AN EVOLUTIONARY SHIFT AND 
EMERGING HEROINES/HEROES

Peggy Natiello, Ph.D.

Sedona Arizona

We are in the midst of an amazing global event that is centuries in the making: the awakening of the global mind, the emergence of a higher form of life in human evolution (Ashok Gangadean, 2001).

Abstract

Evidence increasingly points to a global paradigm shift that is rapidly unfolding among us and causing grief, fear and confusion. The shift involves an entire reordering of the prevailing egocentric way of seeing and minding, and has enormous consequences for social, political, behavioral, environmental norms underlying our culture’s construction. This paper considers the difficulties of moving from a reductionistic view of the world to a more unitary view. The writer looks at the qualities of persons, identified by spiritual leaders and social theorists as having the vision and courage to lead us forward. She reflects on attitudes of the person-centered approach as one clearly defined technology that can facilitate global dialogue and a shift in worldview.

In 1979 our person-centered staff convened in a college lounge to prepare for a five-day group gathering. I was upset about one of my sons, who was in the throes of adolescent rebellion, and whose behavior seemed bizarre and frightening. In the retelling of some of the stories, supported and eased by empathic responses, I gained a new perspective on his behavior and antics. My angst turned into hilarity, and we all ended up howling with laughter. During the pause after our conversation, Carl Rogers crossed the room and handed me a coin for the phone. “Tell your son,” he said smiling, “that I know what’s wrong. He wants to be a hero and there is no space for heroes in this country anymore.”
Introduction

I think of Carl’s statement often, and have come to understand that there have been radical changes in the U.S. and the world since that evening. The Western world’s concept of the nature of reality—which emerged 350 years ago with Isaac Newton — is being challenged, and if western culture is going to adjust to and survive a shift in worldview, we will need heroines and heroes — lots of them! I am not talking about the kind of heroes who fire guns, brandish swords, or drop bombs. I refer to those who have the courage, foresight and creativity to question the prevailing assumptions about the nature of reality and discover unimagined solutions for a crisis-ridden strange new world. What does all of this mean?

A worldview is the collectively, and often unconsciously, held assumption about the nature of reality and our place in it. All of us learn through unconscious assimilation to see reality through our culture’s particular lens. The worldview that prevails at a particular time in a particular culture forms the basis of all organizational, social, political, environmental values and behavioral norms underlying every society’s construction. When a worldview shifts there is a relentless though gradual change in every aspect of that construction, accompanied by immense upheaval for all.

At the outset of this millennium, there is a growing consensus that the Western world stands on the cusp of a fascinating shift in worldview — a time of crisis and opportunity. The crisis we face arises from the reductionistic, atomistic worldview, the classical scientific paradigm, that has dominated the way of seeing, thinking and behaving in Western culture since the 18th century. This particular view divides reality into building blocks, subjects and objects, spirit and matter, and “us” and “them.” It has emerged over an extended period, cresting in the scientific, objective, rational thinking that gained precedence in the 1700s. Jay Earley (2002) names the state of consciousness that characterizes this worldview reflexive, and counts it as a major phase in the social evolution of consciousness. It is characterized by “the ability to reflect on our experience, to understand ourselves and the world through the mediation of images and ideas” (p.110). It has led to a concept of reality consisting of many parts rather than being one whole. Spiritual teachers, mystics, philosophers and historians (Bohm, 1980; Capra, 1982; Gangadean, 2001; Grof; 2000; Harman, 1988; Macy, 1991; Samples, 1981; Tolle, 1999; Vaughan, 2002; Wilber, 1996; Wolinsky, 1993) agree that, although this view has contributed significantly to certain kinds of progress and principled morals, it has also had an appalling impact on human suffering, environmental exploitation, and interpersonal disconnection.

