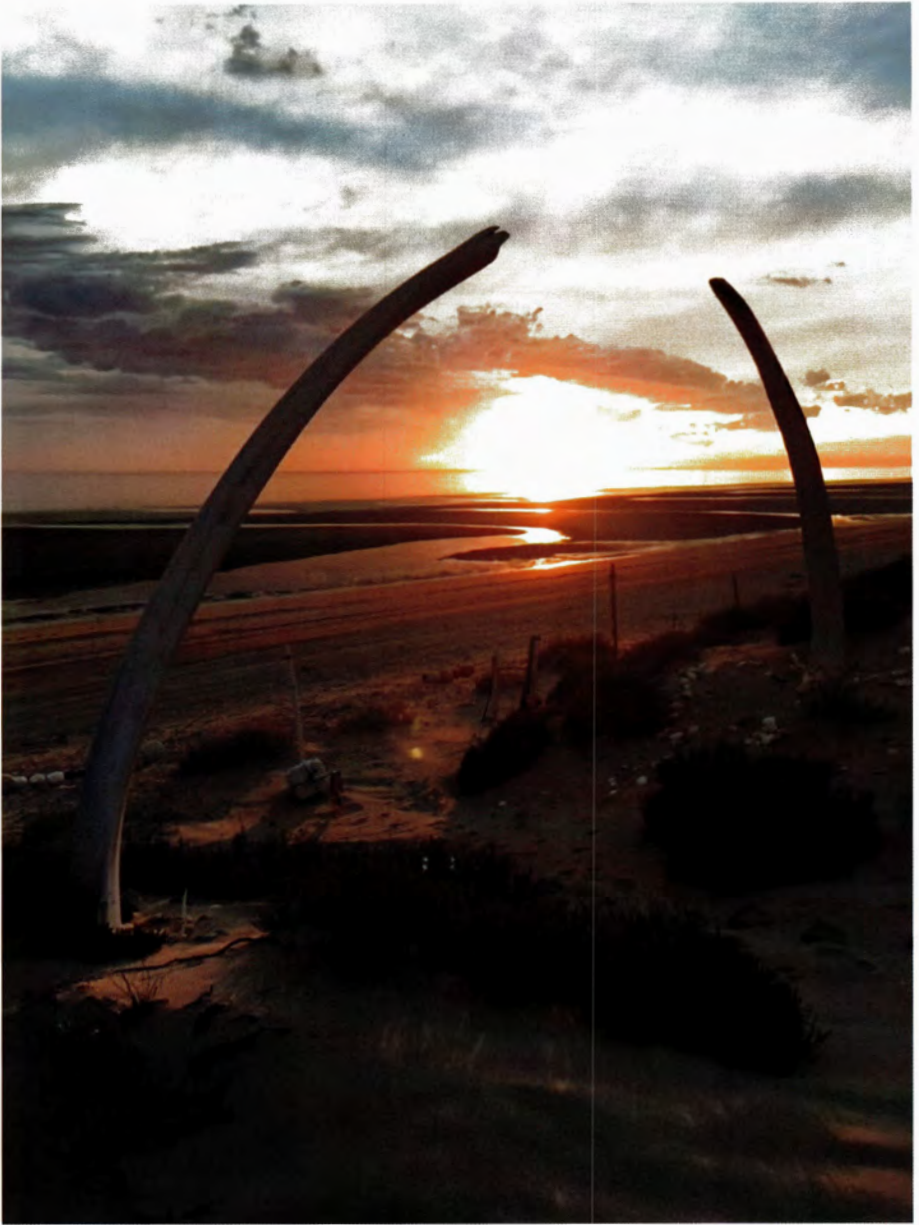
This research affirmed my experience that told me that Cultural Creatives were mostly on the margins of the business community. This is not surprising for the leap of faith that takes us into the interactive world calls for a letting go of much that we have learned. In Real Life the focus is not on control but release of energy. Insecurity underlies all attempts to control. Release, however, enjoys the confidence of inner assurance, or real control, because it enlists the natural energies of others.

The world has always been interactive. Ecosystems depend on a delicate balance of interactivity in order to sustain themselves. Plants gratuitously release oxygen for us to inhale and in return we exhale carbon dioxide for them. It is a life-giving exchange, wholly unsolicited. What if we had choice and could withhold this life-sustaining element from our green providers? Or they withhold from us? Either way it would be death to both. Such is the nature of interactivity. Attending to another affirms us as well.

Research in the biological world tells us that order arises naturally and spontaneously with the principles of self-organization. Complex adaptive systems create their own order. Ecosystems get along rather nicely without human intervention as do our bodies in an elegant complexity of interaction. Much of the control we have imposed upon ourselves in our quest for order is at best unnecessary, at worst destructive.

The legacy of our Modern Age has been a decrease in egocentricity and a heightened sense of otherness with monumental accomplishments such as eliminating slavery, legislating civil rights, protecting religious freedom, granting trial by jury, and giving rise to democratic states. Our institutions reflect this growing interactive trend. The Internet with its spawn of Twitter, Facebook, You Tube, Instagram, and a host of others is an example of our interactive social creations. When we embrace interactivity, we must let go a measure of control as we surrender to the creative process and its uncertain outcome.

Interactive people are connecting with themselves and with others at a variety of levels. At a deeper level they enlist the help of Intuition and subtle energy



Whale bones frame a sunset on the Sea of Cortez. Photo by Tom Thiss.

that are intrinsic to flow state interaction. Abedi called this deeper connection interfusion, a co-mingling of energies. Cultural Creatives acknowledge the energetic body, the life force that vitalizes the physical body. Forty-nine countries recognize this subtle energy and have a name for it. The United States is not among them.

China calls it *chi* and in India, *prana*. There the cultural wisdom is thousands of years old and forms the basis of indigenous healing practices and spirituality. Cultural Creatives are into yoga, meditation, martial arts, hypnosis, breath work, shamanism, chanting, dance, herbs, nutrition, massage, song, dream work, healing, psychic development, drumming, spirituality, visualization, angels, prayer, channeling, myth, and rituals to name a few. All have one purpose – to heighten our awareness in order that we might be more fully alive to life as it unfolds.

To be in the flow is to see the magic in every moment, to sense the wonder in the ordinary tasks of everyday life. Recently an astrologer friend told me to “practice eroticism with the whole world.” Strange as this may sound, she urged me to have an affair with life. A Trappist monk that I know calls this “reverencing the intimacy of our own lived experience.” Our lived experience is our reality, our truth. Preoccupation with the past and fear of the future take us out of our eroticism with the whole world and disconnect us from the living, interactive moment.

In the 150 years since Darwin published his *Origin of Species*, natural selection has become the central canon of biology, the sole source of order. Business was quick to make the connection and survival of the fittest became its mantra in the competitive market economy. Today, research in complex adaptive systems claims that order arises naturally and spontaneously in the biological world.

Stuart Kaufman of the Santa Fe Institute calls this order for free and says it may well be the precursor for natural selection. This natural ordering process is free because it is genetically coded, and it prepares certain species with a robustness that survives through natural selection. Order for free in the form of open, self-organizing systems may be the mantra for the interactive age. This requires heavy letting go of ego and explains why many organizations find the transition to interactivity so difficult.

Eleven: For (Business) Men Only

I was not surprised to learn from Paul Ray's social research on the emerging group of Cultural Creatives that the male/female ratio is 40/60, fifty percent more women than men. In the Core Cultural Creatives, the ratio is 33/67, twice as many women as men. For those that think the world is wrongheaded, this is very heartening research. Feminine energy is on the rise, and it is long overdue. Men need not fear. Our present culture is lopsided, out of balance, and the world is bringing it back into balance. Cultural Creatives include people who have higher standards for spirituality, personal development, authenticity, relationships, and toleration for the views of other people. These are human, not gender, qualities. Women have valued them more highly and put more energy into them.

I was in the business of running sales and management seminars. Men dominated all of them. Not surprising when you realize that men outnumber women in management. This was not so for the seminars I attended for self-discovery. Women always outnumbered men. Women attended in disproportionate numbers. It did not matter if it was a one-hour lecture or a week-long retreat; or if it was daytime or evening – women prevailed. I cannot recall a single program that was not specifically business related where men outnumbered women.

I refer to a staggering variety of programs in broad arenas such as yoga, meditation, healing, nutrition, consciousness, spirituality, health, psychic development, creativity, or intuition. The outcome is always the same. The ratios are seldom less than 2 to 1 and 10 to 1 is not uncommon. For example, recently I attended an after-hours free demonstration of Pilates, a popular system of rebalancing the body developed by a German physical therapist. This is an impressive system of realigning the body endorsed by several greats in the world of sports and performing arts. Twenty-two attended and I was the only man. Are women the only gender out of balance?

The executive director of a local health crisis resource center in Minneapolis, estimates that 85% of their volunteer teaching staff is women and 70-80% of the participants are women. This is an organization that has an extraordinary range of group and one-on-one offerings free of charge. A sampling of what one can sign up for individually includes Swedish Massage Therapy, Energy Balancing, Healing Touch, Body Mind Centering, Reiki, Zen Shiatsu, Acupressure, Hypnotherapeutic Bodywork, and Personal Empowerment Through Self Awareness.

The following is a sampling of group offerings: Natural Foods, Transformational Kinesiology, The Diet Health Connection, Resentment and Forgiveness, Conscious Aging, Awareness of Inner Selves, Healing Laughter, Finding Clarity, Releasing Fear, and Finding Peace in Chaos.

Where are the men? Do they not eat, fear, laugh, age, and seek clarity and peace like the other sex? Given the sorry state of our gender's health one would think they would be knocking the doors down.

In his Self-Healing newsletter Dr. Andrew Weil wrote that men are:

- * Twice as likely to die of heart disease or liver failure
- * One and a half more likely to die of cancer
- * Four times more likely to kill themselves, and three times more likely to die violently
- * Five times more likely to die of AIDS
- * Thirty percent more likely to experience a stroke

Wouldn't you think men would be curious? Lifestyle plays a key role.

Dr. Weil says men tend to:

- * Eat more meat and fat and fewer fruits and vegetables
- * Drink and smoke more and use recreational drugs more often
- * Engage in riskier behaviors
- * Get less sleep
- * Get less regular exercise and more likely to be overweight
- * Visit doctors less often and ask fewer questions
- * Comply less often with treatment plans for chronic conditions

It is not surprising that women live seven years longer than the average man. Ron Henry, the founder of Men's Health Network says, "There is nothing in medical science that says men have to die sooner."

Dr. Kenneth Goldberg, author of *How Men Can Live as Long as Women*, writes, "All the evidence says that the problem isn't entirely in the cards we're dealt. It's in how we play them." We men are not playing our cards well at all.

I don't pretend to have the answers to why women live longer than men, but I do believe that one of the reasons is their reluctance to explore the self. There is much speculation about why men are less open to self-examination, but I prefer to deal with the merits of doing so and the consequences of not. Thomas Aquinas said, "The slenderest knowledge that may be obtained of the highest things is more desirable than the most certain knowledge obtained of lesser things." I would argue that self-discovery is among the highest things and that we have been excessively preoccupied with lesser things.

In his landmark work, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, E. F. Schumacher lays out the true progression of a human being:

1. "One's first task is to learn from society and 'tradition' and to find one's temporary happiness in receiving directions from outside.



The author's son, Eric Thiss in Alyeska, Alaska. Photo by Tom Thiss.

2. "One's second task is to interiorize the knowledge one has gained, sift it, sort it out, keeping the good and jettisoning the bad; this process may be called 'individuation', becoming self-directed.

3. "One's third task cannot be tackled until one has accomplished the first two and is one for which one needs the very best help that can possibly be found; It is dying to oneself, to one's likes and dislikes, to all one's egocentric preoccupations. To the extent that one succeeds in this ... one has gained freedom or, one might say, one is then God-directed."

This progression lies at the heart of Real Life. Submission to God is embedded "helps me and others along on this journey of liberation." This is no theologian talking, no woolly philosopher. Schumacher was an economist. Born in Germany he studied economics at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. For 20 years from 1950-70 he was the Economic Advisor to the London Coal Board. The job was no sinecure. This was in pre-Thatcher days when unions ruled Britain.

I recall being in London at a fashionable west end hotel watching an evening news report on television about the ongoing coal strike when all the lights went out. Groping about in the dark of my room for a candle gave me a new appreciation of the power of British unions. The coal miners were making a statement. Their power lay in cutting electrical power.

My best guess is that 85% of corporate America is still on the first task – being politically correct, and not questioning the traditional way of doing things. Their struggle is to accomplish the second task, to become self-directed – to differentiate yourself. The 15% who are already self-directed are creating the future and making a difference in their organizations. The freedom that these few experiences on their journey of liberation is not being constrained by tradition or cultural norms. This is what Schumacher called being “God-directed” – acting in a manner that more fully realizes their true potential, and that of others, in a quest larger than their self-interests. They are not always welcomed, indeed frequently subverted, but they persist – and that is the difference that makes the difference. Self-discovery begins with the second task and realizes its true potential only in the third. Nothing of consequence will happen in business or society without a significant shift to steps two and three, and these require heavy doses of letting go.

Twelve: Out There and In Here

John Muir, the noted naturalist, wrote in his journal late in life, “I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.” Virtually all our conditioning has taught us how to deal more effectively with what’s happening out there. Yet we can’t even recognize things out there if we do not have them in here. The external world mirrors our internal world. The aggression we display externally exposes the aggression we feel internally, and the love we see in the world is only possible if we have it in ourselves. The societal shift now in progress focuses on what’s happening within us. This is individuation, Schumacher’s second task in human progression. It represents a seismic shift from being controlled by external events to self-control and self-responsibility. The realization behind this shift is twofold:

- 1) The external world has failed to meet our expectations and we can no longer count on it to do so.
- (2) We need to be together in here in order to be truly effective out there.

Each of us has developed a pattern of behavior that serves our personal needs. This is our persona, our social style, the pattern of behavior we display in public to meet these needs. I taught a very popular social style program for many years. People are eager to see how others perceive them. These behaviors are also our addictions which prevent us from opening up to other possibilities. So long as we are responding habitually to our needs, we are not free to choose. Our needs hold us hostage.

I had a client who had a power need to control outcomes in order to get results, a common malady of our time. He had forged a formidable identity and amassed a considerable fortune doing so. Each new achievement reinforced this behavior. By all external standards, he was highly successful so there seemed little reason for him to change. What he failed to realize, however, is that he was enslaved by it. This left little opportunity for personal growth.

Were he more introspective, however, he would realize that this compulsion to get results was also a source of distress in his life when relational issues were ignored. His aggressive ways caused him to be out of touch with his body and he lived with a litany of physical hurts. Pushing harder with his patterned ways merely compounds his distress. A diverse world of growing complexity demands thoughtful and creative responses, not more of the same. Paradoxically, his continuing dependence on what he did best was a recipe for chronic distress.

A more balanced approach would be to detach from our need to control outcomes and to focus on self-discovery and what one can learn about oneself. This involves letting go of knowns and choosing new ways that are less familiar. What may appear to be a risky strategy of abandoning strength in favor of the

unknown is the first step to claiming true power. This is stepping into the void of open space with intention and trusting. Doing exclusively what we do best prevents us from growing and expanding our horizons. It is counterintuitive but such is the nature of our paradoxical times. The logic of it goes like this:

- * The nature of habits is to repeat patterns that work.
- * Habit patterns are tried and proven, comfortable and familiar.
- * Patterns soon become routines that in turn become ruts.
- * When in ruts we have little awareness of other choices

This is a form of addiction. When we are driven by needs, whatever they may be, we are not free to choose our actions. In effect, by continuously repeating our habitual ways, we are surrendering our power. External circumstances and events are pulling our strings and dictating our habitual responses. Contrary as it may sound, detaching from our need to control is the first step toward claiming real control.

I learned this lesson the hard way. For three years I tried to beat prostate cancer with a series of alternative methods involving dietary changes, yoga, meditation, exercise, visualization, antioxidants, and other modalities. Having been told by a brilliant medical intuitive that my cancer was due to an unresolved control issue, I had no difficulty accepting the fact that cancer was a disease of unfinished business. Yet I could not understand how that applied to me because my style was not one of controlling others. Inevitably, I conceded to treating my cancer with a mainstream method.

In the aftermath, when discussing this with my son he said, "Dad, you haven't changed a bit." Rather annoyed that he would not give me credit for my efforts, I defended my position with a barrage of things that I had done. He listened and held to his position that I had not changed at all. Months later I realized what he was saying, and I had to conclude that he was right. My issue was self-control, not control of others. For the first time I understood what the medical intuitive had tried to tell me years before.

I had changed what I was doing, but not how I was doing them in the same old deliberate way. My analytical approach to the cancer issue was no different than my approach to every other problem. I had treated the whole thing like a big life experiment, tweaking one variable after another and watching for changes in my blood tests. My son was right. I was doing different things but how I did them had not changed at all. I needed to detach from my habit pattern, to die to my habitual ways.

For several years one of my favorite weeks was the annual Organizational Transformation (OT) gathering. It was always held over the Fourth of July holiday because this was a time that these fellow management trainers and consultants could not sell. OT was about transformation, not development. Development was not making the needed changes in the business community. In



Lake Minnetonka. Photo by Tom Thiss.

the early years I was all in my head attending lectures and taking notes. I loved it but I was just reinforcing my addiction to rationality. I wanted to experience the energy so apparent in the transformational process. To do so demanded that I balance my cerebral bent with more offerings of the heart. I took no notes, led nature walks, attended fewer lectures, and participated in more activities, physically and emotionally. When I made that change, I began the rebalancing.

Thirteen: Truth is a Pathless Land

In conditioning ourselves to look to the outer world for answers, we delude ourselves into believing that someone's opinion about our lives is better than our own. We call upon specialists even before we call upon ourselves. I continually remind myself that my opinion is best for me.

I worked for a very creative person who would make strong unsupported statements based on his own experience. My training in argumentation and persuasion from the University of Minnesota had taught me to support my assertions with testimonial authority. I would search for authoritative proof for what I wanted to say and would marvel at his self-confidence asking him, "How do you know? Who told you so? What are your sources?" He would simply indicate that his own experience verified his statements. What I didn't realize was that he didn't need any other sources. It took me years to realize this simple wisdom.

We find ourselves unable to make the changes that we desire in our lives because we are not in charge of ourselves. We have turned that responsibility over to other authorities – corporations, banks, governing bodies, schools, political groups, consultants, peers, churches, doctors, gurus, trade and professional associations, etc. We hear it in statements like this: "I'd like to do it, but my boss..." or "My doctor told me I had to..." These authorities with vested interests in the status quo make the big decisions for us, leaving only cosmetic changes with us. The most important question we could ask is, "Who's in charge of me?"

I have concluded that most of us have abdicated our right of choice, unaware that we are no longer in charge of our own lives. When a crisis comes, we want to return to normal not realizing that normal gave rise to the crisis. With Self-awareness we can address our inner dragons, the fears and insecurities that our existing beliefs project to the outside world. Only then will the dragons lose their potency.

The role of the shaman in indigenous cultures was to confront the dark side of the Self. The Self has a shadow side that will inhibit growth. The shadow is our fears, our doubts and guilt, our negative thoughts and bad habits, and our ego that inflates our importance. These feelings must die for new growth to emerge. All endings have new beginnings. This practice may require the work of a professional shaman to confront the dark side with exorcism, but anyone who has overcome an obstacle to growth has experienced what Native tradition called Shaman's Death. It involves a rebirth of the Spirit, a high order of letting go.

If we are dissatisfied and not centered, we try to fill the inner void with things. Like a carousel our lives go round and round in this cycle of dissatisfaction, temporary fulfillment, and then more dissatisfaction. This is what Buddhists call samsara, the continual search for external satisfactions. Satisfaction is in getting, not in keeping. Enjoy the temporary satisfaction and then let it go.

Keeping begins attachment that takes us out of the present moment. When we are not in the moment, we are absent from life itself. If there is a secret of life, it is awareness, paying attention to the present moment. The only way is to connect with the centered Self.

The late Krishnamurti – author, educator, and philosopher – presented the core of his teaching seventy years ago: “Truth is a pathless land. Man cannot come to it through any organization, through any creed, through any dogma, priest or ritual, not through any philosophic knowledge or psychological technique. He has to find it through the mirror of relationship, through understanding the contents of his own mind, through observation and not through intellectual analysis.”

Eckhart Tolle in *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose* tells of the late philosopher Krishnamurti when he revealed his secret, “I don't mind what happens.” These five words may well be one of the most brilliant utterances ever made about living a stress free, authentic life. He is untroubled by the events in life. What that says to me is that he is living in the present moment and his inner being, his true higher Self, is unaffected by the demands of the external world. For better or worse what happens out there does not impact him in here. When we don't mind what happens, we are accepting life non-judgmentally as it unfolds. It must be noted that acceptance of our experience (feelings) in the moment does not mean that we accept the situation. This is pure awareness of what is, the starting point of any action or non-action we may take.

Real Life urges each of us to find our own truth. Our truth is our experience in the present moment, in the flow of life. Any attachment to ideas and beliefs keeps us out of the moment when we interpret what is happening in our fixed, time bound beliefs. This process perpetuates our existing belief systems that are tied to the past. Think about that. We interpret the living present in the dead past.

That dead past comes alive in the present when we cannot let go of the past. As a presenter, I experience a flow state only when I'm free of attachments to



Portrait of Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti, 1922. Photo by Albert Witzel.

any idea or issue. Fixed positions take me out of the flow and blind me to the possibilities that exist only in the present moment. The only way for me to see the world without any distortion is to see it as if for the first time. This is the celebrated “beginner’s mind” which activates awe and wonder of what is.

