

PREFACE TO THE ESSENTIAL SPIRAL: Ecology and Consciousness After 9/11

Introduction

This book is written as a text for my television course on Ecology and Culture, which re-considers how our modern culture relates to its environment. An orthodox enquiry would examine other cultural adaptations and draw conclusions about ecosystem limits being breached, and how this can be repaired – if at all. Then one could look at the advocacy role of modern ecological thought and apply it to the consequences of our civilisation's adaptive capacities. After the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, I can no longer write this book in the way I had planned. This otherwise good strategy is now redundant, as the environment that all cultures, including our own, have to adapt to is one framed by fear, uncertainty, hatred and fanaticism. At no time in history has the lucidity of the peacemakers been more important. The skills and methods of cooling anger, of dealing with the terrorist within, of putting the brakes on anger's translation into deadly harm, are found in meditation traditions that I bring to the reader's attention with practical down to earth exercises and meditations

I also bring ecopsychology, ecosystems, traditional ecological knowledge and globalisation into a discussion of cultural processes that take the reader from Chief Seattle's alleged speech of 1854 to the World Trade Organisation and beyond – to the Tobin Tax and the reconfiguration of our global order. The events of September 11, 2001, shattered the illusory calm and assumptions upon which the present global order precariously rests, enabling a radical rethink to enter discourse, with respect to the new leadership required for the 21st century. I propose a meditative base for activism and renewal as the re-creation of our world requires a radical change in direction which involves shifts in human consciousness.

I examine this radical change from a perspective of personal experience as well as explicating what this alternative paradigm looks like in general. The Essential Spiral insists that Ecology and Consciousness are inseparable, akin to the double helix of DNA. To separate the double helix eliminates life. The same portent applies to Ecology and Consciousness, especially as we have the reality of September 11, 2001, in our face.

Chapters

One: Violence, Leadership and Ethics in the 21st Century

On September 11, 2001, the world changed following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the war footing that pits fundamentalist Islam on a collision course with western hegemony. The models of reaction drawn on by Western leaders are outmoded and belong to the cold war era of the 20th century. We are in the 21st century. New models of response are in order, new leadership is required that enables crises to be handled with equanimity and compassion to dissolve violence and hatred. Further killing simply creates more terrorists. Terrorists possess the mind and fill it with fear, anger and vengeance. We must refer to profound spiritual teachings to free the mind from terror

and other afflictions. I begin with an examination of the many levels of violence and terror, before broaching the topic of new leadership. New leadership emerges when ethics are rooted in spiritual practices that allow our true nature to be expressed. I establish that our true nature is that of truth, integrity and happiness, only we have to re-educate ourselves about this. First, by examining our compulsive and addictive behaviors, then by recognizing what we are truly seeking. We seek our true nature and that is where we will find the natural core of love, maturity and responsibility that constitutes a foundation for leadership in the new millennium. We open the doors to our true nature by turning inwards through meditation.

We learn to close the external doors to our illusions so that the inner door to the heart opens. The love, goodness and wisdom that arise from that location provide the foundation for leadership. We create the conditions for this to happen through silence, meditation and mindfulness practice, in the process of which we deeply heal the scars and wounds produced by fear and terror. I explore the interconnection between leadership qualities and ethics, and chart a path to a sense of internal freedom that can re-construct society with a different form of leadership, now essential for the 21st century. This leadership is sculpted from the deep experience of our true nature in meditation. This is how we re-educate the world.

I refer to the inspiration provided by Nelson Mandela, also to ethical guidelines as signposts for the spiritual traveler so that we know how to behave and honor our interconnectedness with everything. I like Greenpeace's motto of "We All Live Downstream!" This is how we become peacemakers, through deeply understanding the other we are in conflict with.