Macy (1998) reminds us that living systems (and the earth is such a system) respond to such crises when their survival is threatened. Consistent feedback that prevailing behaviors and coping techniques are becoming dysfunctional inevitably leads systems to adapt and seek more life-enhancing norms. The ensuing period of adaptation, named “exploratory self-reorganization” by Laszlo (1973, p. 170), is disorienting and confusing and can feel like a living death to those caught in the struggle. It seems certain that we are caught in such a struggle today.
That struggle is reintroducing a different perception of reality that is challenging the mechanistic, reductionistic worldview that triumphed in 18th century science. The different perception is evolving out of a resurgence of interest in eastern philosophies, and recent findings in quantum physics, general systems theory, and chaos theory. These findings provide considerable scientific evidence that things are not as they have seemed, that all reality is part of one immense system or one whole, and that there is one prevailing energy underlying all life — one unitary power that drives everything. Thus, the world and all of its changes are constantly being created by the dynamic interrelatedness of this driving energy rather than by any linear, predictable process. There is no ‘us’ and ‘them’, no ‘this’ and ‘that’, say its proponents. Every thing, every event in the universe shares in the same consciousness, is created by the interaction of the same dynamic energy, and is an indivisible part of the same whole — be that whole identified as God, Aum, Sunyata, Tao, Christ, Love, Logos or other. This concept of reality incorporates the beliefs of age old spiritual traditions. “There is, and always has been only one spiritual teaching although it comes in many forms…. ‘felt oneness of being’ ” says Eckhart Tolle (1999, p. 6).

The unitary view of reality — the view that prevailed in ancient times and is named participatory consciousness by Earley (2000) — has been seriously suppressed in modern western culture (p.108). Loss of the belief that all reality shares in the same life force has justified an alarming violence toward other human beings and to our life-sustaining natural environment. Earley suggests that, at this stage of social evolution, humankind needs to integrate the values of reflexive and participatory consciousness to have a healthy society. He says when “ participatory and reflexive consciousness are integrated, a person can experience vitality and belonging while also being able to reflect on his or her experience to make choices” (p.111).

Even when faced with emerging scientific discoveries and their compatibility with ancient wisdom, it is difficult to fully comprehend a unitary reality. Most belief systems in the Western world are entrenched in the egocentric, reductionistic worldview that our culture, language, socialization, and institutions have taught us is the truth. Although the holistic concept of reality is gaining ever-wider acknowledgement in scientific, psychological, spiritual, historical, and popular circles, it still seems incomprehensible to much of humankind. The predicted shift in worldview has been talked about for decades, but the changes that propel culture into such a shift take awhile to build in intensity. Sharon Begley, in the Wall Street Journal, describes her experience at a physics conference she attended in 2002 and particularly her feeling that she had heard similar ideas somewhere before. “And then it hit me,” says Begley. “A role for consciousness in creating the universe ….a participatory universe ….the experimentalist choosing what reality emerges.” She ends her column:

These were not the blatherings of New Agers, but the empirically based inferences of some of the world’s best quantum physicists who study subatomic events. And they were precisely the sort of statements questioning objective reality that were

The difficulty of seeing beyond consensual reality, as well as the terrible fear of the kinds of changes such an evolutionary shift implies, keep us locked into competitive behavior, environmental plunder, war, personal isolation, and oppression. Gangadean (2001) calls the prevailing egocentric mind, its technology of thinking and subsequent world-view "an adolescent stage in human development." Tolle (1999), too, confronts the egocentric perception. Thinking egocentrically, he says, "has become a disease" (p.13). Doing something is no longer enough to get ourselves out of the global crisis. Change must take place at the core of the beliefs that inform Western culture if we are to survive the planetary crises we face.

Encounters with other ideologies, spiritual philosophies and cultures consistently reveal the recurring concept of a universal life force that underlies all worldviews. The courage to see beyond the atomistic, egocentric Western perception of reality and live according to a different vision of life is the characteristic necessary for potential heroes and heroines during this period in history. The technology called upon to heal the wounds of egocentric thinking, says Gangadean (2000) and others, is not war but the art of global dialogue. Such dialogue can bridge the gaps across diverse worldviews, systems of religion and philosophical narratives, and divulge the underlying truth of reality that connects all of us despite barriers of language, culture, and spirituality (p.2).