When we don’t mind what happens, we are seeing the world with a beginner’s mind, a clean slate, and not allowing our mindsets to influence what we observe.

I find that meditation helps me access the beginner’s mind. In meditation you clear your mind of all thoughts and focus on your breath or on a mantra that you repeat silently. This process allows me to be more open, less reactive, and less likely to “mind what happens.”

Krishnamurti’s profound statement is a maxim of pure awareness.

Fourteen: Who's in Charge of Me?

This may well be the most important question we will ever ask. We say that we are, but only if we show up for life and choose to be fully present in the moment. Life happens in the present and most of us, even if we show up, miss the full and subtle richness of the present moment. Dr. Angeles Arrien, a keeper of indigenous wisdom, calls showing up “warrior work.” Just showing up takes guts when we consider the tempting alternatives to not showing up – procrastination, excuses, alibis, lying, rationalization, cop-outs, and denial. We’ve made an art out of not facing up to life’s issues.

In the anonymous words of an old pastor:

Mornings I feel kind of lame,
And my looks are no longer the same.
But I laugh at it all
When’re I recall
If I show-up I’m winning the game!

Indeed. We can’t win if we don’t show up. It’s so easy to say that we don’t have time. We are so busy making a living that we don’t have time to make a life. Many of us don’t show up for life’s important moments that may not be events at all, as we have seen, but rather those gaps between events. Then, even when we get a wake-up call we may not exchange our wanton ways for warrior ways because it’s tough to let go of habit patterns to face the unknown. We think life’s greatest danger is death, the big unknown, but the real danger is not showing up for life itself.

A senior executive I know urges us to “step up to the plate,” a baseball analogy of taking our turn at bat. We may be in a slump, or may not feel good, or may not like what life pitches, but it’s our turn at the plate. Will we take our cut at life’s throws? The big events in life are not just births, graduations, weddings and health crises. The other day an editor friend cut our conversation short apologizing for having to attend his son’s recital. How many of us would have “blown this off” for a business engagement? I complimented him on his priorities.

We may be present physically, but our mind can be anywhere, and usually is. If you are like me, you have lots of distractions – unresolved issues of the past, some concerns about the future, and even some thoughts about what you should be doing right now. All of these thoughts take us out of the present moment, which is like having our own personal power outage, a rolling blackout all our own. The only power we have is in the present. The past is history, and the future is a mystery. Real time is now. I have a watch that says, “Now” – no numbers,

no hands, just “Now.” It’s easy to forget. I need that constant reminder.

As a consultant who has been teaching seminars for over thirty years, I can attest to the many who show up but are not fully present. I remember Professor Mark van Doren’s sage advice, “When you are there, be all there.” Being all there is being here wherever you are. John Kabat-Zinn captured this in his classic book, “Wherever You Go, There You Are.”

If anyone thinks life is fair, they had better take another look. Why should one have such fortuitous circumstances and another such tragedy? I do believe, however unfair it may be, that it is intrinsically good. The equalizer is attitude, and the key to attitude is letting go. Life has dealt unfairly with all of us. Many take great comfort in hanging on to these injustices that give us good excuses for not “showing up.” You hear it all the time with phrases like this:

“I never had the chance to...”

“My boss told me I was too...”

“I can’t because I’m just a...”

“I tried that once and...”

This is what Carolyn Myss, author and intuitive medical practitioner, calls “wallowing in our wounds.” Wound wallowing is a favorite pastime. It takes us off the hook. We put ourselves on the disabled list, so we don’t have to step up to the plate. Wound wallowing pumps life into past grievances by dragging them into the present. This is living in the past that steals time and energy from the priceless present, and that is not the same as having a healthy ownership of the past that prevents us from repeating it. It is important to distinguish between the two.

Folk wisdom says the past is a canceled check and the future is a promissory note. We live, love, laugh, and let go only in the present moment. There is no other time for life. For the past to come alive, we must bring it to the present. That can be helpful for fond memories, but any time we spend outside the moment is lost time for living in the present. The problem we have with the moment is that it is just a moment. Then it is gone and replaced by another moment. If the moment is pleasant, we want to possess it and not let it pass. But pass it does. And if we dwell on it, pleasant though it was, we are not attending to the next present moment.

On the other hand, if the moment is unpleasant, we can’t seem to forget it and we recycle it playing “if only I had (had not)” games in our minds. A common response is “poor me,” victim tapes that we play over and over to justify our negative attitudes or inactions. Once again, Who’s in charge of me? We are allowing past events to run our lives.

I believe we love the past because we long for certainty. The past is the only certainty in our lives. The future is unknown, and the present is ongoing. It’s safer to wallow in the past because it is known, even if it wasn’t all that great.



Playa Encanto, Puerto Penasco, Mexico. Photo by Tom Thiss.

For many, it beats the uncertainties of not knowing. If, however, we accept that life is a continuous flow of uncertainty and that its basic nature is impermanence, then to love life is to love uncertainty. The difference is attitude. When nothing is certain, anything is possible. Each moment brings something new. This is change. This is growth. This is life, a continuous flow of moments, each one to be savored for what it is.

Fifteen: Living on the Edge

Real time is Real Life, the interface between the past and the future, the waning edge of what was and the leading edge of what will be. Living on the edge carries a connotation of greater risk, but the real risk is not being on the edge because this is where life happens according to complexity theory.

Complexity theory teaches us that life evolves in phase transitions between order and chaos that lead to new order. An example of a phase transition is ice melting to become water. The theory posits that evolution of all life moves inexorably toward greater complexity. As a given order grows in complexity it approaches a state of disorder because it cannot handle the increased complexity, and a phase transition of disorder (chaos) ensues. Disorder or chaos is the seedbed for yet another phase transition to a new order that can accommodate the greater complexities. This phase transition from order-to-disorder-to-new order is a cycle that will repeat itself ad infinitum. It is the evolutionary process.

One could argue that this is what is now happening in our alleged democracy. All agree that the democratic system is broken (disorder). The existing order that has evolved over the last 200 years has reached the limits of its ability to handle the growing complexities of globalism, non-state terrorism, the internet, social media, climate change, and an ethnic diverse population. We are experiencing the disorder that precedes a phase transition, and a new order will emerge in time with systems and institutions that can manage the greater complexities.

Growth occurs only at the outer limits of complexity where order approaches chaos. That moment is now, on the edge – the outer limit of the known past and the cusp of the unknown future. Wags say that if you are not living on the edge you are taking up too much space, but that's another story.

Of greater concern is having too narrow an edge, a very limited now. Heavily invested in what has happened (past), we don't have the resources to attend to what is happening at present. All our energy circuits are plugged into the past and there is not enough current to light up the present, and we find ourselves fighting to defend our past positions.

The idea is to expand our now, to make our edge a ledge to stand on and give ourselves space to see the potential in the present moment that is alive with possibilities. Expanding our edge is like putting a wide-angle lens on our perception to see the world in all its interconnectedness. Furthermore, this wider ledge enables us to accommodate differences of opinion and to see conflicting views as parts of a larger whole rather than as obstacles.

The power and the promise of the present are in being alive to these possibilities. The present is enlivening, and we want to feel this aliveness in our lives and in our work. We seek experiences of being alive, what Joseph Campbell called rapture. This is empowering, and we surrender our power when

we divert our energies away from the edge of now. When out of the present moment we are literally out of control.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the late Vietnamese Zen monk, scholar, and poet calls us to the present moment lest we miss our appointment with life. We have an ongoing, ever-present appointment with life now as it happens in the moment. The present moment is a present, a gift that is offered to us freely and unconditionally, 24/7. Hanh also says that if we take care of the present moment, the past and the future will care for themselves. Contrary to conventional wisdom the past is not past. It is very much with us influencing our present moments. Taking care of the past involves not being controlled by what has happened. When we let go of our guilt, anger, regrets, resentment (whatever possesses us), the past no longer controls us and we are free to cherish the moment.

Sixteen: The Present Moment

At any moment there are any number of possibilities for us to select. Whatever we choose, we let go of limitless other possibilities. Life is as much about letting go as it is about choice. Kabat-Zinn says we will never be this young again, so we want to make the most of it. The beauty of this statement is that it is always true. If we miss this moment, it is just as true for the next ... and the next ... ad infinitum.

The moment is never the problem. There are no good or bad moments except our attitude toward them. Hamlet said, "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so." A moment is just that, a moment, and then it's gone. The problem is our reaction to the moment. If we like it, we want to hang on to it and if we don't like it, we can't seem to forget it. Either way, we miss the next moment. The present moment cannot be possessed. The instant we try to possess it, it is gone, and we are no longer living in the present. Possession is static attachment in a flow state world.

Living in the moment is analogous to watching a 35 mm movie with its continuous succession of frames passing before us, each one frozen for an instant to give the illusion of movement. Trying to possess the moment would

be like hanging on to a frame as it passes into the take-up reel. While our attention is taken up with the last frame, the moments pass unnoticed as the movie plays on. When we try to possess the moment, we are wound up in the past just as the frame is wound up in the reel.

The present moment is not good or bad, right or wrong. It just is, and it is timeless. We experience this when we lose ourselves in whatever we are doing unaware of the passage of time. It's as if time stood still. Athletes call this being "in the zone." They know when they are there because they are at the top of their game as everything flows effortlessly. Phil Jackson,



Squirrel at Gideon Cove. Photo by Tom Thiss.

former coach of the L.A. Lakers says that the late Kobe Bryant was able to sustain that time in the zone longer than any player he has ever coached, and he coached the Chicago Bulls during the Michael Jordan championship years.

Animals don't have a problem of being in or out of the moment. They are always in the moment. They are not bothered by guilt for sins of the past nor fear of not living up to parental expectations. That is why they are so alert. We can learn from them if we see our body as the soft animal of our being. Like an animal our body is always fully present. Our mind can be anywhere, but the body is always here, now, on the edge. Therefore, being in touch with our body puts us in the present moment.

Mary Oliver in her classic poem "Wild Geese" writes:

You don't have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
Love what it loves.

When we get enough sleep, when we keep the chronic illnesses at bay with good nutritional habits and an exercise regimen, and when we have good stress management practices, we can handle the hits in life. We have the resources to deal with physical, emotional, and psychological blows from the outside world and rebound with resiliency.

When, however, we are sleep deprived which experts tell us we are as a nation; and when we are not keeping those chronic illnesses at arms-length; and when in lieu of good stress management practices we take medication which merely masks our symptoms and teaches us nothing, what is the quality of our doing?

The wisdom of this elemental state of being was once passed down from grandmothers to mothers. This mother lode of indigenous advice seems noticeably absent today. Whenever I had a problem as a child my mother would tell me to get a good night's sleep and I would feel better in the morning. Things would look different tomorrow. At the time I didn't see the wisdom of this.

While trekking in Nepal I was laid low with enteritis. In my recovery I talked with the volunteer doctors at the Himalayan Rescue Association aid post in the Khumbu, homeland of the Sherpas. The clinic is in Pheriche, a tiny village at an elevation (14,300') where mountain sickness is an issue. Doctors know its cause and its cure, but they cannot predict who will get it. Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) has no correlation with age, gender, or fitness. It just happens to some and not to others. When I asked them what patterns they saw they told me of two kinds of people: "Type A" folks and those on tight time schedules, both out of touch with their bodies. It's that "gotta get there" syndrome that overrides our deep visceral feelings that tell us otherwise. Being out of touch with our bodies is a quality-of-life issue at sea level. At altitude, however, it is life threatening.

In summary, the sequence goes like this. If we are in touch with our body, we are on the edge living in the moment. Being on the edge we are more alive and more fully human. And being more fully human, the quality of our doing is measurably better.

Seventeen: Letting Go of Everything

One way of being in touch with our body is through meditation. Meditation is not well understood in our society, perhaps because its essence is letting go. Even the dictionary that describes it as “thought, contemplation, reflection” fails to grasp its full meaning. True meditation is not thought but letting go of thought. As one wag put it, “Meditation is not what you think.” It allows access to the natural mind when thought, and all other distractions, are set aside. Meditation is letting go of all attachments and gazing deeply into the abyss of now, the inexhaustible present, and trusting in our vulnerability. Meditation is surrender to a benign universe. It is stepping into the void of quietude with intention and trusting.

Jim Finlay, a therapist and former Trappist monk, gently urges practitioners to “Be present, open, and awake neither clinging to nor rejecting anything.” The idea is not to judge thoughts as good or bad, but to notice them and allow them to come and go as an observer would. He also says, “Show non-judgmental compassion toward yourself as you find yourself clinging to or rejecting everything!” That is forgiveness.

In life we tend to run from difficulty or tough it out. Here, the idea is to gentle it out with resolve. Finlay says, “what’s needed is an attitude of nonjudgmental compassion, being gentle to one’s own helplessness” or vulnerability. To gentle it out is to encourage the natural flow from being vulnerable to trusting and letting go.

The practice of meditation is to experience intimacy with the distilled essence of life. There is no reason to go anywhere because that essence is within us. The idea is not to get there, but to be here. True insight comes from within when we let go of all that’s out there.

Breathing is our most elemental act of letting go and it is central to meditation. In letting go of one breath we create the conditions to receive another breath. The rhythmic wisdom of breathing is the basic metaphor for life itself. We let go of our breath, or expire, so that we may take a fresh breath, or inspire. It is significant that we must expel the old in order to take in the new. Letting go is part of the pattern of all cycles.

The Anasazi Indians, known to us as the “ancient ones,” tracked the sun’s cyclic movements and celebrated the solstice when the winter season loosened its grip on the land to allow the coming of spring. These early cliff dwellers knew that when the sun stood still (solstice) in its path, they could foresee the return of the summer sun with its promise of another growing season.

The ancient Egyptians revered the daily cycle of the sun. They built their temples of worship on the east side of the Nile River where the sun re-birthed itself with new life, and they buried their dead on the west side where the sun died daily.



Figure of Egyptian sun god Ra, National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C.
Photo by Carol M. Highsmith.

Trees die to nourish new life on the forest floor. And we let go and forgive the past in order that we may savor the living present. In meditation we let go of everything except the present in a ritual of renewal. Finlay says, “Letting go of everything is the beginning of everything.”

Eighteen: A Stroke of Insight

On December 10, 1996 a 37 year-old brain scientist suffered a massive stroke on the left side of her brain that rendered her unable to walk, talk, read, write, or recall any of her life. In her eight-year personal journey of recovery Jill Bolte Taylor, Ph.D. tells of her “stroke of insight” in her book of the same name. She could not create nor understand speech. Despite this severe limitation she recalls experiencing the feeling of sweet tranquility:

“In the absence of the normal functioning of my left orientation association area, my perception of my physical boundaries was no longer limited to where my skin met air. I felt like a genie liberated from its bottle. The energy of my spirit seemed to flow like a great whale gliding through a sea of silent euphoria. Finer than the finest of pleasures we can experience as physical beings, this absence of physical boundary was one of glorious bliss.”

This new-found peaceful state of mind was a welcome refuge for the extreme frustration she felt being unable to interact in any meaningful way with the outside world. In effect, the persona of Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor vanished with the stroke. She shifted from the doing-consciousness of her left-brain to the being-consciousness of her right brain. Without the boundaries imposed by her left-brain she lost the sense of time. With the past and future deactivated, she could only perceive the present – right here, and right now. And in her words, “It was beautiful.”

Her experience with the right brain was fluid, expansive, part of a larger more universal whole. She had lost her separateness and was no longer a solid individual being. Before the stroke her left-brain with its language center defined her Self and dominated her persona. Now she was a different person, and she valued her new fluidity. As she gradually regained possession of her left brain she worried about its dominance and wondered if all the old behaviors, some unwanted, would return.

Although both halves work together to form our perception of reality, the difference in the two brain hemispheres was more than a neurological process. The two halves perceive the outer world differently and manifest different values and behaviors. This realization gave rise to her stroke of insight. In her words:

“... at the core of my right hemisphere consciousness is a character that is directly connected to my feeling of deep inner peace. It is completely committed to the expression of peace, love, joy, and compassion in the world.”

The significance of this distinction lies in our being able to recognize the differences in the two halves. This awareness enables us to avoid dominance by the left and to summon the right as needed. How to do this?

As a brain scientist Dr. Taylor tells us that when our emotional system is triggered the whole automatic process takes less than 90 seconds. For example, when we are angry the brain chemicals released into the blood stream surge



Kachemak Bay, Alaska. Photo by Tim Steinberg.

through the body and dissipate in less than a minute and one-half. The idea is to surrender to the emotional imperative and let it have its moment. Allow it to run its brief course and then let go of it and choose an appropriate response rather than holding on to the anger. We may have no choice in quelling the surge of anger, but to remain angry is to choose to do so.

By holding on to old grievances, fears, and anxieties we resist the moment and prolong the suffering. It is so with anger or any other negative emotion. If we know that anger is but a fleeting physical response, we can allow it to have its moment and then choose not to be hooked into perpetuating the anger. An alternative more compassionate response is available and on call.

Today Dr. Taylor says that her stroke is the best thing that could have happened to her. It taught her that deep inner peace is just a thought away. She says if she had one word to describe the output of the right brain it would be compassion, and joy would be the word she would choose for the feeling she experiences. The right-brain sees the bigger picture. It has no boundaries. Unlike the left-brain with its ego and unique personality, the right-brain is universal. This is the connection we have with all life. It is the wellspring of our compassion. Think of the left-brain as our head, and the right as our heart. To access the inner peace of the right-brain you metaphorically drop into your heart.

In a diverse world an awareness of this distinction is vital. The head differentiates, while the heart unites. We differ in our thought, and we connect with our feelings and heart.

When I kayak, I feel the sun, the wind, and the movement of the water. The water birds, muskrats, and turtles are my companions. This is all right-brain stuff that commands my attention. These meditative moments make it easier for me to make a whole and balanced life in an outer world where my left-brain demands that I make a living. The right-brain reminds me that making a living is but a subset of making a life, a Real Life.

Nineteen: Effortless Being

Recently I took a three week on-line guided meditation course “Effortless Being” by Peter Russell, world renown for his work on consciousness. Following this I attended his four session Zoom series on “The Art Letting Go.” Russell quotes a Buddhist teacher saying that all world religions can be summed up in two words – letting go.

I had been making efforts to meditate for years and had found it to be very difficult. To me it was a chore, a distraction from what I was doing, and I reluctantly gave it 5 or 10 minutes. Early in a 22-minute guided meditation Russell said, “Just allow your being to relax into the experience of the moment.” That was an epiphany! Language matters. I had never thought of meditation as an experience. I have long championed life experiences. When I realized that it too was a life experience my meditation deepened and I found myself anticipating that moment of meditative silence. Now I find myself more able to say those five magic words that I learned from Krishnamurti, “I don’t mind what happens.”

In Russell’s talk about the natural mind’s modes of attention, self and ego, I was reminded of what I had learned from Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor. There seemed to be correlation between Russell’s two mind modes and what Dr. Taylor had learned about her brain’s two hemispheres. I emailed Peter Russell to get his thoughts. True to his giving nature, his reply was swift, thoughtful, and clarifying:

“There are some connections between the two sides of the brain and self and ego in that the ego uses language a lot more, and the focused attention of the ego is more associated with the left brain and the open attention of the self with the right; However, I am always cautious about assigning too much association between mental states and brain hemispheres. Current scientific opinion is that both sides are engaged in most mental activities.”

When Russell talks about the natural mind, he refers to the open mode of attention of the true self that is always resting in the experience of the present moment. The present moment is an experience in the flow that is characterized by ease and serenity. It is peace of mind that we all cherish. This awareness is not consciously controlled as it drifts naturally from one thing to another. The natural mind thinks of itself in relation to the rest of the world. It sees things in the context of the larger whole — a wiser perspective not distorted by the ego, and not looking for something because nothing is missing. The state of our natural mind is contentment, and it shows us a different way of seeing things. To be who we are in our true self takes no effort, an open state of effortless being.

I am fascinated with the idea that to be in our natural mind takes no effort. If it is so natural, then why are we not always in our natural mind? We need to understand the ego, the deliberate or focused mind’s mode of attention. Its primary concern is about me and my well-being, and not the larger whole.



Sea of Cortez, Mexico. Photo by Tom Thiss.

The ego sees with an egotistical mindset, a way of thinking conditioned by our belief system. It sees what it thinks is needed, what is lacking or useful and it nearly always appears with discontent — fearful, protective, and often defensive. Tension is the hallmark of the ego. When tension is present the ego is in control, and we view the world through the distorted ego lens. The ego mindset makes judgements about past happenings or future desires and takes us out of the present moment. This disallows the inner knowing of the natural mind.

This is a mixed blessing as the ego mode is essential for us to feel safe and secure and to look out for our best interests — an ally when needed for achieving things and problem solving. Whereas the true self rests its being in the present moment and is on-call 24/7, the ego self can easily lead us astray with its grievances and its insatiable demands for having and doing. Letting go is not about doing and it is not about getting rid of something. It is more about undoing, like not following an ego train of thought. It is about accepting our experience in the moment. We are letting go of the ego's way of thinking, how it sees things. In doing so we are coming back to how the body feels and waking up to the present moment. Being awakened is a good starting place for any action.

Russell contends that letting go is a two-step process – first letting-in and then letting-be. Letting-in is welcoming the feeling, such as discomfort, and allowing the experience to be as it is. How does it really feel? Attending to

how the body feels takes us out of our perturbed ego state and into the present moment with the body's emotion.

This openness ushers in the second step – letting-be. Letting-be is letting go of resistance and the tension will begin to dissolve. Jung said, "What you resist, persists." The discomfort of tension arises when we resist this allowing process. You want to be in your natural state of mind when making decisions.