Two: The Art of Deep Listening

After September 11, 2001, I turned to the practice of Deep Listening to take care of my despair and anger. I remembered the practice of reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians during the summer retreat in Plum Village, 2001. This example of Deep Listening was a miracle of mindfulness, a blueprint for the new leadership required for the 21st century. A group of young Israelis and Palestinians were sponsored to spend time in Plum Village, France, the practice center established by Thich Nhat Hanh twenty years ago. Before talking to one another they practiced mindfulness together, walking meditation, sitting meditation and mindful meals. They had all left a war zone in the Middle East, yet with the practice of mindfulness they were able to arrive at a place of deep listening and learn that the others' suffering was their own.

In *The Art of Deep Listening*, I explore our ability to listen deeply and compassionately. In the modern world this is not a skill that is encouraged. We rarely listen and others do not listen to us, mostly because we have not been taught how to do so. The necessary training lies through finding calm and stillness within so that we can listen to the other rather than to our preconceived judgements. When we are fully present and listen to the other, especially our children, our energy can transform them and heal their deep hurts and neglect. We learn about full presence through meditation, which is the practice of

being with our true nature. Then it becomes easy to fully be with others. The Fourth Mindfulness Training of the Buddha about deep listening and compassionate speech provides a guideline. It directs us to examine our positive and negative seeds of experience, and encourages us to water the seeds of self-awareness, compassion and mindfulness. That is the practice that enables us to become internally strong and step forward as new leaders of the millennium.

I refer to Thich Nhat Hanh's clarity when he states that we have the right to be angry and to suffer, the right to feel overwhelmed by strong emotions, yet we do not have the right not to practice. Otherwise how can we become strong enough internally to deal with our feelings of anger, despair and hatred? To not practice is irresponsible for there are so many occasions when we need the positive seeds of mindfulness to take care of our distress. If these seeds are not strengthened, we cannot take care of our anger, despair and other deep hurts. And so we deteriorate, just as the world deteriorates. We have to put in the mileage with meditative practice as there is so much at stake within our selves, loved ones and the world.

I tell a story about the Buddha and Stopping then look further into the power of our words to either destroy or heal. If we cannot listen deeply, then we cannot speak kindly. So we must choose, and perhaps adopt *Listening Deeply, Speaking Compassionately* as the mantra for the new millennium. It is **us** who must provide the example of the benefits of meditation and thus heal the world. I provide a blueprint of the Buddha's Fourth Mindfulness Training in action for our modern civilization. The Buddha guides us to how we naturally are and provides a map to return there. We all have the ability to put our awareness into a different flow. The alternative is heavy sledding with our worst nightmares and traumas as travelling companions. Compassion and love are much easier to dance with.

Three: Nutriment For The Spiritual Journey

Violence is nurtured by habits of consumption engrained in our consciousness. That consciousness guides us throughout life. If we load it with toxins, hate and violence, we should not be surprised by what occupies the driving seat. If we fill our consciousness with nutriment that foster the energy of mindfulness, we can look forward to enjoying life with a different energy. Mindfulness is the energy of astute self-awareness. Lack of mindfulness is also energy, yet these two kinds of energy open different doors. The development of mindfulness through meditative practice, leads to further applications of mindfulness in all domains of life and society. But if we continue to say, think and do things from a state of non-mindfulness, then we automatically extend this energy to all we engage with. Thus we create disaster and suffering in all dimensions of life, society, and the environment. However, if we become aware of non-mindful acts, then we can come to a STOP with meditation. We stop the wrecking ball of negative energy by choosing to be aware and thereby open different doors for our actions. We do, however, need support for this journey, particularly in what we consume.

I discuss the Buddha's four kinds of nutriments – edible food, sense impression food, food of desire and consciousness food. I begin with the Buddha's *Son's Flesh Sutra* and end with a story about two wolves. The bottom line between these stories is that we must cultivate awareness about the consequences of our consumption, so that we do not create internal violence to our systems - or to the systems we interconnect with. I present edible food guidelines that seek harmony with nature and look at the body as a precisely tuned self-regulatory system that our food habits have pushed beyond the limits of good health. The chronic degenerative diseases that are commonplace in western civilization find their origins in the toxic food we consume.