**Global Dialogue**

Any discussion of dialogue and its social implications is incomplete without inclusion of Martin Buber, the virtual father of dialogical theory. It is the space between the inter-human that Buber refers to as dialogical. The quality of the interchange is what creates the I-Thou dialogue that includes "confirmation" or "being made present as a person" (Friedman, 2002, pg. 9). Friedman cites Buber as differentiating between the "I-Thou relationship" that is "direct, mutual, present and open, and the 'I-It', or subject-object, relation in which one relates to the other only indirectly and nonmutually, knowing and using the other" (p.8). This I-It style of dialogue is a product of egocentric thinking, and, as such, has divided us and created increasing isolation and interpersonal violence. The I-Thou dialogue, however, is very relevant to this discussion, as it is at the core of global dialogue.

Concerned with the difference between mere existence and authentic existence, between being barely human and being more fully human, between remaining fragmented and bringing the conflicting parts of oneself into an active unity, between partial and fuller relationships with others. ...One may move in the direction of greater wholeness through greater awareness and fuller response to each new situation (Friedman, 2002, p. 9).

During the writing of this paper, the United States has unleashed thousands of bombs and troops in Iraq. It is becoming apparent that the justification for the attacks
was largely based on lies and false information. The evening news displays pictures of Israeli and Palestinian children donning grotesque gas masks in the struggle to survive the ruthless bombing. On the same newscast, Major General Mitzna of Israel, a fierce, heroic military fighter in his youth is interviewed. He warns that war will solve nothing. “We must negotiate, talk honestly, respect each other.” Mitzna, now the mayor of Haifa, refuses to allow disputes there to be solved through fighting. His policies have transformed Haifa into an island of peace in Israel, and he was the Labor Party’s new candidate for Prime Minister in 2003. In the meantime, the disastrous consequences of the attacks on Iraq are loosening more belligerence against the United States and Britain. In spite of the devastating consequences of weapons of mass destruction, leaders of the most powerful nations on earth continue to rely on war rather than reason or dialogue. Such decisions will almost certainly jeopardize the future of all people on earth, There is no evidence of an I-Thou attitude or global dialogue in this violence.

“Critical dialogue” is the term that Willis Harman (1988) uses for the way one can participate in the evolutionary, structural change that is gaining momentum. We cannot push it forward, make it happen, predict the outcome, says Harman. Instead he suggests that “through truth-telling and dialogue and sincere attempts to see the world through the other person’s eyes, together we can come to an understanding of what it is that needs doing and a joint commitment that it gets done” (Foreword).

The evolutionary potential inherent in the dialogical practice of the person-centered approach is alluded to by Carl Rogers, Ph.D., theoretical founder of the person-centered approach. He says. “perhaps we are touching the cutting edge of our ability to transcend ourselves, to create new and more spiritual directions in human evolution” (1980, p.134).

Rogers found a wealth of validation among 20th century scientists and philosophers for the “transcendent, indescribable, unexpected, transformational experiences” (ibid) that he and his associates were observing as outcomes of person-centered facilitation. He believed that the evolution of consciousness would be the earmark of the postmodem age, and that practitioners of the person-centered approach already held some understanding and experience in opening a movement in that direction.

Who are the heroines/heroes who can make the evolutionary shift?

The major key to a paradigm shift, most futurists agree, is a changing worldview and the personal courage of a critical mass to embrace it. The consequences of such a shift will be radical. Every institution, every relationship with the earth and one another will have to assume new forms. Such changes (already manifesting) will create tidal waves of cultural dis-ease, and result in loss, pain and suffering. These predicted symptoms, however, can be overshadowed by brilliant new opportunities to build a more humane and inclusive world community.