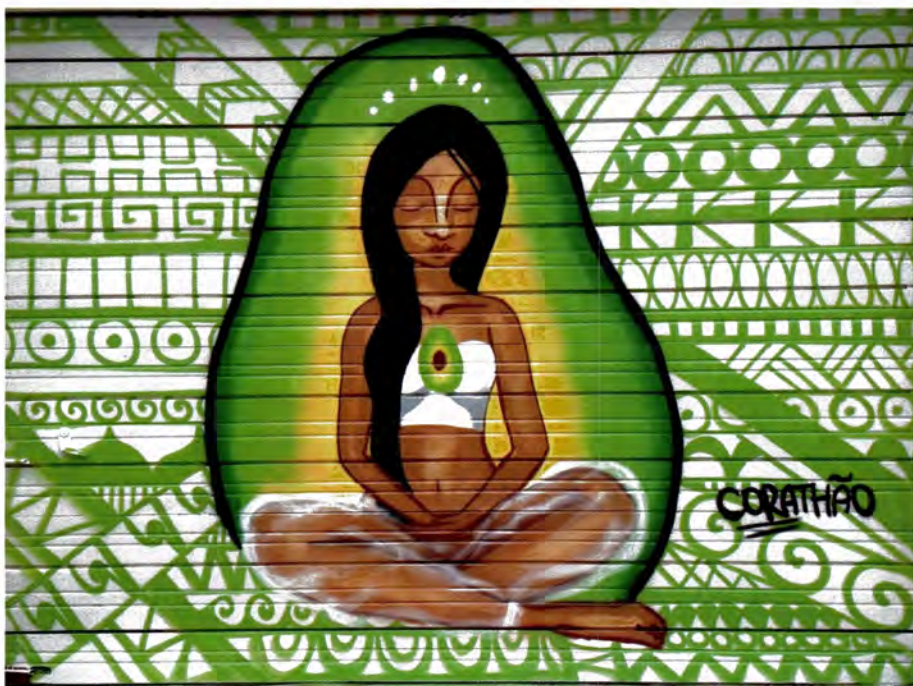
Discomfort is pain and that is inevitable in life, but suffering is optional. We suffer when we make judgements and cling to the pain. Acceptance of the reality of the discomforting experience is essential. This does not mean we agree with what happened. We are only accepting the fact that it did happen. This is required for moving on.

The truth is that we don't need the ego very often. It is there for us if threatened, but mostly not needed. We need to learn how to shift mindsets and get back to our true self – a shift that allows a different way of seeing to reveal itself. The idea is not to get rid of the ego, but rather to step out of it in order to access our natural mind.

Twenty: Meditation and True Self

We want to be in our natural mind with open attention seeing the world as it really is when making decisions rather than seeing through the limited and distorted lens of our ego. Marcel Proust, the great French novelist, said, “The voyage of discovery is not in seeing new landscapes but in having new eyes.” Russell says that we need to ask ourselves, “Is there another way of seeing something?” The problem is not the thing itself, but rather how we see the thing. For example, two people are facing a delayed decision. One is frustrated and distraught at the delay and the other is grateful for having more time to prepare for the decision. The problem is not the delay, but rather one’s attitude toward the delay. Attitude is everything.

Russell contends that three qualities of our true self emerge with our new eyes – a sense of truth, compassion or understanding, and a feeling of ease or relief – peace of mind. This is how we know we are being our true self, and all is in the context of gratitude. When seen through the eyes of the true self, we are feeling OK inside with what the situation demands rather than what the ego thinks is right. We are not looking for happiness in what we have or do, because we recognize that happiness is already available in the form of the true self at any moment even when the ego is in charge. Being at peace with our



A street art picture of an women in Zazen. Photo by Marko Kafé.

true self and then acting accordingly is what Buddhists call Nirvana, freedom or oblivion from the worry of the external world. When Buddha was asked if he was a God, he said no. When asked, "What then are you?" He said, "I am awake." Shifting mindsets to our true self awakens us to a broader and deeper reality and the possibilities within that enhanced openness.

Meditation is greatly misunderstood and thought to be impractical when compared with doing things. In meditation we are having an experience, a non-doing experience of the present moment which is not the same as doing nothing. Non-doing is stepping out of doing for the moment and allowing the natural mind to notice what is happening. You recall this is what Dr. Jill Taylor learned when our emotional system is triggered. It takes 90 seconds for the biochemical response to run its course, so she advocates surrendering to the emotional imperative and allowing it to have its moment. When this situation is observed by the natural mind, not the ego mind that would get defensive, it is ready in 90 seconds to choose an appropriate response rather than holding on to the emotional intensity. Holding on is unnecessary suffering. As such, meditation is very practical.

Meditation is a life experience of open attention. When meditating we are immersing ourselves in the experience of the present moment. Because life happens only in the present moment, why wouldn't we want to be there while it is happening? We are so conditioned to deal with past happenings and future concerns that we have little time for the present. The key is to be fully present when dealing with the past and the future.

Meditation is about noticing. When I meditate, I notice the ticking of my wall clock. I never hear it when I'm at my desk even though I am closer to the clock. When I meditate, I notice the rate of my heartbeat. When I meditate, I notice the slowing of my breath. When I meditate, I notice my hand temperature and I know that warm hands are a sign of relaxation. Meditation is about noticing what is going on inside me and outside as well. We are encouraged to notice the breath because the breath is always present. It offers an ongoing meditative base for us. When distracted by thoughts that take us out of the moment, we merely come back to noticing our breath.

I have memorized much of Russell's guided meditation. As such, I know what is coming next. When what I hear is not what I know to be next, I realize that I was distracted by a thought and had unknowingly drifted off. I then effortlessly return to meditation. It is a check on my ability to sustain a consistent meditation.

Twenty-One: Earthing

My late doctor Christopher Foley introduced me to Earthing in an annual medical checkup. I consider it the most important new therapy in my well-being. Earthing is grounding, a simple process of coupling or equating our body with Earth's electric potential. Electricity has taught us that when we are grounded, electric current cannot pass through us. What we have learned only recently is that Earth's surface is negatively charged, and this has healing power. When walking barefoot on the Earth, our bioelectric systems ground us immediately with the Earth's electric potential. We are electrically stable when grounded.

The book, *Earthing: The most important health discovery ever!* is co-authored by Clinton Ober, the discoverer of Earthing. In the first revision they replaced the question mark with an exclamation point. The power of Earthing lies in its universality, its immediacy, and its demonstrated healing capacity. The Earth's surface is an energy field replenished constantly by lightning strikes (5000 per second), solar radiation, and heat from its molten core. When we are connected to this natural energy field with its negatively charged free electrons, our body's bioelectric systems are normalized and in balance; we are grounded.

Grounding is our natural state of health with our immune system in balance. Pre-modern humans trod the Earth and slept on it with direct skin or leather



Native American moccasins. Cokey Thiss collection. Photo by Tom Thiss.

contact unaware of its healing power. They were grounded 24/7. We have only recently realized that we have insulated ourselves from this healing energy source, and this is correlated with the rise of most chronic illnesses. In our industrialized world we live disconnected from the Earth's surface. Plastic, rubber, glass, wood, and asphalt are insulating materials that block the flow of Earth's energy. When not grounded, our bodies are vulnerable to chronic inflammation related disease and accelerated aging. One lifestyle authority says that the common shoe with its plastic or rubber sole is one of the most destructive culprits of inflammation and autoimmune diseases.

The discovery of Earthing coincides with the rise of inflammation in medical awareness. Inflammation is believed to be the underlying cause of most chronic illnesses, and more than half of all Americans suffer from one or more of them. The rise of chronic diseases correlates with our increasing disconnection with Earth. This loss of grounding is the number one reason why our immune system is compromised with chronic inflammation. When ungrounded, our body is "on fire" with inflammation.

Wikipedia says there are at least 80 types of autoimmune diseases, abnormal responses where the immune system attacks the body's healthy tissues. Could those diseases be the body's response to an ungrounded immune system? Ober would say there is only one disease, inflammation. Cancer too is a chronic inflammation health disorder. Earthing puts out the fire by normalizing the immune system allowing it to do its natural job preventing disease. When ungrounded, our immune system is compromised with inflammation. When grounded, our immune system is charged to the max.

A dominant theory of aging is the concept of free-radical oxidative stress/damage to the body. We take antioxidant supplements like vitamin D and CoQ10 to offset this damage. Earthing's negative charge neutralizes the body's destructive oxidative stress making it the world's greatest antioxidant, and it's free. The authors say:

"The classic inflammatory response may actually be an abnormal condition caused by separation from the Earth's available bank of free electrons. When the body is connected to the Earth, the classical signs and symptoms of inflammation are greatly reduced or absent, among them pain."

Many feel that Earthing will take its place along with the classics of good health – fresh air, clean water, exercise, and stress management. You cannot have inflammation in a grounded body. Wild animals are grounded 24/7. Cancer does not exist in the wild, but when domesticated and living indoors, animals take on chronic disorders.

We may rightly ask, "What if we can't go barefoot outside where we live?" We can get the same effect inside with products that connect into a port (third hole) of a grounded wall outlet. I have an Earthing mat under my feet at my



Gideon Cove, Shorewood, Minnesota, the author's playground. Photo by Tom Thiss.

computer station where I now sit, and I have another at my desk. I also have an Earthing “throw” or blanket that covers me when I sleep and an Earthing pad covering the mattress under the bottom sheet; and Earthing therapy patches that may be applied anywhere on the body to inflammation and pain.

In the September 2020 I lost control of my bike and landed hard on my right hip. The C-T Scan revealed a fracture of the pubic ramus, and I was in a walker for a month. The discomfort that I felt in my pubic bone I allayed with an Earthing patch on the sole of my right foot. Hands and feet are the most conductive parts of the body. Electrons travel slowly in the body, so it took a little time to remove the discomfort.

Clint Ober says that 99% of doctor visits are inflammation related. The benefits of Earthing are manifold. Twenty-five years of research including 21 medical studies affirm that Earthing quenches the fire of inflammation. Worldwide feedback from those who have grounded themselves routinely, often while sleeping, reveal a shortlist of Earthing’s merits:

- * Improvement of many inflammation-related disorders
- * Reduction or elimination of chronic pain
- * Better sleep and faster to sleep
- * Increased energy

- * Lowered stress
- * Normalization of the body's biorhythms
- * Thinner blood, improved blood pressure and flow, and much more

One might call Earthing a subversive science because it undermines much of our industrialized economy. Look at that list of benefits and imagine how many organizations, companies, and individuals make a living addressing those issues, and Earthing does it free — and may well do it better. This is not to say that it will replace the many healing sources, but it will be challenged by those who feel threatened.

Some will say it's too good to be true and therefore it probably isn't true. To those people I say, give it a try. Take a leap of faith and trust the outcome. That is what this book is about. This is not a commercial pitch. I revere Earth and this is just one more reason why I do. The authors urge us to experience Earthing simply and quickly. Just walk or sit barefoot on grass, sand, gravel, or unpainted concrete — all are surfaces that conduct energy. Stay for at least a half hour, long enough so that you will notice a difference in how you feel. Many say they feel calmer. Some who start with pain find it diminished or gone.

Earthing is a healing, not a cure. The healing comes with grounding and reverts when ungrounded. Earthing is dose-related, the more the better. Remember, grounding is our natural state. We evolved to be grounded 24/7. Best you develop a routine as with any restorative mode. You cannot do too much. When you feel the effects, you will want to continue.

Twenty-Two: Eating Rice and Raising a Water Buffalo

In a single breath we can experience the unfathomable essence of the elemental life, yet most of us scarcely notice our own breathing. Jim Finlay tells a Zen story that illustrates the importance of attending to these elemental acts. The story is about a monk who ate rice and raised a water buffalo. This is all he did for 30 years. The Zen master said, “When you realize the meaning of the life of eating rice, you will also understand the deep meaning of raising the buffalo.”

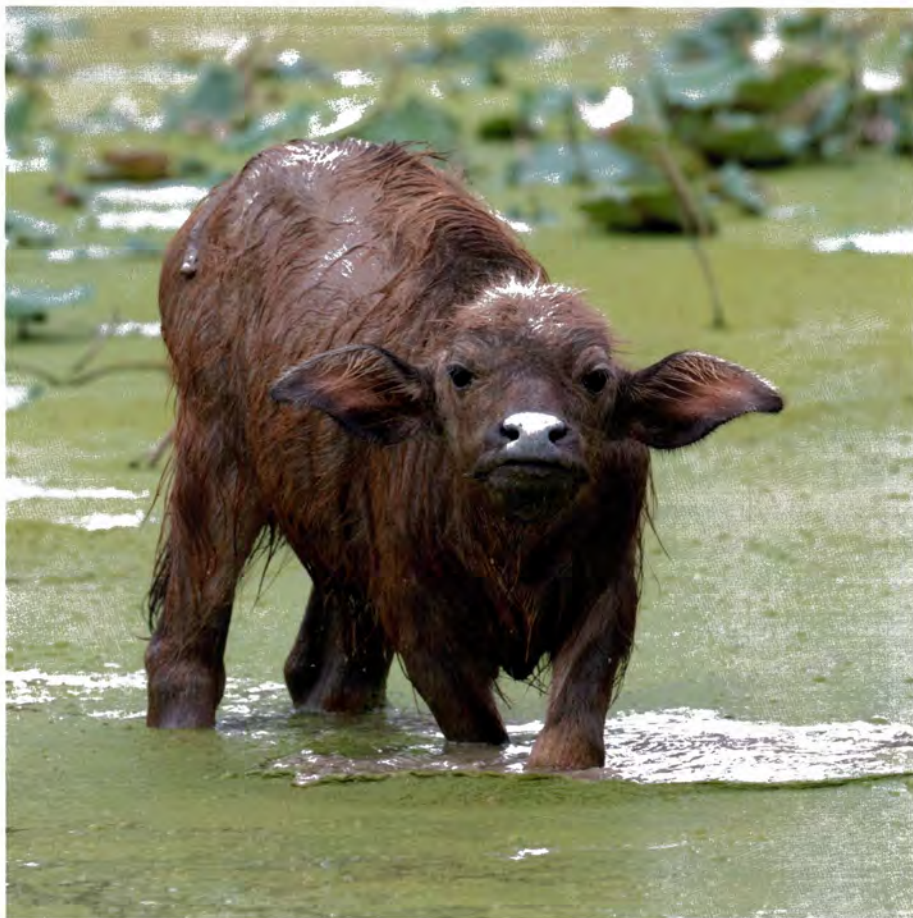
The meaning of eating rice is what Finlay calls this “the body grounded life” of being, the ordinary things such as eating, sleeping, waking, and breathing. The meaning of raising the buffalo is the doing life, carrying out the daily tasks. If we take time to reflect on our being, the body grounded life, then the doing tasks will be manageable. If we neglect these ordinary things, then the task of raising the buffalo will be difficult to manage. In other words, if we neglect our body, everything we do will suffer. Life’s tasks demand a healthy, grounded body. When we attend to our being, the doing is easy.

We have trouble when we attend to the illusion of doing what we think we have-to do in order to be who we think we have-to be. This is when our doing life becomes unruly. Meditation helps us to avoid this illusion by keeping us in touch with our lived experience. Finlay calls this “reverencing the intimacy” of our lived experience. He says, “When our goals are split off from the ordinariness of life, then the buffalo gets unruly.”

The Zen story of the monk and the buffalo illustrates two types of life experiences: 1) the life of being that arises of itself, the body grounded life of eating rice; and 2) the life of doing, of raising the buffalo. By attending to the needs of our body, we can tame the unruly mind. Meditation is the art of taming the unruly mind. Finlay begins his meditations with the following sequence from a psalm, pausing after each line:

Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am.
Be still and know.
Be still.
Be.

Each time he repeats the line, he lets go of the last bit leaving to the end the solitary word, “Be.” No words can adequately express the experience of meditation. Yet, no word says more about meditation than “be.” It is the root word of “being,” of life itself. Letting go of everything takes us to being, the



Water buffalo calf, Don Det, Si Phan Don, Laos. Photo by Basile Morin.

essence of life, which is the beginning of everything. Letting go starts the cycle of creation.

When we let go of all attachments outside of us, and all our thoughts within us, we are left with a vast and incomprehensible, creative void – a field of infinite possibilities. This is the abyss, the open space that letting go creates. It holds our essence, our being, which has unlimited potential. Meditation allows us to access this essence.

Conscious awareness is the most important skill one can learn in a lifetime. Everything we do begins with awareness. With this skill, anything is possible. Most are not aware that meditation heightens awareness. That is its primary purpose. Meditation is a discipline that allows us to be fully aware – to be present, open, and awake. It works best when we focus on one thing or nothing, no-thing. To master it effectively is to enter a state of timelessness. All of us have experienced this occasionally when we concentrate totally on something

and lose track of time. Earlier we referenced top athletes who experience this in “the zone” when time stands still and they move with effortless fluency, totally aware and feeling invincible.

I vividly recall from the 1970s playing tennis in bare feet on a grass court in New Zealand. It was the first time I remember being fully in the flow. There was something about the clear air and the touch of bare feet on the turf that evoked a state of euphoria. I did not know it at the time, but I was experiencing the healing power of Earthing. My game was never better, and I could do no wrong. And if I did, it did not matter. The score meant nothing. The physical experience was everything.

Years later at a gathering in Athens, I gave a talk to a group of 500 manager, and I told this New Zealand story. When I left, I wondered if I had been too sentimental including this story in my speech. As I stepped into the elevator, another man from the conference joined me. He was a Pakistani banker, living in London, and a writer of some fame in his native tongue of Urdu. In the few moments we had together on the elevator he told me he liked my talk very much and the best part was the story of playing tennis in bare feet. He said it reminded him of his boyhood when he never wore shoes until he was fifteen years old. Shoes inhibit our awareness. In yoga, shoes are not worn.

Twenty-Three: Yoga, a Mind/Body Connection

Real Life is about release that, paradoxically, is real control. Yoga is one of many forms of bodywork that employ physical release. To understand yoga, we must let go of our preconceptions. It is not contorting the body into weird positions, nor is it sitting endlessly in a lotus position awaiting enlightenment. Yoga is a philosophy, an art, and a therapy. It deals with the essential nature of the human being in relation to the universe. The word itself means “union” or “yoking” from the Sanskrit root “to unite.” Yoga yokes the body, mind, and Spirit to the universe.

The body is the vehicle for this union of the individual soul and the universal soul.

The late B. K. S. Iyengar, a yoga teacher and half-century practitioner, has done more than anyone to bring yoga to our awareness. He says, “If you look after the root of the tree, the fragrance and flowering will come by itself. If you look after the body, the fragrance of the mind and Spirit will come of itself.”

The old expression, “mind over matter,” taught us that the mind could override some body functions, even diseases, once thought to be beyond our control. Today, however, even that expression is obsolete. The relationship of mind and body is not one of control, but more like a dialogue, an information sharing process. Learning goes both ways. Mind influences matter, and matter influences mind. Even this is too simplistic, because at a deeper level, they are one. So perhaps we should think of it as an internal dialogue, talking to oneself.

I began taking yoga seriously when I found I had prostate cancer. In reading a research work-in-progress about alternative cancer therapies by Michael Lerner, I discovered most regimens included some yoga. The prostate has poor blood circulation, so my plan was to build up my immune system, open up the pelvic area with yoga, and get more blood circulating through the region. Now, years later, the unintended benefits of yoga have been so affirming that I have continued the practice for reasons quite apart from those which got me started.

For half a century I have had back problems, most of them kept at bay with lifting limitations and corrective exercises. Three months before I began taking yoga seriously, I suffered a compression fracture of my third thoracic vertebra when I flipped a car during an autocross event on the Brainerd International Raceway. This injury was high up between my shoulder blades and I was unable to access it with traditional therapeutic exercises. Yoga taught me how to reach this area and brought me relief.

In high school I had inflammation of the growing ends of the lumbar vertebrae. When my bones could not keep up with a teenage growth spurt, I pitched forward into a round-shouldered slouch and compressed the growing ends of the vertebrae. In the mid-1940s I pioneered a new Baker back brace and wore it for several

years together with an exercise routine to strengthen my back muscles and straighten my spine. It helped, but I have had a curvature (kyphosis) of the upper back all my adult life. I was told that there was nothing I could do about it after my bones stopped growing. I believed that for forty years. Today, I no longer do. Thanks to yoga, I am standing straighter than ever.

As for flexibility, I have a range of motion today nearly comparable to my earlier adult lifetime. In talking with my elderly neighbor, I said that I was now able to do things that I could not do at age 21. His reply was quick and witty saying that he was more interested in doing things that he could do when he was 21!

Yoga is meditation in action. In *Yoga, The Iyengar Way*, the authors say, "In order to keep the knee straight, attention is focused on the knee. This is concentration. Then, holding the attention there, the mind moves to the next focus – thigh, hip, waist, and so on... until attention is diffused all over the body without any lessening of intensity. This is meditation." Yoga is meditation, and meditation is letting go.

The movement of intelligence or awareness throughout the body is the yoga. This yoking of mind and body is what distinguishes it from other stretching exercises. You can work-out with a Sony Walkman, and you can exercise with TV. You can even read *People Magazine* on a Stairmaster, but you cannot practice yoga authentically with any of these. Yoga demands total concentration. I listen to classical music on Minnesota Public Radio. MPR has few distractions. As with all meditation, yoga keeps your awareness in the living present moment.



A young man performs a yoga pose at the Rift Valley Escarpment along Nairobi-Mai Mahiu Road. Photo by Abba Swaleh.

If the mind is not fully attending to the body, it is not yoga.