The ecological “footprint” created by our habits of consumption is excessive, producing violence and cruelty to animals, to ourselves, and to the planet. This chapter deals directly with suffering and unhappiness generated by our consumption habits. The causes are identified as the desire cycles our ego-attachments enmesh us in. The solution is to de-identify with the desire process. I write about the incorrect perceptions we have of ourselves and of reality. To move out of this we must nurture the capacity to be with our true nature. Mindfulness and daily meditative practice are the keys to get out of this prison. Without such understanding we can never take steps to be free, remaining caught in the wrong identifications that allow attachments to entrap us in suffering. Meditation changes their energy, relocates us in heart consciousness, allows the wrong identifications and attachments to fall away, simply because there is no energy to sustain them. The goal of practice is to discover our true face. The intricate connections between eight levels of consciousness are explored to bring home the realization that how we feed them shapes our lives.

I illuminate the very dangerous environment we have created for ourselves; the insidious violence created through our desires and attachments, and the dangers of attachment to identity. I discuss the killing grounds of the Balkans and tell a story about Socrates, to demonstrate the trap of false identifications. When we discriminate against others we ultimately discriminate against our own internal Divinity. The point of touching on these examples is not to provide detailed accounts but to give reference points that strengthen the argument about instituting mindfulness practice into every level of modern society.

Four: Meditation For Gaia

It is difficult to come home to our true nature without discovering, from firsthand experience, how interconnected we are with everything. If we can stop discriminating against others, we can know wholeness. This is a life experience, not an intellectual construct. This is my hymn for the Earth. In *Meditation for Gaia* I reflect on childhood memories of nature walking me, of stretching time as I explored streams and meadows on my way to school. I still retain that childhood naivete about the web of life, though now it is more strategically placed. Nature has always been part of me and the immediacy of global ecological crises provides two considerations, which I refer to as Soft Edge, and Hard Edge arguments. The Soft Edge explores my consciousness. The Hard Edge examines the reality of drastic Earth changes, pointing to a different leadership to deal with issues of human adaptation that are scarcely comprehensible at this time. The thread

of changing consciousness is woven through both arguments. I reflect on the cybernetic lunacy of a global economy driven by the collective greed of corporations that operate without ethics, responsibility or accountability. I write about global warming and globalization, the ecology of ideas and new paradigms for the twenty first century. I note the ecological illiteracy and indifference of our leaders while knowing that “business as usual” is no longer an option. Yet my first choice is the stillness and silence of meditation. I write about why meditation provides the basis of my activism for Peace and the Environment. I touch upon mythology for guidance and know that the present global turmoil is a catalyst for a different leadership to emerge – one that has responsibility, compassion and integrity at its core. These qualities arise through the cultivation of mindfulness and meditative practice. We have inner work to do if we wish to hang out on this planet! This chapter is followed by two earth meditations.

Five: From Chief Seattle To Globalization

Chief Seattle’s 1854 speech represents a nature-based philosophy that speaks to ecosystem balance and a respectful, harmonious world. The degradation of this view lies in conditions that gave rise to elite processes, whereby a tiny minority gained control over political, commercial and financial domains, without reference to ecosystem integrity or to populations and cultures that got in the way. The collision course between the entrenchment of these elite processes and the rapidly deteriorating global ecosystem is the stage for the major dramas and wars of the twenty first century. The Ecology of Mind is outlined as a forerunner to Ecopsychology developing as the new discipline for the 21st century. Easter Island as the world writ small brings the issues of environmental degradation, violence and elites to center stage. The muddled models of ecology in anthropology evolved into an ecosystem approach by the turn of the century, and no longer prevent an understanding of the sweep of history.

Small scale societies – whether they were hunters and gatherers, pastoralist or simple horticulturalists – carefully managed their ecosystems in order to survive. They had to, otherwise they would die out and many did not survive. Yet for the most part, such a scale of society operated with a traditional ecological knowledge that enabled long term management strategies to adjust social organization to the resources available from the lived in ecosystem.