A review of the literature surfaces many allusions to the persons who will move most fluidly through a paradigm shift. Russell (1982), Maslow (1971), Samples
(1981), and Harman (1988) all identify qualities that reiterate those attributed to Carl R. Rogers’ *Persons of tomorrow* (1980). Rogers, with his usual clarity and brevity, claims that such persons will demonstrate the following: 1) openness, 2) desire for authenticity, 3) skepticism regarding science and technology, 4) desire for wholeness, 5) wish for intimacy, 6) openness to process, 7) caring and positive regard, 8) closeness to nature, 9) anti-institutional tendencies, 10) authority within, 11) the unimportance of material things, 12) a yearning for the spiritual (p. 350-352). He adds that:

persons with these characteristics will be at home in a world that consists only of vibrating energy, a world with no solid base, a world of process and change, a world in which the mind... is both aware of, and creates, the new reality. They will be able to make the paradigm shift (p. 354).

A rapidly growing group in the United States, with almost identical qualities to those described by Rogers, is identified by Ray and Anderson (2000). These authors, after fourteen years of research, have uncovered a substantial new sub-culture that they call *The Cultural Creatives*. This group, say Ray and Anderson, numbers 50 million people or 26% of the population; stands apart from the *traditionalist* and *modern* subcultures; and has been gathering strength consistently since the 1960s. Their study has been replicated in fourteen European countries, and the findings are strikingly similar. Although this emerging population has been forming somewhat silently, its creative values and idiosyncratic viewpoints have already affected the culture in powerful ways through isolated and unique projects.

Cultural Creatives, proclaim the authors, are the ones who will lead society toward resolution of the seemingly disastrous problems that threaten our planet with new, unimagined and creative solutions. They describe the members of this sub-culture as being unique, self-determining, authentic, and similar in their commitment to certain universal values. Those values include caring for the well-being of others, strong commitment to preserving the earth, disgust with war and oppression, preference for learning from experience rather than being taught by the “authorities,” attention to psychological and spiritual dynamics. They are whole-system thinkers who construct a large view of reality by fitting together fragments of information from the media as well as others’ stories and their own life experiences. They support their personal values by participating actively in projects dear to their hearts. In other words, say Ray and Anderson, “they walk their talk” (p. 10).

Members of this group are increasingly standing out from the crowd. One is Michael Moore — an unlikely looking hero. With his films, books, sneakers, sagging blue jeans and baseball cap, Moore has challenged some of the most powerful political and corporate leaders in America and their tightly held values such as gun ownership, intervention in foreign governments, and the objectivity of the American media. Another such hero is Jimmy Carter who, after losing the presidency with all its tools of institutional power, continues to work for the well being of the disadvantaged, building them homes with his own hands, and traveling abroad to try to bring peace to troubled lands by negotiation rather than war. Many healers from the medical profession, too, qualify — among the best known are Deepak Chopra,
Larry Dossey, Rachel Naomi Remen, Christiane Northrup, Bernie Siegal, and Andrew Weil (Ray and Anderson, 2000, pg. 195). They are rejecting the notion that medical healing has only to do with the physical body. They are bringing the body, mind, emotion and spirit together in their practice, and recognize the inestimable healing value of the patient/doctor relationship.

There are many other gentle revolutionaries who could be named as members of this group. They are fluid, open, non-rigid, just like the heroines/heroes called upon today that Rogers (1961) and others describe. These are the kinds of persons who can facilitate the changes in heart and mind needed for the impending shift in worldview and, hence, a significant advance in cultural evolution. Although Harman (1988) says this shift in worldview and consciousness cannot be “pushed,” it can be nurtured, smoothed and facilitated by many groups among the cultural creatives.

**Potential for Heroines/Heroes in the Person-centered Approach**

The system for growth and change with which I am most familiar is the person-centered approach, originated by Carl R. Rogers, Ph.D. I want to highlight it as one technology that might help us to embrace the cultural shift in which we are already embroiled. Brian Thome, in The Mystical Power of Person-centred Therapy (2002), sets forth his belief that “history would show (Rogers) to be one of the major influences on the spiritual evolution of twenty-first century humanity” (p. x). My recent reflection on Rogers’s writings, in preparation for this paper, surfaces many examples of the evolutionary theme, some cited in this text.