Recently the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* ran a feature on yoga – “Acing the Mat Test.” More than 100 Minnesota schools have staff trained to teach yoga to kids of all ages. Studies have linked yoga in schools to better grades, behavior, health and relationships among students. Educators are extolling its benefits: improved self-esteem, self-awareness, acceptance, and focus. One school social worker said, “Yoga just regulates the system. It brings hyper kids to the center, and lethargic kids wake up ... when we slow down the nervous system and they’re able to be calm, they open up and are better learners.”

Early in my practice I concluded that everything in yoga is inward with the mind and up and out with the body – extending the spine, opening-up the chest, stretching the muscles and tendons, and creating more space in the joints. Muscles and tendons protect us by resisting sudden or extreme change. They are looking out for our best interests, guardians of our body’s structural integrity. If, however, we give them time to assimilate the change that we have imposed upon them, they will grant us a bit more. It is significant that the stretch comes on the out breath, in the act of letting go. The muscles and tendons release their grip as we release our breath in one unified moment of relaxation. Holding our breath is a no-no in yoga. Continuous breathing is vital, but the movements are coordinated with the breath. Exhale as we stretch out, and inhale as we return.

More than anything, yoga is balance. It is a rich mix of the hard and soft, of effort and letting go. During the most intense poses the belly is always soft. Tense abdominal muscles inhibit breathing and hamper the full extension of the spine. The face too is always soft even with maximum effort. Walking that fine edge between soft and hard is the art of yoga and of Real Life with the accord of stillness and action.

I stress letting go because it gets lost in our effort-fixated culture. With yoga and other meditative arts, we can bring our lopsided lives back into balance. According to the Yoga Sutras, ancient Indian texts, all poses or asanas serve four functions: 1) firm body, 2) open heart, 3) still mind, 4) benevolent Spirit. We would be hard pressed to find a better summary of Real Life.

Twenty-Four: Body Wisdom

Yoga is another great metaphor for life. Anything that has been around for 5,000 years has to contain some wisdom. Holding a pose in yoga allows the muscles time to assimilate change. This creates a little more open space for movement. Yoga fills this void with an added increment of stretch. Next time it will come a bit easier. Like a child testing the limits of its parent's authority, yoga lives at the outer edge of the body's capacity – never forcing yet ever allowing, and always extending toward a fuller expression.

We struggle with our efforts to get better at our disciplines whether it be yoga, dance, meditation, or racquetball. And we ask ourselves, "Will I ever get there?" This is the wrong question. The real question is, "Will I ever be here?" The body understands that it has no place to go. It is forever here. We can take it somewhere and it remains here in the now. For most of us, the mind has yet to learn what the body instinctively knows.

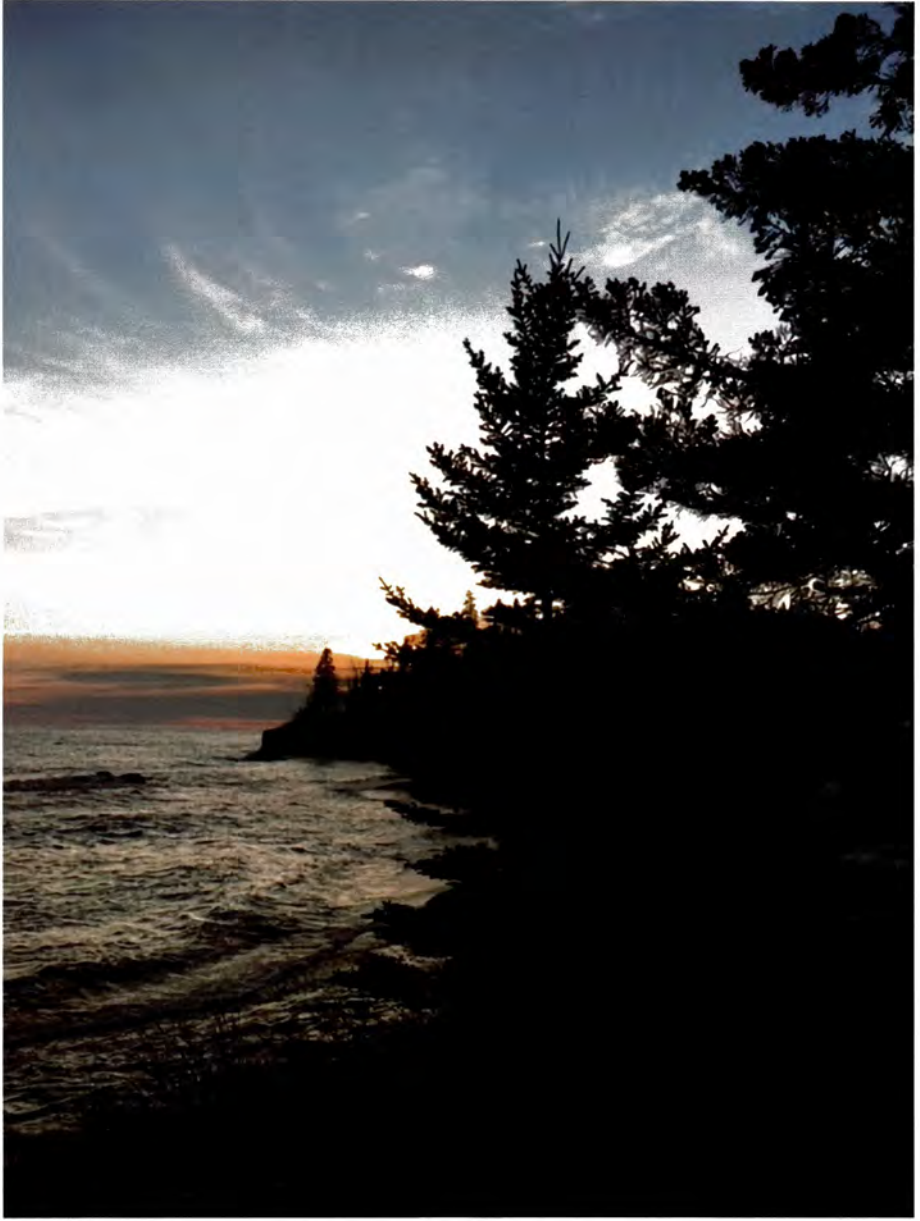
Yoga is merely one means of bringing our awareness to the present moment. Sitting still or mindful walking can do the same. These three meditative practices all focus on the body. The body, always fully present, is never behind or ahead of us. Our mind is what takes us out of the present. With our body on cruise control, our mind takes a holiday.

I'm reminded of the Tortoise and the Hare fable. While our body plods along tortoise style, our hare-like mind roams at will and checks in periodically to see how its body is doing. Like the fable, the body gets there first because it never left! Body wisdom knows what the mind has yet to learn that the secret is here, not there. All the time the mind is away, which is most of the time, we are not fully present. The body brings us back with its power of pleasure and pain.

Truth is our direct experience in the moment and the vehicle for that direct experience is the body. If the body is always present, it represents a reliable source of truth for us. The mind has the power to distract and to distort the truth. The body does not lie. Therefore, non-verbal cues are so important in communication because words have the power to distort. It is easy to hide behind words, but hard to hide our natural body responses.

Recently I attended a program on the Feldenkrais Method. In Awareness Through Movement (ATM) lessons highly trained practitioners help you reprogram your body's dysfunctional habit patterns. Feldenkrais was a Russian born Israeli physicist who researched human movement and its relationship to behavior. His mission was to "make the impossible possible, the possible easy, and the easy elegant."

What interested me were their methods of altering habitual body patterns. Most of us have movement patterns that are either unnatural or incorrect in terms of how the body naturally moves. Yet these patterns have become our comfortable way and repetition simply reinforces the distortion. Eventually the



North Shore Lake Superior, Minnesota. Photo by Tom Thiss.

excessive strain of these improper movements causes the body to malfunction. To prepare our body for change, the Method will first make us aware of our movement often by inducing a less familiar way. For example, we all walk bilaterally meaning the left leg advances at the same time as the right arm and then the right leg and the left arm. Feldenkrais will have us walk homo-laterally meaning the left leg and left arm advance together and then the right pair. If

you have never walked this way you cannot imagine how awkward it is. This forces you to become aware of how you walk. It also creates a chaotic situation in the nerve pathways that opens us to new possibilities.

Chaos is the seedbed for transformation. It is the void out of which the new arises. We are literally stepping into the void and trusting that the new will become more natural and effortless. When we walk homo-laterally we are allowing ourselves through awareness to correct any faulty walking patterns by presenting the brain with another choice. The brain must experience something new for it to change its neuromuscular response pattern. Most of the people who come to yoga or Feldenkrais do so because they have a physical problem. It is curious that we need a must problem in order to become aware of how we move.

My experience tells me that the purpose of crises, especially illnesses and injury, is to bring our mind to the present moment. There is nothing like pain to keep our mind focused on the moment. We know that healing can occur only in the present. If we are wallowing in our wounds of the past, we don't have the energy to heal ourselves. It would stand to reason then that illness forces us to focus our attention on the body. It is as if the body has been trying to get our attention for some time and finally says, "That's enough!" and illness follows.

We then tend to our illness, get well, and proceed as we did before to ignore the body again until it gives us another reminder. As one wag put it, "Death is nature's way of telling us to slow down." If we would attend to our well bodies with the same intensity of care as when we are ill, we would seldom be ill. The mind is a channel for healing and the mind goes wherever we focus our attention. Paying attention to wellness perpetuates wellbeing.

Recently I had a minor outpatient surgical procedure. When I asked my doctor if she wanted to see me next month she said, "I don't need to see you if you are well." She is very competent and professional, and I knew what she meant; yet I could not help thinking that this is what is wrong with the system. Perhaps if they saw us more often when we are well, we would not have these problems. If we focus on wellness, we will have more wellness. If we focus on problems, we will have more problems.

Problems also force us to be present. They give rise to the stress response that is a state of physical arousal. Stress manifests itself in the form of fear, anger, motivation, excitement, and a host of other emotions all of which have the same generic body response known as the fight/flight syndrome. Most of our crises including illness are consequences of our not attending to issues in our lives that we need to address. What better way for the universe to get our attention than a personal crisis? Our problems are symptoms of deeper universal archetypes such as being a victim. Left unaddressed, these problems will return repeatedly until we face them. When consciously addressed, they will fade from our lives. There is always a lesson in crisis. The question is: will we learn. If not, we can be sure we will be reminded again.

Twenty Five: Intuition and Integration

The natural world is an inseparable web of relationships of which we are a whole/part. This infinitely complex web of interconnectedness is too vast for our conscious mind to grasp, but nature has equipped us with five senses and a brain. The latter has an intuitive capacity, the so-called sixth sense, and a critical thinking capacity to separate complexity into its component parts. The intuitive mind integrates information, and the thinking mind differentiates. Differentiation is the main function of the rational mind, and science is our most sophisticated tool for doing so.

Differentiation distinguishes one part from another. This is how we acquire knowledge. With technological advances we plumb the depths of nature's components learning more and more about less and less! Much concern has been voiced about reductionism, the process of reducing matter to its simplest elements. Old paradigm thinking believes that the dynamics of the whole can be understood from the properties of the parts. Our experience tells us otherwise. We have scientific disciplines within disciplines talking only among themselves in their highly specialized fields — like those hapless blind fellows clinging to disparate parts of the elephant and wondering why the rest don't see things their way.

What is desperately needed is an integration of these disparate parts or patterns. Ken Wilber, one of the deeper thinkers of our time, says that the lack of integration is the greatest failure of the Modern Era. Integration is the opposite of differentiation. The dynamics of the whole elephant cannot be understood from the properties of the parts. We cannot just reassemble the pieces and call it a whole. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. New paradigm thinking is more holistic. It starts with the whole.

Holism, as a philosophical theory, states that whole entities have an existence other than the sum of their parts. As humans looking at our own bodily components, we would have to agree. Who would argue that we are essentially a complex string of protein molecules? New paradigm thinking has growing support in many fields, most notably the integrative medical models and ecological movements.

Enter intuition, the direct perception of truth — knowing immediately without conscious reasoning. Lying outside the conscious mind, intuition is our greatest integrating power giving us insights into the whole. The rational mind may give us facts, but it won't give us meaning and the truth behind the facts. Richard Wilhelm, in his classic *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life* wrote, "The spirit must lean on science as its guide in the world of reality, and science must turn to the spirit for the meaning of life." Intuition is a higher order than reason and is most closely associated with wisdom. We must let go



Apostle Islands, Wisconsin. Photo by Tom Thiss.

of the belief that all things maybe known through reason and that science has all the answers.

Research shows that creative people trust their ideas more than the less creative who have an equal number of ideas but trust them less. Creative people are not afraid to voice their ideas and to act on their intuitive “hits.”

The greatest barrier to intuition is low self-esteem. If we don’t feel good about ourselves, we are not going to listen to our inner voice. Creative people have developed confidence in their intuition. They trust their inner voice. Again, we are intentionally stepping into free fall and trusting. Creativity is free fall and intuition is the ripcord that opens the canopy.

Years ago, I read *The Intuitive Manager*. It was a timely addition to management lore, and it prompted me to reflect on the past. Thirty years earlier I was deeply involved teaching problem-analysis and decision-making from a text titled *The Rational Manager*. How far we have come! It has taken 30 years to cross the corpus callosum, that tough band of transverse fibers that separates the left, or rational, side of the brain from the more intuitive right side. We have moved from denigrating intuition as an obstacle to rationality to celebrating it as a priceless gift. Rational and intuitive processes are very dissimilar, some would say opposites, but together they complement one another to form a whole.

Twenty-Six: Real Control

One of the great paradoxes is that real control comes when we stop trying to control. Abedi spoke to his managers about the “demon of dominance,” the illusion that we control by dominating others. In the old paradigm science dominated and tried to control nature. The new paradigm recognizes the world as a living system with its own intelligence. As such, domination gives way to dialogue and rational submits to relational. The difference between rational and relational is only two letters, “el.”

When we get the “el” out of relational, we’re being rational and that is very limiting.

When we think relationally, we see all parts as patterns in a web of relationships. This conceptual shift from domination to dialogue is easier to grasp with people relationships, and in our effort to be objective we have often marginalized the living connection between people. We believed we could control people and we built structures and systems for this purpose. It has cost us dearly.

All control stems from insecurity. Our control practices are simply an admission of our insecurity and our unwillingness to trust. With inner security we have no need to control. Fortune reported the story of a woman who ran a \$10 million business until breast cancer forced her to “relax her grip.” She found, to her surprise, that her people could handle things perfectly well. Now, completely recovered, she says, “I see now that my illness was a positive experience ... We became a very close-knit family... I had never realized before how much these people cared.” During this difficult time her marriage broke up and she was forced “to stop running, sit down, and consider what is important in life.”

This is the way it always seems to work. We relax control and begin to trust when we have no other choice. Then often, the chaos of open space fulfills its potential of life transforming magic. Churchill said, “America always does the right thing, but only after exhausting all other possibilities.”

For over 30 years I have been telling skeptical listeners that we cannot control another person. I urged them to disabuse themselves from thinking they could control someone else’s behavior. Influence, yes; control, no. It is not a useful idea. To try to control another is to tamper with freedom that carries the burden of personal responsibility. When we remove freedom, we remove responsibility.

In any relationship, we can only control half, our half. We have a full-time job with our own behavior. Modifying our behavior is the best way of inducing behavioral change in others. If we maintain self-control and responsibility in relationships, there is a good chance that others will do likewise. But if we lose control of ourselves, the relationship will suffer independent of the other party. Changing one part in a web of relationships changes everything. We try to change others rather than ourselves, but transformation is an inside out



Great blue heron, Frog Island. Photo by Tom Thiss.

process. If we wish to evoke a different response from another person, the best way is to change our approach.

The whole empowerment concept is often distorted to fit our traditional idea of control. Managers with an Oz-like aura mandate empowerment, all smoke and noise. Like Toto, when we lift the curtain of control, we expose the sham of imposing empowerment.

We cannot empower people any more than we can control them. This is something they must do themselves. We thought we could motivate people, but that didn't work either because we used it in the context of control. You can motivate me all you wish but if I do not feel motivated, nothing changes. That is my call. You can influence, but I have the final say. It is a fundamental human freedom.

Teachers cannot teach us unless we want to learn. Salespeople cannot sell us unless we want to buy. Leaders cannot empower us unless we choose to feel empowered. This is not something we do to another person. The process of empowerment begins when we let go of our traditional concept of control and accept real control that comes when people exercise choice and take responsibility. The key to empowerment is to create the conditions that allow the other person to feel empowered.

Twenty-Seven: The Creative Process

One aspect of real control is a diminished need for a plan. Planning, yes, but the plan is obsolete the moment it is complete. Peter Russell, one of the foremost authorities on creativity, says that we are in the most challenging and unpredictable time in history. As such, we need to prepare. He says we never have enough time to this stage of the creative process. The idea of getting to the solution quickly is wrong. From a creativity standpoint, the later we get there the better. In a five-day retreat on creativity, he will not deal with solutions until the fourth day. Then, he contends there is never a shortage of solutions. Russell says that frustration is part of the creative process. It either means we have not spent enough time in preparation, or we are ready to move on to the incubation stage. And only we will know.

The incubation stage is the time of letting go to allow the idea to take form. We have done all we can do now. It is time to stop trying and begin to allow. Sleep on it. Creativity has its own time independent of ours. This is a conscious letting go of the analytic process when we step back and allow the solution to bubble up when it's ready. Awareness of being fully present is key. Because everything is interconnected, we are likely to see, hear, or sense the presence of something related. The answer always comes unbidden, when we are not looking for it. Russell says the whole creative process is a dance between the conscious and unconscious minds. Intuition is the "window on the unconscious mind," the vast repository of truth of which we see flashes of insight.

The key to incubation is detachment, or letting go, and awareness to cues that come to us from triggers in the outside world. These triggers may come in dreams or in accidental exposures to unrelated things that point us to the answers that have eluded us through our rational inquiry. Native Americans were taught to read nature's signs such as the presence of an animal that would give meaning to present and future events. Jung called this coincidental process synchronicity. Creative people know that coincidences are not coincidental.

I recall attending a Native American pow-wow at Birch Coulee, one of the battle sites in the US-Dakota War of 1862. The event was a "Gathering of Kinship" to honor the spirits of those 38 who were hanged in Mankato, Minnesota in the largest mass execution in our history. We were awaiting the arrival of runners from Mankato who were carrying the spirits of the deceased. The announcer called our attention to an eagle circling overhead, a good omen that all was well with the travelers and that they would be with us shortly. Eagle power is clarity and illumination and that is what its presence did for those of us below. Synchronicity.

Real control is moving in a purposeful direction, dialing into the present, opening-up to intuition, letting go of the outcome, and moving on. The idea is to remove anything that diminishes our capacity to live fully in the present.

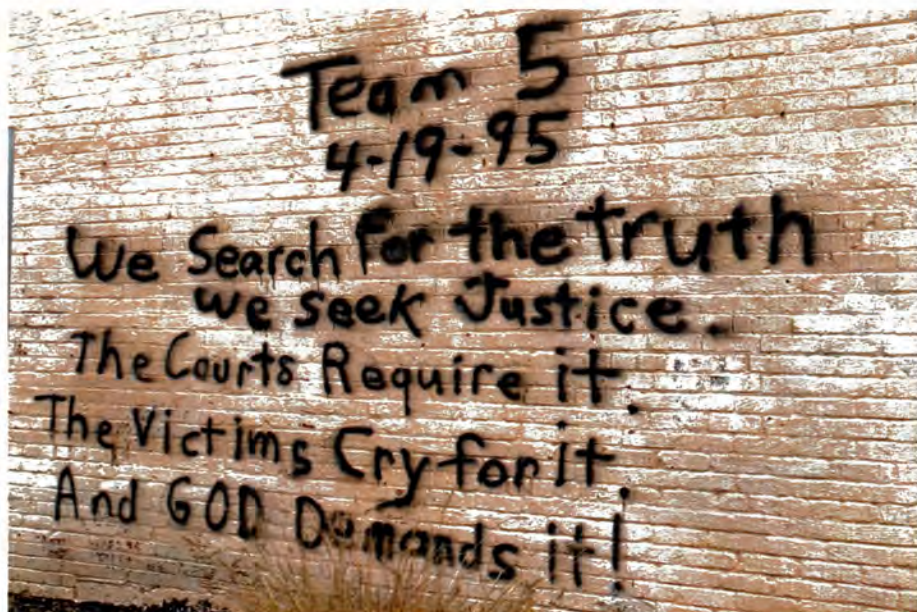
Twenty-Eight: Forgiveness

Everything is relational. This means that our actions, no matter how seemingly insignificant, are always consequential. Everything we do has its impact. As in any relationship, we must take responsibility for our actions and their consequences. With such an awesome burden of responsibility for all that we do to everything and everybody, we need a means to lift that burden responsibly. This is the role of forgiveness. Excepting death, forgiveness is the supreme act of letting go.

Forgiveness is something we do for ourselves primarily, not for others. It can be done for others as well, but its chief purpose is for our own wellbeing. That may seem selfish, but it is no more selfish than breathing and eating. It makes no sense to say, "I'm too busy to eat, would you mind eating for me?" Forgiveness is an essential element of self-nurture. I recall seeing a young black woman on television refusing to be a bitter victim of hate after the Oklahoma City bombing incident. Quoting the wisdom of her mother she said, "If they knew better, they would be better."

For years, every time the name of a certain person came up, I developed a knot in my belly. I knew why. It was an unresolved issue with this person going back many years.

I thought the issue was behind me, but my gut told me otherwise. For no better reason than to rid myself of this occasional knot, I wrote the person a



Oklahoma City National Memorial. Photo by Jud McCranie.

letter. It was my first correspondence with him in fifteen years. I did not expect a response, and I did not get one. That didn't matter. What mattered was my initiative in sending the letter. I have not had the knot since.

