



Peace: A New Center of Human Becoming

◀ *Peace by Piece* is an ongoing collaborative effort benefiting World Peace and Prayer Day, founded by Chief Orvol Lookinghorse with the Lakota Peace Organization and other nonprofit groups. The same-titled featured artwork is a 4' x 5' mixed media canvas containing images, prayers, writings, and artifacts from many cultures of the world. Courtesy of Carlton Gallery, www.carltonartgallery.com.

JAMES O'DEA

WE LIVE IN A CHARGED EVOLUTIONARY MOMENT saturated with conflicted meaning. In the prescient words of poet W. B. Yeats, “Things fall apart, the center cannot hold.” The old center—one which contrived an accommodation between the interests of rampant secular materialism and dogmatic religion—is caving in under the pressure of fundamental contradictions. To permit and participate in the destruction of nature while at the same time affirming salvation in otherworldly realms is a formula for ending life as we know it on this planet. It is also increasingly a formula for major conflict over fast-shrinking resources.

VISION VS. REALITY

However painful the unfolding drama—and some would say denouement—inherent in the incompatibilities of this dualistic framework, some of us feel relief. The resolution of this contradiction requires a higher synthesis of the spiritual and the mundane. In this view evolution has been gestating a new center of gravity for planetary civilization, one that finds balance and

sustainability for human life within the supportive bounty of nature and one that affirms the connection between earthly and cosmic reality.

It is, perhaps, in what some pundits have now come to call “the reenchantment of the cosmos,” that we can imagine a coherent thread linking life on this planet to the unfolding story of the universe. One can even imagine that it is a universe dedicated to helping us shed the training wheels of a false duality so that we can enter more fully into the mystery of its unifying power and breathtaking coherence. It is a universe that reflects a peace that passes all understanding.

This may be all well and good as an emerging vision, but we are not there yet. In fact, although we pride ourselves on being rational creatures, we seem collectively to have a huge deficit in this arena. Again and again we see that the logic of narrow self-interest trumps a more rational framework that serves the good of all. We seem to be caught in the momentum of consumption patterns so aggressive that we are now visibly devouring our own habitat.

Our ability to reason on behalf of the whole remains significantly compromised. Our political and economic

systems, our educational paradigms, and some of our fundamental beliefs pivot on competition rather than cooperation. Science has been commandeered to serve the accelerating degradation of the planet and a seemingly relentless militarism. But there are many who wrestle for the soul of science and appreciate its critical role in providing us with the insight, data, and evidence so necessary for rational decision making. Yet even when science provides us with startling evidence, say, of ecosystem collapse, it has often been ignored. If we are to survive as a species, we need a new rationality in the political sphere: a rationality that appreciates the reality of global interconnectedness and interdependence.

FROM FRAGMENTATION TO WHOLENESS

If mainstream science is only selectively attended to, you can imagine the challenges in conducting “frontier” science. And yet growing evidence from sustained scientific research suggests that our fundamental nature, the underlying structure of mind and matter, may be more loving, forgiving, relational, and collaborative than the dominant notion, which sees war, aggression, and survival of the fittest as inescapable realities. As compelling as this research is in providing the basis for a worldview that brings science and spirituality closer together, it, too, is drowned out by the status quo needs of governing systems conditioned by fear, threat, and the relentless pursuit of competitive advantage. The gods of vengeance and punishment may sound as though they are from a bygone era, but they hold sway over the more reconciling, rehabilitating, and restorative ones, even if good science favors the latter.

Transforming a world configured around these basic contradictions is no easy matter, especially when the explosion of information has tended to fragment attention and push the development of knowledge into specialist niches. It may be easier now than ever before to manipulate public attention and perception. The new science of memetics, which studies the transfer of cultural information and meaning, can help us see the pivotal and viral nature of certain memes: The little “terror alert code orange” in the corner of your TV screen, for example, is a clear example of a button-pushing fear meme. Viral peace memes are both possible and necessary but will only take hold when they align with

practices that serve our being as well as our doing. In short, reactionary politics is not sufficient. Scientific research into meditation, breathwork, and the entrainment of heart coherence are leading us to believe that the antidote to the triggers of fragmentation, fear, and stress lie in centering within our own deepest awareness. Inner peace is a prerequisite to peace outside us.

If moving from fragmentation to wholeness is a key to peace, equally significant is the ability to promote dialogue rather than polarization and name-calling. As much as “right versus wrong” works as a building block of moral development, it is an incomplete concept when viewed from the perspective of complexity. If you were abused as a child and were profoundly and negatively conditioned by that experience, how useful is right and wrong? Of far greater value are recovery and healing from the trauma you experienced. Cycles of wounding can be transmitted from one generation to another in both family and social structures; psychological and integral models of health and healing have much to offer to help prevent future cycles of abuse. Conducting dialogue within a wounding-healing framework is thus more likely to produce results than a right-wrong framework. As one theologian put it, our collective choice is now “dialogue or death.”

The transformation of our world requires a new story, one that deals with the deepest underlying causes of war and violence and that offers us the inescapable lure and promise of peace. It must be a story in which our desire to settle differences is more exciting than the willingness to die for the rightness of our cause. It must surpass war in catalyzing our quest for heroism, courage, and camaraderie. It must offer such a compelling vista into the universe that our sense of awe and wonder gives us a new perspective on the beauty of human diversity and the need to heal the great wound in nature.

It is here that science has a great role to play, for if it is key in helping us make rational choices based on the best evidence available, it is also a great ally in helping us peer into the great mysteries of existence. For science ultimately explores the unknown, where the new story, pregnant in the Mystery, awaits its birth into history. And you who have waited for, longed for, and dreamt of the great day of peace are its eager midwives. 🌍

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the Institute of Noetic Sciences.*