There were two main processes that disrupted the essential spiral of ecology and consciousness, and produced a highly complex, interconnected world that now pushes the global ecosystem beyond its limits of viability. One was the development of intensive agriculture and the predominance of power hungry elites, who sought to secure and entrench their special interests. The boundaries of ecosystem balance and productivity were not a consideration as states and empires grew, and frequently collapsed due to ecological deficiencies. The Neolithic Revolution and the development of intensive agriculture brought about cities, states, and empires – all with competing elite hierarchies.

The other major process that further disrupted the essential spiral between ecology and consciousness was the Industrial Revolution and the commercialization process.

Financial and commercial culture emerged out of the radical disruption initiated through the Industrial Revolution. It displaced political culture as the dominant paradigm. In the process of profit's bottom line, the global ecosystem is not a relevant variable and neither are the populations of developing countries, whose resources are coveted by western interests. The erosion of democracy and human rights, the degradation of peoples and the environment are byproducts of this process.

Chapter Six: At The Threshold

The notion of Ecology of Ideas is revisited as a necessary component to transform the present global ecosystem. A cursory brief on the nature of corporate culture is provided. The reader may not then be surprised by its cynical disregard for the planet and the peoples upon it. I emphasize that growth, development and globalization are cultural processes. Economic facts of life cannot be separated from culture. The subordination of science to economics occurs when such separation is institutionalized. As a civilization we are captivated by the illusion that science and technology will solve everything. The Ecology of Ideas is part of a counter-culture as scholars and civil society take steps in the 21st century to re-assert the control of political democracy over the dominance exercised by corporate culture. I examine the basis for change in terms of three major variables – ecosystem knowledge, structure of power and organization. The unifying factor for all three is changed consciousness, so that a new form of international linkage – of Interbeing - may emerge.

In the face of impending disaster, the twenty first century is witness to an incredible effort by civil society to restore what the Neolithic and Industrial Revolutions tore asunder. Not to turn the clock back to a fanciful golden era, but rather to initiate a different consciousness to better regulate humanity's affairs in this new century. This is the beginning of the Consciousness Revolution, which has been given tremendous impetus by the events of September 11, 2001 and their aftermath. This book is about rooting the Consciousness Revolution in mindfulness practice. Yet we must also be aware of the opportunism of corporate culture, as it uses the crisis of September 11, 2001, to subvert government further into its agenda.

At present the international scales of justice are tipped heavily in favor of corporate capital and mindless technological development. The economic models that support this are seriously flawed as they do not factor in environmental and cultural costs to their schematics for growth and continuing corporate control. Change, however, is slowly occurring as individuals and business heed the call for a Restorative Economy, and adopt different practices more in accord with the design wisdom of nature. A three point plan is proposed to re-orient global culture based on 1) The Tobin Tax; 2) Dismantling the World Trade Organization; and 3) Empowering the UN to regulate world trade. A reflective pause is introduced to usher in UNESCO's Manifesto 2000 and anticipate the next chapter. The final words of this chapter rest with Hildegard of Bingen.

Seven: Guidelines to Recreate Our World

9/11 frames our global environment with terror, violence and fear, yet is this so different from the many other levels of terror, violence and that fear we are associated with? From the everyday use of speech through mindless consumption to terrorism, we need an impetus from ethical guidelines to change how violence is presently nurtured worldwide.

At the other end of the spectrum there is the growing concern about the absence of Love and Compassion in daily life, in schools, at work, and in the healing professions. This preoccupies many citizens and scholars in the new millennium. These same issues were examined with great clarity and depth by the awakened mind of the Buddha 2600 years ago. His teachings are timeless, as relevant to the modern world as when first spoken. The Buddha talked in particular about a set of ethical guidelines – the Five Mindfulness Trainings – as a design for living. There are many ways to discuss them. *Guidelines To Recreate Our World* places an emphasis on global ecology, post Columbine violence in schools, and the 21st century war on terrorism, as contexts where these ethical principles can be applied. I make the point that we do not know how to behave and draw on the well of Buddhist ethics for guidance.