Mary Hayes Greico, a local forgiveness guru, says this: "Forgiveness means to release an expectation that is causing one to suffer, to cancel a debt of demands and expectations that one is holding onto, and to dissolve an attachment that blocks our flow of love and energy." That says it all. Forgiveness is unilateral and it does not require the other person to respond in kind. Having the other person accept and participate in your act of forgiveness is very fulfilling, but not necessary. It is something you do for yourself. Forgiveness is "auto-philic," (Philos is Greek for "loving.") self-love, the arousal and satisfaction of a loving act by oneself. Isn't it nice to know you can originate a loving act and be satisfied without having the other respond? If that sounds unnatural, it is not. That's because forgiveness is a loving act given by you and for you – an act of self-love. Having done so, it is finished. You can now move on without the burden.

Jim Finlay tells a lovely Zen story of two monks who were out walking in silence. They came to a stream where a woman was waiting for help to cross. The first monk offered to carry her across on his back. On reaching the other side, she went her way and the two monks continued in silence. After a considerable time, the other monk broke silence and said, "You realize, that when you carried that woman on your back you violated a sacred vow." To which the first monk responded, "Yes, I know, and I let her go at the river, but you have been carrying her ever since." The burdens we carry in our minds are usually heavier than those we carry on our backs.

Forgiving another would be easy were it not for our desire to see the perpetrating party suffer and crawl abjectly before us. This is the hard part to let go. We want retribution or apologies and sometimes even these are not enough. If, however, we see forgiveness as a solitary act, we can eliminate these matters of pride and simply lift the burden from ourselves.

I recall talking with a friend who counseled me on two occasions after I had been fired from a job. The first time we met the act of being fired was fresh and I keenly felt the injustice. The second time I had come to realize that the company had changed, and I was better off not being there. When he commented on how much improvement he saw in me, I was surprised. I had not realized how poor my attitude had been, nor did I know it was so apparent to others. I then realized how subtle and corrosive my negative attitude was. I had been playing those negative tapes in my mind about all the injustices that had been done to me and they had slowly corroded my spirit without my knowing.

That was a turning point, as being fired often is, and I resolved never again to indulge myself in self-pity. Years later I can say I let go of that habit for good. It is so natural, and so human to want to feel self-righteous and sorry for oneself. Knowing that you don't have to carry that burden, you can forgive yourself for your mortal ways and move on.

If you have done a stupid thing or offended another person, forgive yourself. Forgiveness is like a savings plan. Pay yourself first and the accrued savings will compound and grow. Forgive yourself first and the accrued benefits will follow as you feel the release. We all do stupid things. It goes with being human, a role that we have been assigned. If you wish to tell the other person you are sorry and ask for forgiveness, do so; but if the other person doesn't respond as you wish, let it go. Forgive the person for not meeting your expectation and move on. You have done your part and that is all that is required.

Furthermore, if your expectation is shattered when the other person does not appreciate what you have done, the fault lies not with the other person but with your expectation. Remember, expectations are attempts to control outcome and they get in the way of the present moment. We forsake life in the present when we try to control future results. Let them go.

If someone has offended you, the process works the same. You do not need the other person to be present. An easy way is to visualize doing it. Imagine it happening the way you want it to happen. See the person accepting your forgiveness. This act is sufficient. Should you wish to convey your forgiveness in person, you may. Having visualized it will make the act of forgiveness come easier.

Twenty-Nine: Accepting our Humanness

As humans, we need to celebrate our humanness, our uniquely gifted but finite condition. In the Judaic Christian tradition original sin is our unwillingness to accept this limited status. We want to be God, infinite and perfect. This is hubris, or arrogance, pride in its overweening state. Many of our spiritual problems stem from this. The arrogance of pride lies in our unwillingness to accept our human condition. In truth, there is great freedom in letting go of perfection, forgiving our imperfections and fully embracing our humanness. You have heard it said, perfection is the enemy of the good.

It is reassuring to know that the world will continue without us. There are those who won't take time off not because of the workload but because they fear they won't be missed and might be seen as non-essential. How sad! Forgive yourself for that unhealthy but very human thought. You don't have to carry that burden. Let God handle that one. Humility is acceptance of our gifted but limited state.

Myth is a metaphoric way of communicating the profound, the portrayal of eternal truths in story form. Contrary to current usage, myth is not the absence of fact. Myth gives us guideposts for our spiritual journey by pointing to eternal truths. The story of Adam eating the apple is a myth to convey the profound truth of our limited powers. When he ate the apple of human understanding, he assumed the role of God. Blatantly rejecting his human condition, he took on the mantle of the divine, a clear case of the finite trying to be infinite. In Christian theology this is number one (original) sin. Adam should have celebrated his humanness and let go of his need for perfection – but then we would never have known what we are not supposed to do. Thank you, Adam.

In a curious way our limited state is our strength. It goes like this:

To be limited is to be vulnerable.

To be vulnerable is to be open.

To be open is to trust.

To trust is to let go.

The real sin is not accepting our limitations, having to play God, and not letting go. This is the problem we have with control. It breaks the flow of this natural sequence. To be fully human is to trust. One very positive sign today is the trend to collaborate with competitors. People are realizing there is more to gain from sharing than withholding. Real power comes from sharing, not controlling. Real Life values inadequacies realizing they are often what makes us unique and interesting as a person. These limitations urge us to pool our energies with others to make us more complete. Abedi said, "When I acknowledge the importance of others, I forget myself."



Gulf of California, Mexico. Photo Tom Thiss.

The primary message of the Bible is our struggle to let go of power and accept the sovereign grace of God. Again, we are urged to step into the abyss and trust. In this context, however, it is called faith. I cite this not to preach, but to illustrate the centrality of letting go, known as forgiveness in our western culture. Christians find great joy and liberation in knowing that despite their failings they are forgiven. This is God's grace, unearned and freely given. The message is that if your life is properly aligned vertically, the horizontal relationships will take care of themselves.

Thirty: A Warm Heart

When I think of forgiveness no contemporary figure symbolizes this quality more than the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and political leader of the Tibetan people. I have listened to him speak on several occasions. The message that came through to me was that all of us, rich or poor, want a happy life and that we all have the same potential to create that happy life because the key is attitude. I was struck by his choice of words – “potential to create” happiness or misery. He did not say equal opportunity. The potential is in all of us, independent of our status or surroundings.

He advocates unconditional love, compassion, and forgiveness because they strengthen the core of our being and provide peace of mind. Negative attitudes weaken us. He urges us to see these states of mind not as religious traits but rather as human qualities available to all regardless of our persuasion. In an interdependent world, nothing exists on its own. As such, interdependence is at the root of compassion. His religion is kindness, and he says this, “Be kind whenever possible... It is always possible.” There are no exceptions.

Living in exile in India from the Chinese occupation, this man lost his freedom at age 16, lost his country at age 24, and for over a half century he has shouldered the burdens of the Tibetan people as their spiritual and political leader. Yet today he can say with humility and with confidence, “My mind is quite peaceful.”

His mind is peaceful because he does not view the world through the lens of an ego mindset. The ego is fearful and protective and takes us out of the present moment with its sole concern of our safety and security. It is not concerned with the whole, only the person it serves. Setting his ego aside the Dalai Lama sees the world from his true self unhindered by the constraints of a limited mindset. The true self sees little distinction or separation between it and the rest of the world, and it manifests universal qualities – namely truth, compassion, and a pervasive sense of ease. The difference lies in how he sees things.

He spoke of a balance between the head and the heart. Pointing to his head he said, “All knowledge here,” and to his heart, “All action here.” Intelligence guided by a warm heart. When asked what we can do, he was quick to say, “The most precious thing is a warm heart.” To make the point he told the story of a Tibetan monk who had been in a Chinese gulag for over eight years and when released came to India to visit him. When asked what it was like to spend eight years in a Chinese prison he replied, “A lot of time for reflection.” That’s the power of Buddhism, no need to dwell on the past with useless suffering.

He went on to say, however, that there were a few moments of danger. When asked if his life was at risk he said, “Oh, no, not that. There were, however, a few moments when I feared I might lose compassion for the Chinese.” Astonishing! Eight years in prison and a few dangerous moments when he feared he might lose compassion for his captors. Compassion is what enables



Sea lions in the Sea of Cortez, Mexico. Photo by Tom Thiss.

this man to emerge from eight years of captivity with his full humanity in-tact, perhaps even stronger than before.

When we are not conflicted, the head and the heart in sync with no disconnects, we are able to speak our truth without distortion. The truth is our lived experience in the moment when we are fully alive and fully human. This is what makes the Dalai Lama so universally loved and admired. Through the discipline of love, compassion, and forgiveness he models what is possible with exquisitely developed self-control, the only real control we have.

A living example of the Dalai Lama's statement that we all have the potential to create happiness is his French Interpreter, Matthieu Ricard – author, photographer and Tibetan Buddhist Monk. Unable to find meaning in his promising career of cellular genetics, he left France for a life in the Himalayas over 40 years ago. Ricard has been called the happiest man on Earth, an epithet he modestly disavows. In his book *Happiness: A Guide to Developing Life's Most Important Skill* Ricard says, "Happiness is a state of inner fulfillment, not the gratification of inexhaustible desires for outward things." It has little to do with pleasure, as we know it, which depends on external circumstances. He contends that "happiness is a way of being that gives us the resources we need to deal with the ups and downs of life"—namely wisdom, compassion, and inner peace.

How does one acquire these resources that generate a way of being? I would start with gratitude. My moving meditation is a daily kayak outing in season. I love the ever changing four W's – wind, water, weather, and wildlife – that offer a seasonal source of learning and leisure. While on the water I often pause, look up and audibly say, “Thank you!” in gratitude for good health, for the energy to experience the wild, and for the support of family and friends. The word gratitude comes from Latin *gratis* – kindness, freely bestowed favors. When we recognize and cherish the unearned, “freely bestowed favors” of the natural world, it is easier to be grateful and to reciprocate in kind.

Thirty-One: Living in Paradox

In 1987 while boarding a flight from London to Calcutta, I approached an elderly woman seated in the jetway with two British Airways attendants. She was Mother Teresa. She wore brown leather sandals and her traditional white dress with a blue border. We spoke and her manner was very soft and direct. Later, I talked with her on two occasions. The last time we spoke, she took my hand and pointing to each of my five fingers she told me to remember only these five words, “Ye do it unto me.” This was a reference to Christ’s statement that whatever acts of kindness done for the less fortunate are done for Him as well.

I watched her disembark in Calcutta. Her step was slow and her body slight and stooped. She had homes for the poor in 98 countries and had just opened one in New York for AIDS patients. She was returning from the United Nations where she had premiered a film of her life and work. She was poor yet inestimably rich – a living paradox who had elevated compassion to a higher standard. She was canonized by Pope Francis in 2016.

A few weeks later, my hair stylist, knowing I traveled a lot, asked me where I had been lately. I told her I had met someone on a flight to Calcutta whom she would like to meet. She stopped cutting, looked at me incredulously and said, “You didn’t!”

“I did.”

Searchingly she asked, “Mother Teresa?”

“Yes.”

With that, she stopped working on my hair, totally overcome with emotion. Regaining her composure moments later, she confided, “She is very special to me. You see, my two children came from her home in Calcutta.” Mother Teresa had so much power in her being that she could immobilize a hairdresser half a world away with the mere mention of her name.

One of Mother Teresa’s comments that impacted me at the time was, “God uses nothingness to prove His greatness.” She herself is living proof of this statement – a frail, weathered old woman who commanded the admiration of the world. When I returned to London, I told my international banking client that I had just met a woman who was bigger than they were with a presence in 98 countries! Yet she told me, “I have nothing.” Here was a woman, possessing nothing, proving God’s greatness by caring for the world’s sick and poor.

The ageless wisdom of this statement, “God uses nothingness to prove His greatness,” is matched only by its contemporary relevance. When physicists applied quantum theory to the “nothingness” of empty space, they made an amazing discovery. The amount of energy in one cubic centimeter of empty space is greater than the total amount of energy of all the matter in the known universe! In short, all the energy reserves of the universe cannot match the potential energy of a cubic centimeter of “nothingness,” of empty space.



Mother Teresa, also known as Saint Teresa of Calcutta. Painting by Rajasekharan Parameswaran.

The creative void of space is a power of incomprehensible proportions. Matter, as we know it, is but a tiny ripple on the surface of this sea of energy. Real Management recognizes this in its third principle, The Relationship of Existence and Non-Existence. Non-Existence is infinite and the source of the finite. All matter evolves from this.

“God uses nothingness to prove His greatness.”

Sir Isaac Newton, the brilliant Cambridge mathematician who ushered in the age of science, sensed his own limitations when he said, “I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, in diverting myself now and then in finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.”

In recent years writers have made an issue of paradox as a sign of our confusing times. Paradox comes from the Greek word *paradoxos* meaning “conflicting with expectation.” Paradox is a seemingly contradictory statement that may nonetheless be true. Paradox contradicts itself exhibiting puzzling aspects that we often can’t explain.

When something is inexplicable and we lament that we don’t understand what’s going on, it is comforting to say it is a paradox, because we have an acceptable label for our confusion. We have just taken a palliative, a “paradox pill” as it were, which addresses our symptoms as a sign of our troubled times. It doesn’t make sense, but that’s okay because that’s the nature of paradox.

End of story? Hardly. Paradox makes perfect sense when we look at the larger picture. Holding contradictory thoughts in our mind at the same time, known as cognitive dissonance, is discomforting. We are being urged by accelerating events to take a larger, more macroscopic view of life. The operative term is holistic, and the whole is full of contradictions. The whole contains everything, including opposites. Yin and yang are opposites, but together they form a whole. As it is with light and dark, good and bad, up and down, sweet and sour, conscious and unconscious, and endless others. Opposites, when seen in a larger context, are complementary.

Negotiators may find common ground by lengthening the timeline or expanding the scope of the contentious issue. Short term concessions perceived as a loss may work to their advantage in the long term. Tech companies like Apple and Microsoft may collaborate on a new venture when they realize they have more to gain by doing so rather than competing with one another. Their different skill sets form a complementary whole that can move a better product to market faster than either can competing singly. Opposing positions when seen in the larger context can be complementary.

Thirty-Two: Paradox is not Paradoxical

When we are confused by paradox, it is often because we cannot see the larger context. Carl Jung used the term “individuation” to describe the development of the self, the whole person. In *The Way of Individuation*, Jolanda Jacobi, a Jungian disciple, says, “The individuation process has a double sign: an active endeavor and a consciously endured ‘come what may’ are connected in a dialectical relationship.” The dialectical process is the art of investigating truths through discussion.

The “active endeavor” is doing, the work of the conscious mind with the intellect the dominant player; whereas the “come what may” is being, a surrender (letting go) to the sovereignty of intuition with its origin in the unconscious mind. This is beyond our control, so we must consciously endure what it gives us. The secret lies in allowing it to reveal itself. These two minds connected in a dialectical relationship produce a truer and more comprehensive outcome than either the rational or the intuitive could do by itself.

Individuation involves two apparently contradictory elements each establishing its own truth rather than disproving the other. This is the classic Hegelian method of thesis and antithesis combining to form a synthesis or unified whole. The balance is the being and doing, the moral and material of Real Life. With too much or too little of either one we lose the equilibrium of life.

The Zen story of the monk and the buffalo illustrated the importance of the body grounded life, the life that arises of itself. What if we had to think consciously before taking each breath lest we forget or fall asleep. Better yet, what if we consciously had to activate our heartbeat. That would tend to focus our attention. Mental distractions could be fatal. Yet we take all of this for granted, seldom giving our appreciation for the exquisite programming that comes with the body. We celebrate the microchip and pay no attention to the basic metabolic processes, gifted to us, that sustain life.

The life of effort is wholly dependent upon the life that arises of itself, yet the latter goes largely unacknowledged and unattended. There is a parallel here with us and Earth. Our economy, representing our life of effort, is wholly dependent upon ecology, representing nature arising of itself. Yet ecology is neglected, especially when jobs and profits are at stake. What if we had to negotiate with the Earth to take our carbon dioxide waste in return for life sustaining oxygen? Global warming would not be a problem. Where is the reverence for this unsolicited exchange?

The body grounded life is a life of wakefulness, of awareness of that which makes all things possible. Awareness of the body keeps us in the present moment and allows us to savor the immense richness of life itself. Every moment offers us the opportunity to celebrate our being, the context that makes our doings possible. In the doing world we have to speed up to catch up. Yet in the being



The famous pakari tree in Devdah Municipality, Nepal, with a diameter of over 80 feet around. Photo by Rajesh Dhungana.

world we need to slow down to catch up. It's a paradox and it's also a matter of balance.

A good metaphor for the balance of opposites is a tree. Trees live in two worlds, earth and air. Their roots lie hidden from sight (like the unconscious mind) drawing life-sustaining energy from the soil while its visible branches (like the conscious mind) spread to maximize their exposure to the light and air. The tree is centered to live in both realms, each with conflicting needs yet complementing the other. The roots need darkness but cannot live without the light of day. The leaves, in turn, need light, but cannot live without the darkened earth. Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Prize winning Indian poet, said, "Emancipation from the bondage of the soil is no freedom for the tree."

Balance implies opposing forces. This is a universal principle. As we have seen, however, these opposing forces work together in the service of the larger whole. Jung wrote, "Conscious and unconscious do not make a whole when one of them is suppressed ... by the other ... Conscious should defend its reason and protect itself, and the chaotic life of the unconscious should be given the chance of having its way too ... This means open conflict and open collaboration at once. That evidently is the way human life should be. It is the old game of hammer and anvil; between them the patient's iron is forged into an indestructible whole." Open conflict and open collaboration 'at once' are paradoxical. It is also true, and a statement for our times.

When I taught negotiation skills it was largely employed in union vs. management disputes. I felt that it had much larger potential in day-to-day management situations. What is negotiation but open conflict and open collaboration at once? You begin with position statements that reflect your needs and interests and your adversary or colleague does the same, yet both parties know there will be no result without collaboration. The beauty of negotiation is that if you don't get satisfaction, you can walk away. Good negotiators seek to understand the context of their opponent's position and offer concessions that help them meet their needs while not losing sight of their own in a delicate balance of give and take. Many skills are needed but the key is awareness.

The mystery of paradox becomes clear in the larger context. In this sense most of us are like the blind mahouts on the elephant, conditioned by our differentiating, rational minds. We need to let go of our exclusive dependence upon the rational and scientific and integrate the intuitive insights of the unconscious mind. Once again, Jung says it best: "Nothing can be gained in individuation by force of will or preconceived opinions ... our task consists simply and solely in keeping the conscious mind constantly on alert so as many unconscious portions of our personality may be made conscious, experienced, and integrated."

Our sole task is to bring the self to our awareness, experience its power and essence, and integrate it into our lives. Jung is also telling us to pay attention to our insights, hunches, chance encounters, fantasies, dreams, premonitions, instincts, gut reactions, coincidence, synchronicity, and luck. They all have meaning. We are just not always certain what the meaning is. If we let the rational mind disallow these "irrational" elements, we will not see the whole and paradox will always be a puzzling and frustrating element in our lives.

Thirty-Three: The Meaning of Nothingness

Real Life enables us to understand paradox as we experience existence and non-existence at the same time. Non-existence is the source of existence. For example, if we hold our hand in front of our face, we clearly see its existence. Surrounding our hand, however, is nothingness or open space. It is this frame of nothingness, or non-existence, that we fail to see; yet it is the contrast that allows us to see our hand. Where my hand ends, non-existence begins. Nothingness begins where “thingness” ends, and it is nothingness, or open space, that gives meaning to “thingness.” In other words, to understand the meaning of life, we must let go of the idea that life is exclusively matter.

We admire Japanese gardens for their open spaces. They highlight a rock or a piece of sculpture with the open space about it, often configuring the soil in gentle flowing swirls to complement the object. To the Japanese, the space that surrounds an object is as important as the object itself. Open space gives meaning to the object.

David Steindl-Rast, a psychologist and Benedictine monk, says, “You always perceive thing and nothing at the same time. If you didn’t perceive “nothing,” you wouldn’t see the thing. Now, this nothing suggests what we mean when we speak about God. God is no thing. That is why God is not nature. God is our horizon, the horizon of no-thing around everything. And that no-thing is much more important to us than all the things in the world together, because nothing is meaning. Meaning is not a thing; it is no-thing, nothing ... and yet life without meaning, with all the things in the world, is not worth living.” This helps us to understand Mother Teresa’s statement that “God uses nothingness to prove His greatness.” Steindl-Rast then quotes John Cage saying, “Each something is a celebration of the nothing that supports it.”

All myths deal with the transformation of consciousness, and the basic theme of all mythology is the presence of an invisible level of being that supports the visible. This is the third law of Real Management, The Relationship of Existence and Non-existence. Everything emerges from this relationship. Physicists have largely agreed with the theory that the universe exploded out of nothing with the Big Bang. Steindl-Rast has illustrated it more clearly.

Once again, I am reminded of how contemporary Mother Teresa’s words were when she said, “I have nothing and yet I have everything. To possess nothing is to have everything because I have God.” Mother Teresa did not concern herself with things except the bundles of food and gifts she carried with her for “her girls,” the women who worked in her Calcutta hospice. She was into nothingness that she says is everything.

Thirty-Four: Context Gives Meaning

Physicists tell us that all living systems are self-organizing. They have invisible self-organizing patterns that give rise to visible life's structures as we know them. In humans, the mind is the invisible self-organizing process of visible life, an unseen pattern of organization that remains constant while the visible body changes. Cells die and new ones take their places continuously; yet throughout this constantly changing process, we retain our identity. We remain essentially the same person. How is this possible? The invisible context that creates life holds constant while the visible content, the structure of the body, changes continually. In summary, "nothingness" which appears to be insubstantial, holds the patterns of life and remains unchanging as the creative source of life; whereas "thingness" which appears to be substantial, constantly changes. It's paradoxical. God uses nothingness to prove his greatness.