The way-of-being sought by many person-centered practitioners often leads to a glimpse of the interconnectedness and sense of communion that futurists describe as the evolutionary advance in mind needed to turn from an egocentric view of reality to one of global unity. The attitudes and values of the approach can contribute significantly as well to the capacity for global dialogue that many predict is necessary for our survival. What is still missing, however, is the consensual recognition that we are hurtling toward either planetary disaster or cultural transformation.

In 1980 Rogers said:

If the time comes when our culture tires of the endless homicidal feuds, despairs of the use of force and war as a means of bringing peace, becomes discontent with the half-lives that its members are living — only then will our culture seriously look for alternatives. When this time comes, people will not find a void. They will discover that there are ways of facilitating the resolution of feuds. They will find that there are ways of building community without sacrificing the potential and creativity of the person. They will realize that there are ways, already tried out on small scale, of enhancing learning, of moving toward new value, of raising consciousness to unexpected levels. They will find out that there
are ways of being that do not involve power over persons or groups (p. 204-205).

New solutions to the situations alluded to by Rogers are becoming increasingly urgent. We need only look at the devastating relationships between Israelis and Palestinians, the aggressive actions by the United States, the growing hostility of extremist groups, terrorist attacks claiming more lives every day all over the world, the increasing threat of nuclear and biological war, evidence of white-collar crime in some of the largest corporations in the U.S., and growing ecological crises that threaten the ability to sustain life on earth.

The actualizing tendency.

The basic hypothesis of the person-centered approach is that each person, and, indeed, all organic life, if provided with a carefully defined climate, have ample resources and an inherent tendency for positive growth and self-enhancement. (Rogers 1980) sees this same capacity in the universe as a whole. At that level he calls it a formative tendency. Belief in the actualizing tendency is crucial to the climate defined by Rogers as fostering healthy development.

To those of us who subscribe to that belief, the need to control, manipulate, or bring others into conformity makes little sense. Our present day world, however, is organized around the premise that authorities are needed to keep order, to reach goals, to tell people how to conduct their lives and to control behavior. Such a premise leads to oppression, exclusion, power over others, dogma, persecution of those with diverse values, and horrific wars between “us and them”.

If proponents of systems theory are correct, the existence of everything including change, depends on the ever-fluctuating energy that oscillates within and between systems rather than on authorities who have the power to direct or manipulate behavior. According to systems theory, we can trust the natural processes of the universe (the actualizing tendency, in person-centered language) to move in the direction of maintenance and enhancement of the whole. Take, for example, our planet Earth which is presently being strained in its ability to sustain life, and that situation worsens daily. There is indisputable evidence at this point in human history that decisions made by authorities in the Western world, especially since the industrial revolution, have resulted in dwindling resources that are needed to sustain life on earth. If there could arise a recognition that we are one with the earth — a belief that informs most indigenous cultures and Eastern philosophies — it would be unlikely that we would continue to rape it as we have done and continue to do. Such a recognition requires a revolutionary change of mind — away from egocentric thinking and into a recognition that we are all part of the same whole.

The person-centered core conditions.

The conditions that nurture the actualizing tendency, as described in person-centered philosophy, are perfectly suited to the concept of a unitary reality and global dialogue. An awareness of their potency in leading toward an evolutionary
shift can help us to deepen our commitment to fostering a growthful climate for others with whom we work, to consistently strengthen our ability to be fully present in the world, and to facilitate global dialogue.