The consumption of violence by our children through the media, video games and internet can lead to the deadly carnage of high school shoot-outs and murder, because neither the children, their parents nor society at large pay attention to guarding their sensory doorways. I refer to *Taking The Fifth*. The Fifth referred to is not drawn from the American Constitution. It refers to the Fifth Mindfulness Training, in particular to the mindless consumption of violence through our senses and consciousness. I place this ethical guideline within the context of High School murders in Canada, the United States and Germany, identify the causes and conditions that fosters such violence, and provide simple meditation tools for high school children to take care of their distress and alienation without resort to guns. I also return to the theme of the first chapter – *Violence, Leadership and Ethics in the 21st Century* - to demonstrate that there is an antidote to violence and terror already in place, in terms of guiding our actions towards a more compassionate and effective outcome.

The Mindfulness Trainings are the antidote. They provide us with a template to nurture patterns of behavior and habits that are wholesome and generous. In other words we make mindfulness practice our new habit! This is the only way to deal with the potential terrorist that lurks deep within everyone's consciousness. To unravel the insidious internal knots caused by generations of ancestral habits, created from ignorance, vengeance and separation – this is the work of the new revolutionary of the 21st century - transforming terror and violence. It is not just a political and intellectual exercise, nor a matter of compromised treaties and cease fires. It is an internal transformation of consciousness at the very core of our being. It takes mindfulness to do this, and the Five Mindfulness Trainings provide the starting gate, a guidance system and a deep well of internal ethics to live by. Without them.....?

I choose not to go there as my commitment is to actualize these trainings in my life, and in the lives of others, to the best of my ability. That is my dance.

This chapter is followed by SO HUM, a meditation with internal tones, accompanied by a simple meditation for children to deal with their anger and hatred. These are examples of tools introduced into schools, post Columbine, to provide students with methods to deal with their distress, fears and hatreds. The same tools have an immediate application to the environment of terror, fear, hatred, and uncertainty, which encases the global population at present.

Conclusion

“The Essential Spiral” is not a candidate for intellectual sophistry or for theological nicety. As a set of signposts it may be valuable if the signposts are not held on to after their usefulness is exhausted. It is the reader’s inner experience as a result of the words that is truly worthwhile. This kind of self-knowledge lies beyond the formulas found in books and the intellectual constructions of clever talk. If you cling to a formula in the mistaken belief that it holds the truth, then be prepared for disappointment. Formulas for truth expand into rigidly held beliefs, which deny reality as it is. This leads to an escape that is particular and strategic. The escape is from knowing and experiencing the energy of inner consciousness, of mindfulness – of being with God. When these dependencies are abandoned through trust in your inner journey of meditation, then celebrate what has always resided within. This is what I hope the reader will reconcile with as a viable strategy for our times, so that readers, citizens and leaders are equipped with the tools that can generate understanding, compassion and non-violent reconciliation.

This is why I wrote “The Essential Spiral – Ecology and Consciousness After 9/11.” I call for a Consciousness Revolution grounded in mindfulness practice. If my words make sense and lead you to practice what they imply, then inner meaning can lead to transformation in your own life and in the life of the world. The meditations described in *The Essential Spiral* are ones I have practiced to good effect. They represent only a tiny subset of what is available. See for yourself which practices speak to your needs, circumstances, fears and hatreds.

All that is required is that you show up for life and live it fully in each moment of present awareness, not just on your meditation cushion – but in life. That is where we become peacemakers, recognize our interconnectedness, and where we gain the strength to take our mindfulness out into the world. That is where we transform the world.

Your own experience of inner truth, of your true nature, is the warp and weft of the universal tapestry; the seeing of sound in falling snowflakes; the texture of wind in leaves at moonlight; the feeling of *Being Love*, the symphony of song in a mountain stream. All that is required is that you show up for life in each moment and be an agent of the consciousness revolution. All that is required is that you do it now.