Both the monk and the physicist are saying the same thing. The monk says that context is the meaning, the invisible nothing that gives rise to life. He calls it God. The physicist calls it a self-organizing pattern. It is this unseen context that gives meaning to life as we know it, the content or structure of the living thing. In the Zen story of the monk and the buffalo it was the life that arises of itself, our body grounded life, that gives meaning to the life of effort. Context always gives meaning to content.



Washington State coast. Photo by Tom Thiss.

If we didn't trust the life that arises of itself, the body grounded life, we would not step intentionally into the void of open space. The body grounded life of being makes our life of doing possible and meaningful. Being is the context for doing.

If you have ever run into a casual acquaintance in a place you don't associate with that person, you may not recognize her. She is "out of context" and the meaning of her "doing" presence may escape you. After the initial embarrassment, you invariably ask, "What are you doing here?"

More commonly, when we hear from one source the words of another person, we need to know the context in which they were spoken in order to understand the intended meaning. To be quoted "out of context" is to alter the original meaning. It is context that gives meaning to the content of our lives.

Our outdated worldview prevents us from understanding paradox. We need to let go of this narrow view and embrace the larger whole that contains the context, the unseen. Nowhere is this outdated view creating more paradoxical problems than in the medical world. If we take the more holistic viewpoint, then we must conclude that medicine is stuck in the structure, in the physical body. Medicine has been slow to accept the mind/body oneness. Traditionalists hold that the mind is in the brain, the celebrated "ghost" in the machine. It only seems reasonable that our remarkable brain has somehow given rise to our conscious mind. New paradigm thinking, however, says the mind or consciousness is the self-organizing pattern of life which gives rise to all cellular life, the brain included. Conclusion: The brain is in the mind!

This makes no sense to a traditionalist who cannot conceive that the physical brain is in the non-physical mind. It is paradoxical, contrary to conventional wisdom. Yet given the invisible self-organizing patterns that give rise to life, it is not surprising. If the invisible gives meaning and life to the visible, then it follows that the mind gives meaning and life to the brain. The brain is like a radio that gets its signals from an invisible source called the mind. As the invisible electronic signals give life to the radio, so does the mind give life to the brain. Spirit gives life to matter.

The juxtaposition of the invisible and the visible, like the mind and the brain, produces paradox. In the bigger picture, the dynamic whole, we understand the relationship with the two. When we see the whole elephant, the tusk and the tail make sense. Paradox will be confusing only to those who are still locked into reductionism. Looking at disassociated parts cannot give us the whole.

Old paradigm thinkers make the mistake of dismissing or trying to control these paradoxical aspects of their lives that make no sense to them. The secret of living with the invisible is in allowing, not controlling. This is the "consciously endured come what may" attitude. It connects with the "active endeavor" of the visible in a dialectical relationship. In other words, these two opposing attitudes feud and reason with each other like sibling rivals in order to give us a more comprehensive understanding of life. Nowhere is this more visible than in our two simultaneous journeys, the outer and the inner.

Thirty-Five: Arouse the Being Within You

In the external world we are measured by our “having” and “doing,” what we have visibly acquired and done in life. “Being” gets deferred by those who are too caught up in making a living. The reasoning goes like this:

When I have enough money (time, power, information, experience, etc.), then I will do what I really want to do, and I will be happy (important, famous, secure, etc.).

The reasoning is flawed, however, because external wants are insatiable. We can spend a lifetime in “having and doing” and never find the meaning we seek. Fortunately, personal crises or traumas often wake us up. These harbingers of change tear us loose from our tenuous moorings and cause us to search for something more enduring. The search for meaning takes us to the invisible.

The inner world is the unseen one that gives meaning and purpose to the outer. Because being is our essential nature, it is the starting point, not the destination. This journey begins with the premise that we are human beings by nature, human “having” and “doing” by choice. The inner journey evolves not from acquisitions or deeds, but from essence. Evolution is an inside out process. The reasoning goes like this:

- * I am a unique being with talents and gifts.
- * My challenge is to bring them intentionally into all that I do.
- * My “having” wants will follow consequently.

This was the wisdom of the astrologer who advised me to let my goals emerge from my identity, not the other way around. If my identity is dependent on my goals, my life is on a very slippery slope – no goal attainment means no identity. If I lose my job, I lose my identity.

When we attend to our being, doing follows naturally. That was also the lesson of the monk and the water buffalo. The life that arises of itself, the body grounded life, gives meaning to the life of effort. Being brings meaning to doing. This is making a life, the context for making a living. It is the third law of Real Management; non-existence is the context for existence.

For most of us being is a vague abstraction of a fulfilled life to be lived at some future time, if we are fortunate. Many think it is beyond the reach of most, an ultimate state attained only by gurus, Sufis, yogis, and other supra-normal beings. The more pragmatic reason that if they make enough money, they will someday have the luxury of being. Either way, it gets little attention from most of us until something happens to cause us to think about it. This is the positive role that crisis plays.



Mountain stream, Alaska. Photo by Tom Thiss.

On the outer journey, the life of doing, our lives are largely governed by external events hastened by our modern industrial culture that rewards expediency and instant gratification. Employers determine how we will spend one third of our time. We sleep another third leaving only eight hours for discretionary time. This time is not our own, however, for we are subject to social conditioning which dictates what others expect of us.

We are members of a vast consumer society that dictates the standards of success. The advertising world shapes our tastes, and peers determine our choices. Schools decide what our children will learn, and doctors tell us what to do when we get sick. The media tell us what events are important and how we should feel about the people involved. The federal government takes one third of our income and state and local agencies exact additional tribute. In truth, we are not in charge of our lives. We are, in fact, “out of control” with our decisions shaped by laws, social convention, and the vicissitudes of life.

Many express dissatisfactions with their lives yet continue their “having” and “doing” search for the elusive success and happiness. Victor Frankl, the Austrian psychologist whose experiences in Nazi prison camp shaped his idea of logo therapy, said in his classic work, *Man’s Search for Meaning*: “Don’t aim at success – the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue ... as

the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a course greater than oneself." Frankl is saying that the outer journey with its pursuit of "having" is not the way to go. Success and happiness are worthy aspirations, but they come as a result of a larger pursuit that engages us fully.

Thirty-Six: A Matter of Choice

In the 1950s I lived in a tract development in La Mirada, California. We owned a new home; I had a good sales job; my wife taught school; and we enjoyed the novelty and pace of life in “la-la” land when California was called the Golden State. The itch to change was not so noticeable. The precipitating incident for me was the birth of our first son. I was making a good living, but I was not making a life and I soon felt restlessly dissatisfied. As I looked about me, using my neighbors as a standard of comparison, I could see nothing better. I was as successful as they were. I started to think about where we wanted to raise our son and the idea of living in that repository of rootlessness held less appeal. Life in California seemed so superficial, and I longed for the values I had known growing up in Minnesota. Alexis de Tocqueville called values “habits of the heart,” an apt name for their capacity to arouse the being in me. Significant external events serve as wake-up calls that question the values we hold our outer journey, and they open the door to the inner journey.

My external yardstick for success was a faulty measure because the deeper itch was not being scratched. Only when I looked inside myself and assessed my talents, did I realize that I didn’t need another job. I needed a career change. With that I quit my work, took a temporary job driving the monorail at Disneyland while I sold our house, moved the family back to Minnesota, enrolled in graduate school, and accepted a teaching appointment at the University of Minnesota. At age 29, I officially began my new inner journey.

We have a choice. A belief that happiness comes from what we have and do in the external world puts us at risk. In effect, we put our lives in the hands of circumstance. Our state of mind is happy if things work out for us, and unhappy if they don’t. If, on the other hand, we realize that everything we believe is only a construct of our conscious mind, then we can change that construct at will. With this realization we resolve not to let the whims of the outer world impact our being, the inner reality of our true being. This was the wisdom of Krishnamurti’s secret, “I don’t mind what happens,” and this is the source of strength we so admire in the Dalai Lama and Matthieu Ricard whose lives have equanimity independent of circumstances. The choice is ours.

Thirty-Seven: The Power of Surrender

Illness serves a transformative function. I am convinced that this is its primary role in our lives. The first time I became aware of the transformative power of illness was in London with my consulting. One day the head of the merchant bank division confided privately to me saying, "I thank God for my heart attack." He was a reflective, thoughtful man by nature who was caught up with the demands of a fast-track bank. As a writer of some repute in his native country of Pakistan, he had put his life back into balance and felt better about himself than before. He came to grips with his essential nature, with what it means to be human, and transformed his life in the process.

For those who have chosen the inner journey, being comes first. All else follows. Those whose lives were out of control are making changes. The pandemic has caused many to question what they were doing. Many have quit their jobs while others have chosen to work out of their homes to avoid the commute. Still others have opened businesses of their own. All are seeking a better life in how they choose to live.

We made the point earlier, however, that we cannot control the invisible life of being. We need to allow it to happen. This is control of a different order, and this is the satisfaction that the banker experienced. He allowed his true Self to have its way.

This is the ultimate paradox. On the outer journey, we think we are in control, but we are not. On the inner journey, we surrender control in order to acquire it. Understanding this helps us to comprehend why many do not take the inner journey and, consequently, why so few of us find the peace of mind we seek. To access the inner path, we need to surrender to a power greater than us. Creative people know that at some point they need to take their minds off the task, let go of analytical thinking, surrender to the intuitive process, and allow the solution to come to them. Like a butterfly that lands on our shoulder, an answer comes when we are not looking for it.

The process is the same for alcoholics who admit that they are powerless to fix their lives, and for caregivers who realize that they have no control over their patients' behaviors. It is the same for Christians who turn their lives over to Christ, or for Muslims who follow the daily dictates of Islam whose name literally means to "surrender." To our ego, it seems as if we are giving up something. In effect, we are acquiring something. This is a perfect example of paradox at work in our lives. In order to get control, we need to surrender control. It doesn't make sense. Yet, in the larger context, it does.

George Leonard in *The Life We Are Given* talks about Focused Surrender. "This practice combines strongly imaging a desired outcome in the present tense ... then totally surrendering to grace." In his work with affirmations Leonard has learned the power of Focused Surrender. He discovered that "every episode of



Gideon Bay, Lake Minnetonka. Photo by Tom Thiss.

‘perfect rhythm’ ... involved the unlikely marriage of trying and not trying, of zeroing-in and letting go.”

Leonard continues, “If we entertain the notion that the universe somehow already contains all information, all possibilities, and that each of us is a context of the universe from a particular point of view, then we might say that to create

a sharply focused, vivid image of what we are seeking serves to ‘tune’ our being to that precise possibility. But that’s not enough. The striving, the ego still gets in the way. When we surrender, relinquishing the ego with its limitations, we open the way for grace: news from the universe, a direct connection with the divine.” This is intentionally stepping into the void and trusting. It is doing and being, the paradox of individuation. Here again is the dialectical process with its double sign – an active endeavor and a “come what may” attitude – that together form a whole.

The key to the mystery of paradox lies in realizing that the spirit world is the reciprocal of the material world. It turns the visible world upside down. We measure success on the visible journey, the material one, starting on the outside. What counts here is what people see, and how they feel about what we have accomplished. The inner journey, the spiritual one, starts on the inside. What counts here is what we see, and how we measure up to our own internal standards.

When we talk about control, although the word is the same, it has different meanings in the two worlds. Control in the material world means to guarantee a certain outcome. But life does not offer us a certain outcome and few of us would want it. Do we want to know precisely where we will be in five years? Would we really like to know for certain when we will die? Life is change and change is the creative process. The creative process has an unknown outcome. This is how the inner journey juices and vitalizes life. This is what makes life an adventure. If we know the outcome, we lose the adventure.

In her classic book *The Four-Fold Way* Dr. Angeles Arrien states her fourth principle, “Be open to outcome, not attached to outcome.” Detachment from outcome does not mean we don’t care. We may care deeply. Detachment enables us to be objective and to keep our options open, whereas attachment locks us into a fixed outcome and takes us out of the moment. Arrien says, “Wisdom is at work when we are open to all options.” Detachment teaches us to let go of certainty and to be open to trust. In an impermanent world there is no certainty. We are stepping into the open space of other possibilities and trusting that the outcome could be better for all.

Control in the inner world of spirit does not guarantee a certain outcome. Without a guarantee, we are left to trust. Here control means allowing. We allow ourselves to be co-creators with our intuitive higher self. This is Schumacher’s third and highest task in our progression as human beings. Any way we look at it, we are more “in control” with that alliance than we are without it. Surrendering to a higher power gives us more power, e.g., more control. That’s paradox – and it’s also true.

Thirty-Eight: The Flow of Impermanence

In 1992, I attended a workshop, “A Weekend of Exploration in Healing” with Stephen Levine. The brochure described the workshop as “an open-hearted investigation of grief, loss, dying, and healing.” I wasn’t so keen about grief, loss, and dying, but I wanted to know more about healing. My understanding of Real Life would again be deepened.

I had always thought I had good attentive skill, but my meditation and yoga practices have taught me that I have much to learn. The secret of life is paying attention. Meditation teaches us this and if we pay attention, it is no longer a secret! Life is lived only in the present moment and few of us give it the attention it deserves. Levine said, “when we are outside the moment, we are nowhere.” Curiously when we are in the moment we are “now here,” not nowhere. If it is not nowhere, it is likely here.

The moment is all that is real. Time is not natural. It does not exist in nature. We have created time for our convenience to measure natural cycles of the sun and moon and to record the evolution of the universe and life itself. We record the past with time and we project the future with time, but the present is timeless. It simply is. The moment is all that truly exists. It follows then, that to pay attention to the moment is to experience what is – the truth. Living in the moment is living the truth of what is.

Buddhists seem to understand this better than we in the Western world. To them, life is a “flow of impermanence.” You get a sense of this flow when you



Golden statues of the Buddha at the Golden Buddha temple. Photo by Basile Morin.

attend to the moment because each one is different from the last. Were this not so, there would be no change, no progression, no growth, no life as we know it. Most of our suffering seems to arise from our inability or unwillingness to attend to this reality.

Levine separates suffering from pain. He says pain is natural and inevitable, but we create suffering when we hold on to our pain. By holding on to old grievances, fears, and anxieties we resist the moment and prolong the suffering. These old injuries subside when we accept them for what they are, let go of our attachment to them, and move on with life. Attachment to anything in an impermanent world spells trouble, because it keeps us out of the moment. We have a simple remedy for suffering – attend to the moment. Satisfaction is in experiencing the moment, not hanging on to it.

Levine says that everything we love we will eventually lose, so cherish them now. We don't have a moment to lose. When my first son showed an early interest in natural history, I wanted to take him to meet my college biology teacher who had meant so much to me. I wanted to tell my professor how he had influenced my life and let my young son get a brief exposure to a biology laboratory. I put it off saying he was still too young. Then, one day I read that my professor had died quite unexpectedly. The moment passed, and an opportunity was lost forever. We don't have a moment to lose.

In his book *A Gradual Awakening* Levine writes, "Letting go means not dwelling on something which has come to mind. It also means experiencing that quality of non-grasping awareness which pulls nothing from the flow – experiencing a great spaciousness which simply lets everything come and lets everything go...The experience of spaciousness is the essence of letting go, of having room for everything and holding to nothing."

Once again, we are talking about open space, with its transformative power to create something new. Open space is the void between the old and the new. It's the neutral position through which we must pass to change gears. We need to let go, or disengage "reverse," in order to engage "drive." Levine continues, "So we see that in the spaciousness of letting go there arises a natural balance. By our letting go of confusion, knowing arises. By our letting go of anger, love arises. By our letting go of fear, calm arises." This is the flow of impermanence.

Thirty-Nine: The Process of Allowing

Activating our natural state of being is not a matter of adding qualities but rather of removing obstacles to their emergence. Our essential nature, vulnerable in an impersonal world, gets encrusted with overlays of fear, anxiety, guilt, and all the states of mind that we are heir to. These need to be peeled off like layers of clothing to reveal the body of our being beneath. This is a process of allowing, of casting off, of surrendering, of letting go. This is what the heart does best.

Like the sun that is always shining, the heart is always open. We have cloudy days and rainy days, but the sun is still there, obscured by an overlay of weather. We have sad days and angry days but beneath this attitudinal overlay is an open heart. Just as the clouds must clear to reveal the sun, so we must clear the mind of its “bad weather” to access the heart. The art of letting go is to allow these attitudinal “clouds” to pass by attending to the moment.

The heart is the only unbiased observer of the moment. This is its natural forum. Only the heart knows the truth, for the truth is in the moment. Despair and anger are not appropriate conditions for addressing the moment. When we cannot see the sun it is nonetheless reassuring to know it is there. A Minneapolis executive, after a recent prolonged period of depressing weather, chartered a Boeing 727 and took his staff up above the clouds. Reassured that the sun was still there, they returned renewed with hope and energy.

We don't have to charter a jet to know that the heart is still there, open and ready to attend the moment fully and unbiased. Levine says, “a closed heart is what makes life difficult. All you have to do is open your heart to be who you always wanted to be.” In truth, it is not closed, merely obscured by clouds of grief, worry, and doubt. Carolyn Myss says, “When you don't have to control, you drop into your heart.” Surrendering to the heart takes us beyond these mental clouds, like falling in love. Living in the present is to be in love with the moment. To be in love with life is to lavish all our affection on the moment. Only the heart can love the moment because the heart is love. We then have the true self in direct touch with the true moment. We are now in the flow of pure, unadulterated life.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a psychology professor from the University of Chicago, has studied a state of consciousness he calls flow. This is a state of concentration so focused that it becomes absolute absorption in an activity. He contends that we can consciously create and sustain this flow experience. To do so, we need to control the content of our consciousness and thereby enhance the quality of our experiences. He says, “When experience is intrinsically rewarding, life is justified in the present, instead of being held hostage to a hypothetical future gain.” In other words, life's experiences are rewarding in themselves without having expectations of something better.



Living Life in front of the World Museum, Vienna, Austria by Boa Mistura. Photo by Ewald Judd.

In his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* he details the conditions of flow. When we match our skill with a given challenge, flow occurs. Flow enables us to “derive moment-by-moment enjoyment from everything we do.” Staying in this zone of flow is the art of attaining optimal experience. If our skills exceed the challenge, boredom ensues. On the other hand, if the challenge exceeds our skills, anxiety ensues. Obviously, as our skills increase, so must the challenge or we slip out of the zone. Flow tells us we cannot remain static. To stay in the flow, we must grow to avoid anxiety and boredom. This speaks to the ever-changing, or impermanent nature of our experience and offers us a model for staying in the moment while absorbed in a task.

Forty: The Holotropic Mind

When a plant turns toward the sun biologists call this phototropism, meaning “moving toward light.” Tropism is a growth orientation to an external stimulus such as sunlight. Stanislav Grof, a psychiatrist, coined the word holotropic, meaning “moving toward wholeness,” to describe a dimension of the psyche that is not generally accepted by traditional Western science. Grof likes to call the holotropic experience “an adventure of self-discovery.” The holotropic state is a non-ordinary state of consciousness (NOSC), a change of consciousness that is both profound and subtle. Non-ordinary states of consciousness (NOSC) are self-healing, transformative experiences associated with changes of perception, powerful emotions, and physical sensations. Grof, with over thirty years of research in NOSC, is a leader in a growing movement of professional and lay people who believe our concept of the mind is at best far too limited, at worst drastically wrong.

In *The Holotropic Mind* Grof says, “Our mental functions are linked to biological processes in our brains. However, this does not necessarily mean that consciousness originates in or is produced by our brains. This conclusion made by Western science is a metaphysical assumption rather than a scientific fact.” Grof argues that it does not make sense to claim that a television set is responsible for its own programs. When you open a television set you don’t find the programs inside. Likewise, a peek inside the brain will not reveal the mind.

Jung said we cannot understand the mind with our intellect because the mind is cosmic in its dimensions. The mind is infinitely vaster than the brain and science has limited itself by assuming it to be an outgrowth of the brain. Once we realize that the source of consciousness lies outside the brain, that the brain merely mediates consciousness, a whole new world opens to us. This world was known to all indigenous, pre-industrial cultures. They had rituals that would deepen their connection with themselves, with nature, and with the cosmos. These rituals often centered around initiatory ceremonies or rites of passage – birth, puberty, marriage, death – where the person was making a life transition. During the ritual the person often experienced a non-ordinary state to facilitate the transition. These journeys of the mind into strange and wondrous areas gave meaning to the past, purpose to the present, and insight to the future. This was the realm of myth and mystery, of song and storytelling.

Sadly, most of this is gone now, relegated to the realm of primitive practices in our age of scientific advancement. Traditional science has often treated these non-ordinary states of consciousness (NOSC) as deviant states of mind, medicating them when they occurred spontaneously in patients. In ordinary consciousness, the five senses are our windows on the world providing us with all we need to know. In non-ordinary states of consciousness (NOSC) however, the rules of the senses don’t apply. Solid objects, three-dimensional space,



Lake Minnetonka, Shorewood. Photo by Tom Thiss.

cause and effect, and our concept of time all become irrelevant. In NOSC we are far more than Newtonian objects or “skin encapsulated egos” as Alan Watts described our ordinary state.

Just as quantum physics has its Complementarity Principle, that light is both waves and particles, so do we have our own complementarity. We are composed of both ordinary and non-ordinary states of consciousness. NOSC must be seen

as complementary, not as an altered state that suggests distortion of the ordinary. Grof calls the ordinary state of consciousness hylotropic, a term that means "moving toward matter." Holotropic is the word he uses for non-ordinary states. The idea is that we were created to experience both; that life is meant to be a synthesis of the two. Then we can choose. We would expect that commercial pilots would choose hylotropic states while flying! Off duty they may choose a mix of both for a more balanced life.