**Empathy.**

Those who practice or receive empathy know what it feels like to have the boundaries imposed by egocentric thinking momentarily melt and disappear. In the process of empathy, we attempt to merge into another’s experience “as if” we were the other. Some, like Clark Moustakas (1980) leave out the “as if” and simply move into another’s very existence. Moustakas says in his practice of therapy, his clients are with him psychically 24 hours a day during the period when he is working intensively with them. He has even had the experience of dreaming their dreams. Such an experience makes sense in terms of the emerging world-view where we are all part of a larger whole, indivisible and connected at the very core of all being. In the process of empathic presence, both the provider and the recipient occasionally experience the interrelatedness of “being”, the temporary end of isolation, the merging of two (or more) lives into one.

Sometimes as facilitators of human development we have the privilege of witnessing the power of empathy to erase separateness. Recently, a chronically ill client of mine cried deeply for herself and her desolate life during childhood. Previously she had been unable to feel any compassion for or connection with herself as a child. During her lunch several days after the session, a little girl appeared in her kitchen and sat beside her while she ate. “The child was me,” she explained. “It was not a dream; it was not a vision. She was real and she stayed there the entire time just watching me.” For the first time since I met her several years ago, this client was able to accept the truth of her life as a child—an aspect of herself from which she was previously disconnected. Time and separateness (artificial constructions of mind, insist believers in the emerging worldview) were erased in those empathic moments where she was able to emotionally feel and embrace the reality of her early experience. She moved into a higher level of consciousness and deep connection with the holistic, indivisible nature of her life. Similar connectedness is felt by many of us in the moments when we lift the phone receiver and find the person we wanted to call is already there, when we intuit the illness or death of another only to find it is true, when we dream about a distant friend and that person arrives unexpectedly at our door.

Experiences like these can feel mysterious and dazzling when viewed through the egocentric mind, but make sense from the vantage point of all things being part of the same moving force. Similar phenomena manifest even more readily in groups where the climate is facilitative. Most participants report feeling the oneness of the group during certain periods — they talk of “unity of consciousness, “the group mind” (Natirello, 2001), “the progression from experiencing separateness to experiencing connectedness or unity…” (Coulson, 1999). Certainly empathy and the experience of feeling fully heard contribute greatly to this sense of integration with the whole.
Unconditional positive regard.

There is no room for judgment in global dialogue. It is important to recognize that contradictory ideas are not wrong or bad, they are simply a result of culturally introjected visions of reality and our place in it, or of serious personal wounding. Egocentric minding generates separation and conflict by judging the other against our own values and way-of-being in the world. The unitary worldview holds that we are all part of the One. In person-centered experience, we learn the impact of suspending judgment and listening with compassion, openness and genuine enthusiasm to ideas that might differ from our own. None of us know the whole, real truth about the nature of reality. If we listen carefully, however, it is inevitable that we find the unity of human experience, the continuity of struggle that we all share, and the unfolding "evolutionary drama" (Gangadean, 2001) that reveals the common energy binding our diverse lives. There already exists dramatic documentation for the dialogue that can heal and disclose our connectedness. Take, for example, Rogers' peace work, particularly his meetings in South Africa during apartheid. There Rogers facilitated deep and open dialogue between Blacks, Coloreds, Afrikaners, and Asians in a cauldron of conflict seething with rage and hatred. He and his staff facilitated equally deep empathy and healing between members of the IRA and a group from Northern Ireland. In both projects, group members found the common bond of their humanity that lay beneath the conflicts. When focus in an attempt to dialogue remains fixed on the surface differences we all bring to the table, it is almost impossible not to become judgmental, to fight for who is right, even to declare war! In such a state, there is little opportunity for any kind of dialogue, let alone global dialogue!

Congruence.

It goes without saying that congruence, openness and honesty are critical for transformative connection and dialogue. In our international negotiations, indeed in our interpersonal ones, there is too often obfuscation, deceit, manipulation, and even betrayal. When we bring ourselves in "truth-telling" (Harman, 1988) to the table the results are generally far more effective. We see very little evidence of congruence in present day politics and human relations, because such transparency is often viewed as naive, weak or unsafe. We, in the person-centered approach and elsewhere, who seriously commit ourselves to this condition have remarkable stories of healing, connecting, and creating harmony in horrendously hostile relationships. We need to tell these stories and understand how critical this kind of presence is in moving through the global crises and hostile relationships we face.