Grof contends that once we get beyond the basics of life in the material world, an exclusive hylotropic or material orientation is a losing strategy. It is not capable of satisfying us. The outcome will inevitably be one of disappointment. All great religions would support this contention. It is not possible to find deeper meaning in the realm of the senses. Meaning comes from the holotropic realm as does healing, intuition, and all inspired creations. Context provides meaning and the holotropic realm is the context for our material lives as it was for all indigenous people. Thus, it should not be surprising that we have seen in recent years a growing interest in drumming, chanting, sonic meditations, breath work, and a seemingly unlimited variety of native and shamanic practices.

Forty-One: The Way Out is In

It was the industrial age with its lust for science that largely led us away from the rhythms of nature. Wise men have long said there are no absolute boundaries between the individual and the cosmos. It is of interest to note as the industrial (Modern) age gives way to the post-industrial (Post-Modern) age we are witnessing a return to those practices that celebrate our connectedness with the universe. The business world's concept of the information age, for all its transformative rhetoric, is a victim of its own limited science. The information age is more than microprocessors and the Internet. Amazing as all of this is, it is even more amazing how we can so readily trivialize the profound. Here we are on the verge of a revolution in consciousness, and we think only of the microchip! Intuition is "information." Without it no CEO can function fully and that is holotropic. It is also something we cannot control hence science has neglected it. But there is more, much more.

The idea is to balance our lives with a synthesis of both states of consciousness so that we have choice. Once we choose the holotropic, however, the information we receive is not our choice. The whole experience is about allowing, about letting go. All information coming to us from the holotropic realm is not under our control. Grof says the psyche has its own radar that does its search and determines for us what we need to know. Non-ordinary states of consciousness (NOSC) are the cutting edge of psychiatry today, yet the practice may go back as far as 40,000 years with our first evidence of shamanic practices.

Grof writes "The most important requirement for the therapist employing non-ordinary states of consciousness is not to master specific techniques and steer the client in the desired direction, but to accept and trust the spontaneous unfolding of the process." With NOSC it doesn't matter which of the 40 plus schools of therapy you espouse, you simply allow the process to happen. The psyche knows best. Never mind that you don't know what's happening or why.

Grof continues, "With no effort on the part of the therapist, symptoms clear and personal transformations occur as a result of the unfolding of an unpredictable array of experiences." In thousands of sessions over thirty years of research Grof has seen many dramatic healings and positive personality changes which he says, "... have completely eluded all my efforts at rational understanding." Grof's work is consonant with the earlier work of Carl Jung who taught us the concept of the "collective unconscious," an immense pool of information about human history and culture available to all of us at the depth of our psyches.

Therefore, Grof contends, "the task of the therapist is to mediate for the client a contact and exchange with his or her inner self, which then guides the process of transformation or individuation. The wisdom for change and healing comes from the collective unconscious and surpasses by far the knowledge



Oregon state coast. Photo by Tom Thiss.

that is intellectually available to the therapist.” The psyche is in charge and its wisdom is greater than any brain.

I have participated in Grof’s Holotropic Breathwork workshops and can truthfully say that the euphoric feeling that I experienced defied description. The effects of NOSC that I felt were ineffable. The serenity and peace of mind that ensued was real and profound.

A society transforms itself only if the people individually and collectively transform themselves. All aggression, or anger, is a result of unresolved aggression within oneself. Grof says, “Those who initiate warring activities are typically substituting external targets for elements in their own psyches that should be properly faced in personal self-exploration.” And so it is that we project our ills upon society and then set out to resolve our “external” problems not realizing they spring from within us.

In a like manner, we cannot “see” violence or beauty unless we have them within us. Grof is not the first to say, “The main obstacle we face as a species is found in the present evolutionary level of our consciousness.” If Grof’s observations are correct, then in his words “no external interventions have a chance to create a better world, unless they are associated with a profound transformation of human consciousness.” Grof is fond of saying, “The way out is in.”

GOGI (Getting Out by Going In) is a non-profit organization dedicated to

reducing recidivism in prisons. In the words of one coach the therapy requires "constant letting go of all bad habits from past behaviors where one experienced all sorts of negativity, and acceptance of the present moment with positivity (sic) where life is new." The glowing testimonials of graduates attest to its often life renewing success. With GOGI therapy the way out of prison starts with going inside oneself. Again, the way out is in.

As a people, for all our technological sophistication, we are very unsophisticated in our level of consciousness because we are unsophisticated in our level of self-discovery. Here the so-called primitives, the indigenous people, have it all over us. Our job is to recapture what we have lost so we can move ahead on all fronts. Holotropic work is nothing more than the adventure of self-discovery. A synthesis of the holotropic, or self-discovery, realm with the hylotropic material realm is a far more sophisticated approach and provides what Grof calls a meta-framework for life. This is another example of Abedi's fourth law, the Unity of Moral (holotropic) and Material (hylotropic).

Forty-Two: A Sense of the Sacred

A Los Angeles radio station reported a surge in phone calls from people concerned about what was happening in the night sky. Unable to determine anything unusual, the station concluded that people were responding to natural night sky on an unusually clear evening. These city dwellers were unaware of the cosmic wonders normally obscured by air and light pollution. This is a tale of our time. To the ancients the night sky, a rich source of mythology and meaning, was as much a part of life as the day sky. With the advent of city life and electrification the night sky was relegated to astronomers and lovers, no longer a significant part of daily life. And with it went the awe and mystery of the unknown.

Life is a balance of action and reflection, of doing and being. With the passing of the night sky, we took a giant step away from the natural rhythms of life. Daytime is for action, and nighttime is for assimilation. Now with less nighttime, there is more time to do and less time to be. With a life of unrelenting doing there is little time to reflect on the wisdom of our ways. If only we could see how out of balance we are. It's like trying to keep a ship on course with a steering wheel that only turns left. With no time to replace the steering mechanism we compensate by applying right full rudder. What a drag! No wonder we are stressed and tired.

We have lost a sense of the sacred. Recapturing this loss is not all that hard. All we need do is to open our hearts to the wonders of existence. One night I went for a walk deliberately to sense the sacredness of the nighttime presence. Before I left my driveway, I noticed a solitary white pine needle suspended in space beneath a canopy of maple leaves. A single spider web thread, too thin for me to see, held the slender brown pine needle like a sword of Damocles over the rain-soaked asphalt. A floodlight above illuminated the branch with the needle swinging gently beneath. Against the black night background, the scene was as if all of outdoors were a giant darkened museum of art with this alone highlighted as the feature attraction. It was truly awesome.

For a couple minutes I savored the awe before stepping in some dog poop. In Britain, where they have a euphemism for everything, this act on the part of the dog is known as "committing a nuisance" or "fouling the footpath" and subject to a fine of several pounds. Here we just say, "Tough luck." I had come full circle, from awesome to awful in two minutes time. It was as if the universe was teaching me humility saying that not all the happenings in the present are as you'd like them to be. I tried to appreciate the meaning of it all – perhaps the juxtaposition of the light and dark to achieve balance? In the end I concluded that although I was not wise enough to sense the significance of these opposing incidents, somewhere a dog was smiling.

I have made a strong case in this book for being in the moment that we call



Sacred mountain Xiannairi, Yadin UNESCO-MAB Biosphere Reserve, Yading Nature Reserve, China. Photo courtesy of Toni Wöhrle and Sang Cai.

now. Stepping into open space carries the hazard of stepping into dog scat. The outcome is unknown, for better or for worse. Perhaps it's that fear of something worse that keeps us from doing so. Yet when we expand our now, time and space open to present possibilities previously unseen, like avoiding dog droppings! As our now expands we find it harder to say, "It doesn't relate." Everything relates to everything else. If only we understood.

D. H. Lawrence understood. In 1925 he wrote, "If we think about it, we find that our life consists in this achieving of a pure relationship between ourselves and the living universe about us. This is how I 'save my soul' by accomplishing a pure relationship between me and another person, me and other people, me and a nation, me and a race of men, me and animals, me and the trees or flowers, me and the earth, me and the skies and sun and stars, me and the moon: an infinity of pure relationships, big and little ... This if we knew it, is our life and our eternity: the subtle, perfected relation between me and the circumambient universe."

I have not been able to separate my work from my life. The two are inextricably entwined with lessons for each contained in the other. I have always been uncomfortable with conventional wisdom that states, "This is a business, not a charity." We define business too narrowly. Business may not be a charity, a halfway house, or whatever but it has its charitable side, and it is a halfway house for some. These are aspects of life and when we exclude these dimensions in the name of "making a living," we lose a bit of life itself.

The difference between a job and work is the heart connection. Jobs are

something to tide us over until we find our work. Work should be an expression of our being, of who we are intrinsically. Yet the late Robert Bly, poet and guru of men's issues, tells us the number one issue for men is "oppression at work." The "land of the free and the home of the brave" and oppression is the issue? Why am I not surprised? I see it as a consultant all the time. Perhaps if we defined business more broadly there would be less oppression. An expanded now is all that's needed.

Matthew Fox, a post-modern theologian, says, "We have separated spirit from religion, stewardship from commerce, justice from law, and learning from education. Apart from that," he concludes wryly, "we're doing okay."

So, what do we do? We live on the edge and step into the void of unknown with a clear intention and trust the outcome will serve us well. In doing so we let go of all that isn't true to us and focus on what is true. We ask ourselves what joy our work brings to us and to others and we let go of that which fails to do this and embrace that which does. And we do this by getting our own inner house in order by adding a measure of being to our doing. We focus on "making a life" and let "making a living" follow. Matthew Fox puts it simply with a new twist on an old expression, "Get an inner life!" I say, "Get a Real Life."

Forty-Three: Economy and Ecology

Today, in our effort to contain the pandemic and restore the economy to a new normal, creating jobs is a high priority. Making a living is a subset of making a life, so I want to take a longer look and put this in perspective. In an interactive world the comment we heard in the '90s, "It's the economy, Stupid!" calls for a restatement in the 21st century.

"It's not the economy, my friend, it's ecology!" All signs point toward a greening of America. That means big change. A short lesson in etymology is in order. The two words, ecology and economy, both derive their origins from the Greek word *oikos* meaning house. Our house is planet Earth. Ecology translates as the dwelling. Economy, on the other hand, is household (dwelling) management. Now, what is primary, the house itself or the guidelines for managing the house? Clearly the house is primary. Without a house, there is no need for rules.

Ecology is about our dwelling, the planet Earth, and its one-time bountiful gift of natural resources. Economy deals with how we manage those resources. Thoreau was a naturalist. His concern was the preservation of life and its fullest expression. He wrote about these two words in his journal. His focus was upon the life (the voices) in our dwelling; "eco-nomia is the management of the household; 'eco-logia' is the speaking of the household – (voices of) the mice, wasps, rabbits, squirrels, jays, chickadees, and friends – a thousand voices." The fact that we value economy over ecology illustrates a profound misplacement of our priorities.

Ecology is the context that provides and sustains a viable economy. Upon reflection, this realization by itself is enough to effect a change of consciousness, but who takes time to reflect when we are too busy making a living or out of work. The difference lies in the balance between short and long-term perspective. The Iroquois Confederacy made decisions with seven generations in mind. We seem to make decisions with our eye on quarterly stock market earnings.

In the '90s we enjoyed the longest bull market in our history, and it all unraveled in the first decade of the new century when the dot-com bubble burst and later with the crash of the financial markets and The Great Recession. There was no net job gain in the entire decade. None. Zero. This was another first for America. Now we struggle with COVID-19, the coronavirus pandemic, yet another first for us. I would give us a failing grade on how we manage our house (economy) and hope that new house rules will emerge that are more in line with our ecological imperatives. A look at the time perspectives of these two words will help us understand why we focus on the economy to the near exclusion of ecology.

Economy and ecology have two very different concepts of time. The economy moves to the dictates of digital clocks, increasing its efficiency by doing more in



Prince William Sound, Alaska. Photo by Tom Thiss.

less time. Clocks are a human invention, alien to the natural world. Industrial/technological advances often determine the winners, and they relegate the old to the scrap heap of time. Conversely, ecology measures itself in natural cycles of life/death/rebirth, in lunar movements, in the rhythms of solar seasons, and in the universe's one-time irreversible arc of evolution with its earthly manifestation. In short, the economy measures itself by revolution, whereas ecology is subject to the dictates of evolution.

When revolution meets evolution, revolution gets all the attention because it moves faster and impacts us more immediately as we can see things happening. It is a matter of urgency dominating importance. America was born in revolution. It's our cultural heritage. We are young country, and our youth shows brashness, impetuosity, and arrogance when contrasted with older cultures more familiar with evolutionary time. I think of Turkey, ancient Asia Minor, the nexus of East and West with successive incursions of Hittites, Romans, Byzantines, Greeks, Mongols, Persians, Seljuks, and Ottomans with a host of lesser intruders.

Except for the War of 1812 when Washington was burned by the British, we have not been invaded; but we have been the invader on several occasions. We don't have that long historical perspective to know what it's like to feel occupied by foreign intruders. Time is slower in older civilizations, however, perhaps because they have a longer view of history. In the long run evolution



Grand Canyon Colorado River, rafts and kayaks. Photo by Tom Thiss.

will always prevail over revolution so best we attend to it as well. Any victory over nature is short lived. The planet will survive. The real question is: Will we?

Forty-Four: Change of Consciousness

Only a change of consciousness will effect this shift of emphasis from economy to ecology. Had we made this shift at the start of the 21st century job growth would have been a non-issue. Technology and a bull market economy are necessary, but insufficient. Shifts of consciousness happen when we die to our old ways and are “born again” to the new. It is a transformative thing, not a digital thing, and it begins as a matter of personal choice. Letting go of the old is the hardest part because it involves intentionally stepping into the void and trusting that the unknown will be better than the known.

I have long felt that this consciousness shift will happen only when ecology gets top billing or at least equal time with the economy. We will see it when the media talks about it with the ease and frequency of weather reporting. For example, how are we doing on habitat loss, toxic waste reduction, environmental destruction, species extinction, and biodiversity loss? And are we making progress with climate change and ozone depletion? We need indicators and measurements tied to what we can do, but above all we need awareness of the issues. We can’t do much about the weather and it gets prime time coverage. We can do something about environmental issues and yet we “kick-the-can” down the road while we attend to the urgent. We need equal real-time coverage.

The good news is that the environmental awareness shift is happening. In 2011 I flew to Washington to protest the Keystone XL pipeline, a Canadian initiative that would carry corrosive tar sands oil across the border and stretch to Houston where it would be refined and sent abroad. This made no sense to me and was an environmental disaster in the making. Dr. James Hansen, former NASA chief climatologist had said, “If we continue, if we extract oil and burn that (tar sands) and emit that into the atmosphere, we are absolutely at game over with climate change.” The protest was organized by 30.org. I had regretted not being a part of an earlier White House protest and joined this one to circle the White House. They hoped for 5,000 protesters and 12,000 participated. Over the next few years this became a movement and in 2015 President Obama refused the proposal saying that it was not in our national security interest. This was a watershed moment. A mass movement had influenced the president’s decision. The US could go to the Paris Climate Conference and claim that the years when we made more progress controlling protests than controlling carbon emissions were over. Sadly, President Trump put the Keystone XL pipeline in play again, but President Biden nullified the proposal with an executive order.

In a global economy we need new “house” rules and new modes of managing that are more collaborative and inclusive. The longer view of time that predates history will remind us of our stellar origins over four billion years ago. Only then will we put our ecology house first and its economy management second. The late Thomas Berry asserts, “All human institutions, professions, and activities



Departure. Photo by Tom Thiss.

must now be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore, or foster a mutually enhancing human Earth relationship.”

A “mutually enhancing relationship,” not a battle for domination! We’ve not only had the wrong metaphor of a battle, but we’ve also had it all backwards. I would not want to bet against the long-term, primordial imperatives of Nature. Will Durant said it best, “Civilization exists by geological consent, subject to change without notice.”

Time is a recent human invention, created to measure the natural rhythms of the universe. The economy too is a human invention created to manage resources that failed to include our house, the Earth, among its assets— a rather extraordinary omission. The life systems of the planet are our primary resource, and our economy will be viable in the long run only when it integrates its industrial systems with the life sustaining systems of our house, planet Earth.

Forty-Five: The Great Work

Sages have been telling us for centuries that there is only one work, the great work of the universe. Our great work is to integrate our life systems into the community of mutually dependent Earth systems. Ecology is emerging as the primary value of our Post-Modern time. Rev. Michael Dowd, American Progressive Christian minister, has an eight-part video series titled "ProFuture Faith." He summarizes it: "How human centeredness alienated us from primary reality (God) and how ecology, the interdisciplinary study of the way, the truth, and the life of the biosphere – God's living, local, blue-green presence – can lead us home." He advocates being life centered, ecocentrism, living in accord with primary reality. As such, ecology is at the heart of theology. The late Thomas Berry tops his list of those who have influenced him.

I had the good fortune of spending a weekend with Thomas Berry in his North Carolina home when he was in his '80s. He was a cultural historian and a Catholic theologian who referred to himself as a 'geologist' for his reverence of Earth. This reverence for all Earthly manifestations was apparent with this man. While walking out of a restaurant one evening Berry paused and looked up. My first thought was that he was possibly having a seizure, but the look on his face told me otherwise. It was a clear starry evening, and he was transfixed. "Isn't that beautiful!" he exclaimed. We were in the parking lot looking for our car, but Berry's attention was on loftier things.

Berry writes, "The universe, the solar system, and the planet Earth in themselves and in their evolutionary emergence constitute for the human community the primary revelation of that ultimate mystery whence all things merge into being." That said, he would state that ecology is functional cosmology – purposefully stewarding Earth, our home in the cosmos.

When he was eleven his family built a house overlooking a small creek and a meadow beyond. On a late afternoon in May he walked down to have a look. In *The Great Work* he wrote, "That early experience, it seems, has become normative for me throughout the entire range of my thinking. Whatever preserves and enhances this meadow in the natural cycles of its transformation is good; whatever opposes this meadow or negates it is not good. My life orientation is that simple."

In the twilight of a brilliant teaching and writing career he was a strong articulate voice in the growing greening of America. We are degrading our major life support systems (land, air, and water) on which our lives depend. Our industrial systems overwhelm Earth's carrying capacity to renew itself. All cultures have stories of their source and sustenance. We are in the void between stories because the old story that called for exalting mankind by subduing nature and creating a paradise on Earth isn't working. The new story is unfolding. The needed cultural shift of consciousness required comes from what we have



“The Blue Marble” is a famous photograph of the Earth taken on December 7, 1972, by the crew of the Apollo 17 spacecraft en route to the Moon at a distance of about 29,000 kilometres (18,000 mi). Photo by Eugene “Gene” Cernan, Ronald Evans, and Harrison Schmitt.

learned about the evolving universe. The physical sciences have documented the evolutionary story of matter; however, from the beginning the universe has been a spiritual reality as well as physical reality evolving together. Berry does not distinguish between spirit, mind, or consciousness. The evolution of consciousness is not well documented.

The presence of evolutionary spirit began some 13.8 billion years ago with the Big Bang. Berry calls it the great Flaring Forth. He writes, “The universe is a unity, an interacting and genetically connected community of beings bound together in an inseparable relationship in space and time ... each being of the planet is profoundly implicated in the existence and functioning of every other being of the planet.” Notice that he says of the planet, not on the planet. Words matter. Spirit unites us. Berry states simply and succinctly: “The Earth

is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.” At the physical level everything is objective, whereas everything is subjective to our consciousness. For Native Americans all of Mother Earth’s manifestations were subjective and sacred.

We have evolved from Earth, from the stars, from the universe, and from the beginning. We are the stuff of stars – every one of us, earthlings too, but born of star stuff. This is our genetic coding. We need to celebrate it. Berry writes, “The human is that being in whom the universe attains reflexive consciousness of itself.” This is an extraordinary insight! Given their high level of evolutionary consciousness, human beings alone have the capacity to know from whence they have come. This knowledge carries a responsibility that all species have – how to live in a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship. Anything less than that is unsustainable.

Forty-Six: The Earth is Primary

All life is genetically coded. This is the process through which the world of the living evolves, educates, and rules itself. Because of the long maturation process at the human level, genetic coding mandates a further trans-genetic cultural coding by which specific human qualities find expression. Cultural coding continues through the educational process. Unlike our genetic coding, we can change our cultural coding and, indeed, we must. When Berry says we need a new story, it must come from a conscious realization of our genetic coding and a transformational change in our cultural coding (consciousness). A full understanding of our stellar origins may be all we need to shift our consciousness toward a more user-friendly relationship with Earth. Connie Barlow, a popular science writer said, "Tell me a creation story more wondrous than the miracle of a living cell forged from the residue of an exploding star!"

Our old story was people centered (anthropocentric), understandable but too narrow. The new story must be all-life centered. Dowd called this eco-centric. Berry writes that our excessive plundering of the land, called the sixth great extinction, has put an end to the Cenozoic Era that began 65 million years ago with the extinction of dinosaurs and the rise of mammals. The term he coined is Ecozoic. The new story begins with Berry's maxim: "The Earth is primary;



Tipi on Lower Cullen Lake, Minnesota. Photo by Tom Thiss.

the human is derivative.” We are latecomers on the evolutionary timeline. It is hubris to think that we are more important than Earth. We derive our lives and our livelihoods from Earth. Taking care of ourselves means first taking care of Earth. Berry calls ecology the supreme subversive movement as it will undermine and transform our unsustainable industrial order. This, of course, is why it is so feared. Trust is not possible with fear. A look at the basic themes of the universe, however, tells us we have more to trust than to fear.

The universe has a violent as well as a harmonious aspect, but it is consistently creative in the larger arc of its development. Berry identifies three basic intentions or themes – differentiation, subjectivity, and communion. Differentiation is the stunning diversity of nature. Subjectivity is consciousness, the inner spirit of all life. Communion is the act of sharing, the commonality or oneness we have with all life.

The industrial system we have created does not foster these inherent themes. If we had tried to create a system more alien to the basic intentions of the universe, we’d be hard pressed to make a better one. We are hard-wired for differentiation, subjectivity, and communion but the industrial age is a world of interchangeable parts, of uniformity.

Unfortunately, we have been co-opted by science and its handmaiden, technology, and have come to believe that science will save us. Science is supreme in the world of matter. It is the great differentiator, nature’s signature intention, but it cannot claim to know the other two intentions. Subjectivity, or consciousness, is what connects the differentiated components and enables communion, and these themes are alien to science. Is it no wonder in a world sated with science that we long for a sense of community? As violators of Earth’s most sacred aspects, we humans should be grateful Earth’s living community does not have the right to vote. Berry puts it bluntly, “If there were a parliament of creatures, one of its first acts would be to vote humans out of the community.”

So, what is the New Story? It is still unfolding. In Berry’s words: “The universe, the solar system, and the planet Earth in themselves and in their evolutionary emergence constitute for the human community the primary revelation of that ultimate mystery whence all things emerge into being.” In plain words, the universe is our material and spiritual homeland. Native Americans were spot on with their reverence for Mother Earth.

The New Story is Earth centered, geocentric, not anthropocentric or people centered. Berry called it Ecocentric. We are viable only so long as Earth is viable. We know that trying to save wildlife is meaningless if we destroy habitat. That lesson seems to have been lost with humans. Sailors care for their ships because they know they are helpless at sea without them, and pilots know the value of maintenance because they are totally dependent upon the aircraft. Years ago, Iberia Airlines said it best. With a rose and a wrench painted on the tails of their planes, the slogan read: “Only the aircraft gets more attention than you.” To

remind us of our journey on our celestial ship we would do well to say, “Only the Earth deserves more attention than we do.”

The Great Work is the evolution of the universe. We have a choice to resist the Great Work or to put ourselves in harmony with it. The latter involves a shift of consciousness with massive doses of letting go and a surrendering to the inevitabilities of our genetic coding. In doing so, we celebrate the sacredness of our stellar story by creating a new cultural coding – a revised set of values that evokes wonder in diversity, beauty in subjectivity, and intimacy in communion.

Forty-Seven: The Great Mystery

When Jamie Sams, Native American medicine teacher and Holy Person of the Seneca and Cherokee tribes, wanted to share their Sacred Teachings in print, she knew there would be those whose would not approve, so she asked the grandmothers and elders who were her teachers. They all said, "Yes, it is time."

In a like manner the time has come for us to learn from those we subdued and exploited. Had we learned from their teachings rather than stripping them of their culture and forcing ours on them, we would have a more harmonious relationship with Earth and its inhabitants today. Far from being the uncivilized savages portrayed at the time, they had a social/spiritual system in many ways more advanced than what we enjoy today. We are just beginning to value some of the tenets that were inherently a part of their culture. Historians say that Rome conquered Greece, but culturally Greece conquered Rome. In time something similar might well be said about us. We conquered them, but their spiritual teaching that all creation is sacred could rescue us from our environmentally unsustainable practices.

I am struck with the wisdom and compassion of their divination system and its teachings as manifested in their rituals, ceremonies, and traditions. I grew up with all the stereotypes of the time as seen by white eyes and have let them all go as I came to know how rich and deeply spiritual their teachings were. I also know that traditions and rituals varied among tribes yet there was a core that permeated all.

They were not animists who worshiped totems as we thought. They worshipped the Great Mystery that lived in everything and encompassed everything. The Great Mystery created all things in beauty, harmony, and interdependence. It also created the Great Spirit that was the primal energy source, the creative principle that directed the flow of consciousness in all life. Native Americans honored the spiritual essence of all creation because all life-forms were sacred.

Native culture viewed everything as being alive. Every being was a teacher and all nature's life-forms were considered relatives, allies, and helpers on their Earth Walk. In her book *Sacred Path Cards* Sams writes, "The Uniworld is the universal Family of Creation. The Earth is our mother, the Sky is our father; our grandparents are Grandfather Sun and Grandmother Moon. Our Brothers and Sisters are the Stone People, the Standing People, the Creature-beings, the Plant People, and other Two-Leggeds. We are never alone." All were sacred manifestations of the Great Mystery, constant reminders of the one source of creation, from whom they learned and for whom they expressed gratitude in all their actions.

Native Americans personified their relationship to nature. The acclaimed psychologist James Hillman wrote, "Loving is a way of knowing and for love to know it must personify. Personifying is the heart's mode of knowing. It is



Native American cradleboard and Maori skirt. Photo by Tom Thiss.

not a lesser, primitive way of apprehending, but a finer one. To enter myth, we must personify. To personify carries us into myth.”

Medicine to Native Americans was anything that fostered their connection to the Great Mystery and to all life – anything that could heal the body, mind, or spirit. Medicine was a way of life that gave them the strength and understanding to live in harmony with their surroundings. All their totems, or bits thereof, like

an eagle feather carried the power of its person and served as reminders of their teachings. Native wisdom was focused on evoking inner-knowing of lessons from the natural world.

Sams writes, "To find a special Medicine that would give answers for a personal challenge or problem, our Ancestors would often walk in the forests or on the mesas to observe the portents or signs that would assist them in healing and seeking wisdom." The purpose of a Medicine Walk was to align themselves with their helpers and to divine nature's signs in order to evoke insights for decisions to be made. This intuitive process was employed in many of their rituals and traditions such as the sweat lodge, the sun dance, council fires, the vision quest, and the pipe ceremony. These were always accompanied with prayers and an attitude of humility to honor the spirit inherent in the tradition.

Letting go of old habits and attitudes was ever present in practices that encouraged growth and awareness as they progressed on the Sacred Path. Every object and ritual had meaning for the individual and the larger whole. Harmony with all of nature's sacred life-forms was a given as was taking personal responsibility for actions now and for the future well-being of the larger whole – the tribe, clan, or nation. The ubiquitous presence of prayer and gratitude for all life-forms insured the continuance of their traditions.

Chief Seattle, an 19th century leader of the Suquamish tribe in the Pacific Northwest, enjoyed a rebirth in the 1970's when his sayings were championed by a generation that questioned our treatment of the land. The following is attributed to him:

"Teach your children what we have taught our children that the Earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the Earth befalls the sons and daughters of the Earth. If we spit unto the ground, we spit upon ourselves. This we know. The Earth does not belong to us; we belong to the Earth. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. We do not weave the web of life. We are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves."

Dee Brown, author of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* writes, "Dismounted, disarmed, and confined to reservations, the survivors of the once free and mighty tribes were dependent upon an indifferent government which had taken their land doled out to them in exchange for miserly amounts of food and clothing."

Here was a culture more in tune with Earth than we are today with all our scientific prowess. The principles of Real Life were embedded in their traditions, rituals, and ceremonies. All of that was systematically destroyed for an industrial system that built a material utopia and now faces environmental challenges unlike any ever encountered. Had we shown some compassion and humility for those we dispossessed and their practices, we would have more respect for our Earth's one time endowment and its inhabitants.

Forty-Eight: Eulogy for the Modern Age

We are undergoing an epochal social and economic shift as we move from the Modern (Industrial) Age whose central organizing principle is reason to a Post-Modern (Post-Industrial) Age whose governing principle is spirit. Ken Wilber, prodigious researcher and author of *A Brief History of Everything*, says, “Spirit is the process of evolution — the only reality.” In our Modern Age we worship at the shrine of science, and we are controlled by reason because we see it as the highest order, and we cannot see beyond our present worldview. As such we are prisoners of what we have not transcended. Spirit will assume a more dominant role in post-modern thinking as it transcends the exclusive rationality of scientific thinking, an essential but insufficient mode of consciousness for the issues of today.

How to transcend our present worldview? This requires a change of consciousness that runs deeper than a change of beliefs. We experience a change of consciousness when we are illuminated by our own experience. Wilber says the first order of knowing is doing. If we want to know something we must do it — study it, experience it, practice it. It is not by chance that we refer to the practice of medicine. The outcome of direct experience is illumination or insight. It could be an intuitive hit that illuminates us instantly, or it could come slowly over the passage of time.

People evolve, institutions evolve, cultures evolve — everything evolves. The greatest failure of the Modern Age has been its inability to integrate the immense diversity that it has spawned. Reason cannot do this. Only a change of consciousness with spirit as a higher order can do this. Evolution is spirit in action. Its destiny is to rise to a higher level of consciousness with greater depth and a wider embrace that integrates the fragmented components of the Modern Age. The new spiritual perspective of post-Modernism will replace the present limited view of science/technology with a truer, more comprehensive worldview — one with greater complexity, greater consciousness, broader reach, and lesser egocentricity.

This emerging spiritual age will retain the basic structure of rationality, but the exclusive scientific embrace will be replaced with a deeper and wider worldview. With Spirit moving to center stage, the inner life of consciousness, of intention, and of subjective moral values emerge to offset the great imbalance created by the exclusivity of science and technology.

This is a shift of epic proportions. Epochal change of this sort is tantamount to the passing of the dinosaurs, not a bad metaphor for our time. The policies and practices of industrialism have become dinosaurs in the post-industrial culture. Nothing like this has occurred since the dawn of Enlightenment when Modernism arose with rationalism as its central organizing principle.



Glacial drift, Alaska. Photo by Tom Thiss.

Powered by reason and a new discipline called science, the Modern Age displaced pre-Modern mythology that was no match for the rigorous scrutiny of reason. Simply stated, rationalism liberated spirit from the bondage of mythology. Today this current evolutionary shift liberates spirit from the exclusive constraints of science and rationalism. When reason is thought to be absolute and considered the highest good, then anything non-rational is dominated by reason. This exclusive focus on reason, I would contend, has left us ineffective in dealing with issues of what it means to be human.

The exalted role of rationality also accounts for the severing of our communion with nature. In the Modern Age nature needed to be controlled and her resources were there for our use and subsequent exploitation. Thomas Berry said that we have a Nature Deficit Disorder. At a profoundly fundamental level this is what ails our Modern Age and the shift to a post-Modern world is redressing this imbalance.

The Paris Peace accord signed by 93 nations is an emerging example of a post-Modern institution created to address the greatest issue of our time – climate change. President Trump did not support the accord, but President Biden reinstated his support with an executive order. Climate change has no earthly boundaries. It transcends statehood. The International Criminal Court (ICC) is another example of a post-Modern creation that unfortunately has not been signed by the United States.

These new institutions require concessions in order to forge the overarching unity required for integration of the diverse entities. Some are ready to make this step. Others are not. The Common Market took a heavy hit with the Brexit vote that removed Great Britain from the EU. Surrendering the sovereignty of its currency, the British pound, to the Euro was a very difficult move for Britain and it retained a residue of resentment that manifested its resistance in the polls and led to a flood of immigrants. Proponents of the status quo “do not go gently into the night.”

The old must die for the new to be born. There is massive letting go as the Modern Age slowly surrenders its partiality to a higher and more all-encompassing state of consciousness. The challenge, and it is an enormous one, is to integrate the diversity and fragmentation spawned by the Modern Age. Only spirit can do this. Science and technology are impotent in this realm. William James knew the limitations of science in 1890 when he said, “Turning introspection into science is as impractical as trying to turn up the gas quickly enough to see how the darkness looks.”

Forty-Nine: Moving toward Wholeness

Despite the limitations of science, the obstacle is not rationalism but rather our limited worldview. One of the limitations of rationalism is that we evolve faster mentally than morally. We develop nuclear power, clone life, and genetically modify organisms and only then do we ask: What have we done? The moral questions linger as technology moves on.

Our challenge is to evolve our inner ethical side to keep pace with the outer progress. This is the Unity of Moral and Material, so central to Real Life. The seemingly intractable problems we face today can be resolved only with an intentional change of consciousness combined with moral growth. A bull market powered by technology and a growing economy can't do it alone. Grof said it best, "The way out is in."

Thomas Merton said, "There is in all visible things... a hidden wholeness." The revolution we face today is our resistance to a world inexorably moving toward wholeness. This, as Thomas Berry reminded us, is the great work of the universe and it will not be denied, only temporarily subverted. Ethics and morality are on the minds of parents and corporate leaders alike which bespeaks the void we feel in our culture. All the book titles and seminars that deal with soul and spirit give voice to the silent inner realm of our lives, of being and intention which give purpose to our actions.



Sunset at Playa Encanto, Mexico. Photo by Tom Thiss.

We need to deal with intention when we address behavior for it is intention that gives purpose and meaning to behavior and intention is beyond the purview of science. Intention values authenticity, openness, truthfulness, and integrity. These are qualitative dimensions of the human psyche that lie beyond the range of senses and elude the rationality of science.

And we need to deal with culture when we address the structural aspects of society because culture gives meaning to social mores. Culture holds the attitudes and moral values that underpin our social customs. These subjective dimensions also elude the reach of science. In short, we must merge the inner with the outer and address issues interactively with dialogue, inference, introspection, and interpretation. This is the consistent message of Real Life. What benefit comes from having all the right skills and a worldview too narrow to be shared with others?

Industry learned control from the military and never let go. It believed that technology and a growing economy would lead us to the promised land. They were right, but it became a promised flatland – more differentiation, complexity, and diversity with growing distortions and pathologies and no means of integration. (Flatland is a Ken Wilber term for outer growth without integrating inner depth.)

Alfred North Whitehead's summary of this flatland says it all, "A dull affair, soundless, scentless, colorless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly." Technology and the economy do not speak to the evolution of mind and morals. If we fail to evolve ourselves, the Information Age will be "merely the hurrying of information, endlessly, meaninglessly."

We have applied our industrial systems to agriculture with its vast monocultures of corn, soy, and wheat in lieu of nature's diversity; with crowded feedlots creating lakes of animal waste; and with pesticides and herbicides polluting our land and water. All this was done in the name of efficiency and lower cost. Yet the cost is lower only if we fail to consider the health of the Earth and its inhabitants. Again, it's the old story of economy over ecology. Here we are "hurrying food endlessly, meaninglessly," but alas not scentless with feedlots!

Fifty: The Rise of Post-Modernism

Richard Tarnas, author of *The Passion of the Western Mind* says that the Post-Modern era is “without consensus on the nature of reality, but it is blessed with an unprecedented wealth of perspectives with which to engage the great issues that confront it.” He goes on to say, “The critical search for truth (must) be tolerant of ambiguity and pluralism, and its outcome will be knowledge that is relative and fallible rather than absolute and certain... only a committed openness to the interplay of many perspectives can meet the extraordinary challenges.” We are in limbo between two eras. The old isn’t working and the new is ill defined. Without a common worldview we live with the tensions of unresolved issues.

In his book *The World is Flat* Thomas Friedman, New York Times Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, documents the ten forces that have flattened it and the dazzling array of technologies that are available to millions of users. The flat world describes the leveling of the playing field where America no longer holds all the economic cards. The challenge for us as individuals is how to avoid being flattened by the forces at play. Only a post-modern worldview can do that.

In a flat landscape technological progress looks deceptively promising; however, Friedman’s flat world and Wilber’s flatland share the same limitation. Both extend our reach but not our depth. They change our lives externally, but they do not transform us internally. Neither helps us evolve to a higher level if we are to integrate what Tarnas calls “the maelstrom of unresolved diversity.” Only a change of consciousness can do this.

The history of societal transformations has taught us that it is not possible to integrate the disarray with the same worldview that created it. Einstein said it well: “We cannot solve the problems of today with the same consciousness that created them.” The problems of Modernism can only be solved with a post-Modern perspective. Modernism’s established order cannot cope with the disorder in evolving complexity of the post-Modern world. Out of this chaos new order will emerge capable of integrating the growing complexity.

Tarnas says that a common theme of the post-modern mind is a deeper appreciation of the multi-dimensional complexity of reality and the plurality of perspectives necessary to approach it. When the unresolved creative tensions in this modern maelstrom reach sufficient intensity, a new and more all-embracing worldview will emerge as the old one loses its hold on our Western psyche. These are the age-old forces of thesis and antithesis at work to produce a synthesis.

Tarnas, who has traced the development of the Western mind from the classical period of Greek enlightenment, contends that its history is overwhelmingly that of the masculine mind. He says that the objective world of science has ruled with less regard for those subjective things like imagination, emotion, spirit, instinct, art, body, and nature itself. These were regarded as feminine and subsequently repressed. Integrating these is what Real Life is about.



"Abundance" by Francis Derwent Wood (1873-1926) in the Rose Garden, Hampton Court Palace, London, UK. Photo by Jim Linwood.

The feminine emergence is underway to offset this historical imbalance. The signs are everywhere most significantly with our belated concern for Earth. From time immemorial Earth with its creative life-giving capacities has been regarded as feminine and being feminine is all about relationships. The industrial assault on Earth has triggered a global ecological awareness that the life sustaining systems of our mother Earth are in decline, and the nurturing response is the feminine principle in action.

Fifty-One: Spirit is a Higher Truth

Spirit, having shed the shackles of rational repression, is emerging from its slumber and claiming its turf and its advocates. For many of us the numinous moments we have with spirit are more frequent leading us to believe that the veil that clouds the inner realm is becoming more transparent. Our challenge is to avoid interpreting these spiritual insights from a flatland perspective and thinking, "It must be the medication I'm taking."

As we develop our interior with contemplative practices, we open ourselves to the realms of spirit as well as reason in the Post-Modern world. This new worldview is unsustainable without a culture to support it. The cultural values that form the context for our social systems, however, must change to reflect the larger, more all-embracing worldcentric (a Ken Wilber term) perspective. A worldcentric perspective emerges when we recognize spirit to be a higher truth than reason. Its reach is broader, and its depth is greater.

Globalism as we know it today is just another flatland social system acted out on a larger playing field until the players have a change of consciousness, and global conferences will produce global solutions only when the delegates hold worldcentric views. Egocentric minded people operate egocentrically on a global scale, and nothing changes. Shifts of consciousness happen the old-fashioned way, one person at a time, when we embrace a greater and more all-encompassing truth. When a critical mass of people shifts to a worldcentric state of mind, society will shift to a trans-rational world with a more spiritual orientation.

In *The Noetic Post*, a bulletin from The Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), Liz Miller writes in "Cultivating Worldview Wisdom:" Among those skills considered by many to be most essential for success in the twenty-first century are greater cognitive flexibility, comfort with unfamiliarity, appreciation for diverse perspectives, agility in the face of rapidly changing circumstances, an ability to hold multiple points of view simultaneously, and a capacity for discernment that relies equally on intellect and intuition.

This is the role of a culture that teaches values to support these 21st century skills, and therefore Thomas Berry says we need to reinvent the human at the species level with a change of consciousness in our cultural coding and a new story that becomes part of our education system. Miller suggests, "Learning how to expand our worldview in ways that allow us to become more balanced, compassionate, celebratory of difference, and accommodating of new information."

This is how consciousness changes, and this is what I've tried to do with this book by accommodating new information from our interior world as well as from our sensory world. In doing so we transcend our flatland perspective



Heading home. Photo by Tom Thiss.

and cultivate a new awareness with greater depth. Then we can say of the post-Modern world – bring it on!

Of course, in this new state of consciousness with its ever-increasing complexity, we will have new and greater pathologies and distortions that will inevitably arise. I suggest, however, that we let go of that thought for now and focus on the promise of the post-Modern Age. Our lives move in the direction of our expectations, and I am hopeful – but first things first. It's time to let go of this book whose gestation has come full term.

About the Author



Tom Thiss worked in thirty-nine countries on six continents, including a residency in London from 1983-1989. He taught in the business community for over thirty years. The initiatives he offered included social styles, negotiation skills, stress management, team building, life/work planning, adventure-based “ropes” courses, and a variety of Organizational (OT) interventions. Tom’s book, *The Wizard of Is* teaches centering, focusing, and accepting no limitations to your personal power. Tom has a Master’s Degree and has taught at the University of Minnesota.

Now retired, Tom lives in Minnesota with his wife, Cokey, with Lake Minnetonka in view. They raised four boys who have taught him his most memorable management lessons. Tom is an avid outdoorseman and has kayaked over 4,000 times in the last twenty years from Mexico to Alaska, and he snowshoes in the winter months.

Tom has had a lifetime interest in health promotion and holistic medicine. He has been journaling daily since 1983 and he has written 85 journals in the last 40 years.



Tom Thiss worked in thirty-nine countries on six continents, including a residency in London from 1983-1989. He taught in the business community for over thirty years. The initiatives he offered included social styles, negotiation skills, stress management, team building, life/work planning, adventure-based “ropes” courses, and a variety of Organizational (OT) interventions. Tom’s book, *The Wizard of Is* teaches centering, focusing, and accepting no limitations to your personal power. Tom has a Master’s Degree and has taught at the University of Minnesota.

Now retired, Tom lives in Minnesota with his wife, Cokey, with Lake Minnetonka in view. They raised four boys who have taught him his most memorable management lessons. Tom is an avid outdoorseman and has kayaked over 4,000 times in the last twenty years from Mexico to Alaska, and he snowshoes in the winter months.

Tom has had a lifetime interest in health promotion and holistic medicine. He has been journaling daily since 1983 and he has written 85 journals in the last 40 years.

ISBN: 979-8-9856996-6-1