Life as a Process.

If, indeed, a unitary version of reality finally supplants the egocentric view, there will be a period of chaos, radical change, fear, and loss. Adjustments to predicted changes will be made successfully by those who see life and self as a process — ever changing, never fixed on a particular goal, able to see external stimuli without closing down out of fear. The person-centered approach encourages people be "more open to ... feelings of courage and tenderness, and awe.... Free to
live (their) feelings subjectively as they exist... and also free to be aware of these feeling." It enables persons to take in their experience more fully, without defensiveness. Individuals who achieve this ability are likely to realize that “what I will be in the next moment, and what I will do, grows out of that moment, and cannot be predicted in advance either by me or by others” (Rogers, 1961, p. 188). Such persons will be able to live in a state of uncertainty, trusting that experiences that lie ahead will contribute to the growth, strength, and humanity of individuals and the world. They will be able to look anew at old structures and invent different ways of doing things rather than clinging to obsolete coping skills or to guidelines that have been passed down from outside authorities. If, indeed, we are at the edge of the paradigm shift predicted by cultural historians, we will need tremendous adaptability, self-reliance, creativity and openness. Rogers (1961) says of such a person:

With his sensitive openness to his world, his trust of his own environment, he would be the type of person from whom creative products and creative living merge. He would not necessarily be “adjusted” to his culture, and he would almost certainly not be a conformist. But at any time and in any culture he would live constructively, in as much harmony with his culture as a balanced satisfaction of his needs demanded. In some cultural situations he might be very unhappy, but he would continue to move toward becoming himself....

Such a person would, I believe, be recognized by the student of evolution as the type most likely to adapt and survive under changing environmental conditions. He would be able creatively to make sound adjustments to new as well as old conditions. He would be a fit vanguard of human evolution (p. 194).

The ability to see life as a process is in perfect keeping with The Power of Now (1999) written by modern mystic, Eckhart Tolle. The premise of his work is to escape from the prison of egocentric thinking, and to live fully in the ‘now’ unencumbered by the past or the future. If, says Tolle, we can open ourselves to the transformative experience of the moment, we will move toward spiritual enlightenment and survive the challenges that lie ahead.

Conclusion

These, then, are the qualities of heroes and heroines called upon during this stage of cultural evolution. As facilitators and advocates of a more enlightened and humane world community, we can take our place in their ranks if we raise our consciousness about the larger implications of our work. Honing the kind of presence called for by most of the philosophers, psychologists, and other visionaries quoted in this paper is of the utmost importance. Wilber (1996) reminds us that “the job of the humanistic therapist is to help the consenting ego begin its transformation upward. S/he will begin by pointing the individual toward a new way to translate reality — toward an underlying unity of self and world. The therapist,” says Wilber, “engages the language of the client’s higher self, and lives that language or form to the client
until the client lives it himself" (p.167). The same is true for all of us who strive to reach higher levels of human potential. If we accept the extraordinary weight and opportunity of this mandate, it will inspire those with whom we work to recognize their own opportunity to contribute to life-sustaining change on the planet earth.

Many groups and individuals (the Cultural Creatives, perhaps) have visions of a more humane world community. During this chaotic period we should be looking out for those who are committed to a better future for the world, and try to join forces rather than argue about whose way is the right way. Such arguments are part of the problem rather than the solution, and typify the model of relationship that has fostered the isolation and exploitation that characterize today’s planetary crisis. A message from the American (Hopi) Elders, downloaded from the Beshara Library website (2002), can help us find our way and stay strong.

There is a river flowing now, very fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid. They will try to hang on to the shore. They will feel they are being torn apart and will suffer greatly. The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the stream, keep our eyes open and our heads above the water. See who is there with you and celebrate....

The time of the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves. Banish the word ‘struggle’ from your attitude and your vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration. We are the ones we have been waiting for.

References


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