

SECTION II

A MOVEMENT TOWARDS PLANETARY CONSCIOUSNESS

INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter we attempted to convey the significant impact upon individual and social perspectives and motives of the realization of Oneness and interconnectedness, illustrated through the example of the space explorers--Russian and American. Theirs was an intuitive insight, induced by their unique experience, into their own deep inner sense of truth, that opened or expanded their perception of reality to transcend the deeply ingrained belief systems of our contemporary society. Many referred to it as spiritual, aesthetic, or even mystical experience--beyond what science considers legitimate sensorial and rational perception.

But precisely because it was so challenging to the dominant scientific and religious doctrines, this subjective experience was often reduced by others to more familiar or legitimate phenomena or else simply ignored or dismissed as delusion.¹

Yet, not only were space explorers alleging important aspects of human experience that science and organized religion seemed to miss, but also many others, perhaps less notable and less noticed, were beginning to claim subjective intuitive experiences that provided previously unrecognized knowledge about life and reality.

Many of the "consciousness movements" of the sixties and early seventies did indeed reflect this trend toward the discovery and increasing legitimation of "inner experiences" that were in striking contrast to what many perceived to be the prevailing emptiness, rigidity and lifelessness of preceding and contemporary generations. Many started drawing from their personal experiences to motivate them in their new social behavior and turned their attention "outward", so to speak, actively and vocally, in an attempt to create lives and opportunities more in keeping with their new perspectives. Some aspects of "the new left"--the free speech movement, anti-war activism, the second wave of feminism (in the early seventies), the budding ecological movement, the

dawning gay movement, for example, can be understood from this perspective. One strong common aspect of these various social trends is that they were dealing with consciousness and with values. They were quite forceful and vocal for over two decades and, though their influence may be felt in various areas of public and private life, they seem to have had little or no significant impact within the major power structures of our society. For many participants in the new "movement" and for many of the following generations, there is and continues to be disappointment, heartache, and outright skepticism about the possibility of truly impacting the system and of having a safe, or even meaningfully creative, life.

There were many who were experiencing a *cognitive* shift, a shift in perception in a most literal sense, in which they encountered a more intuitive mode of being and of knowing which not only *felt* good but also revealed a truly holistic picture of reality. Arriving at their new insights through various and diverse routes, they came to regard the prevailing assumption of separateness fostered and maintained by our dominant worldview as no more than a tragic illusion. During the sixties, an increasing number of people were reporting experiencing a sense of "no boundaries," of unitive consciousness--a sense of a merging of self and others, human or otherwise. This was manifested in a growing popular interest in such areas as Eastern religious philosophies, yoga and meditation, channelling, near-death experiences, imagery approaches to healing and education, and mind-over-body phenomena such as psychic healings, psychedelic experiences, or paranormal phenomena. People among this population began talking about telepathy, premonitions, channeling and similar effects of the shift in perception (the permeability of boundaries) that they claimed to be experiencing, and about changed views regarding more ordinary experiences such as volition, intention, conscious awareness and selective attention.²

Willis Harman (see interview and discussion below) refers to this viewpoint shift as a "quiet rebellion", wherein, in a very direct and personal way, the whole

metaphysical and epistemological basis of our society is being challenged. Some aspects of this "rebellion" did indeed take cultish or bizarre forms. (as discussed in a following chapter), and many expressions, though recognized as a normal part of human experience by most traditional societies of the world, were simply seen as odd or aberrant from within the dominant scientific Weltanschauung.

Of course, this phenomenon did not start during the sixties nor in California nor in the United States, but it is as old, no doubt, as human life itself. As a contemporary empirical phenomenon of the San Francisco Bay area (and, to some extent, of the United States), however, it has traceable, roots in California in the fifties and forties and, perhaps, even earlier.

This section focuses on the developmental process of this planetary consciousness before and during the 1960s and 1970s describing how different people in the San Francisco Bay area came to their unitive insights within the context of their personal histories. I wish to stay as close as possible to the deeply experiential nature of this transformation and its highly idiosyncratic characteristics for the people involved. I also wish to convey that this transformation is indeed a process, highly dynamic and fluid. With these objectives, I will proceed by way of presenting a few brief selected life histories of people in the San Francisco Bay Area who are involved in the new emerging planetary consciousness.

Though representative, in many ways, of the depth and richness of this new-consciousness phenomenon, these selected personal profiles cannot, of course, constitute a complete portrayal of the emerging new movement and its population. Such a task would indeed require hundreds of individual histories. Rather, these selections are intended to illustrate a general trend and process in the development of this planetary consciousness and some significant aspects and attributes of experience that spawn and support it. Considered collectively, they imply a conscious recognition of the holistic

nature of life, and an attendant sense of connectedness and compassion. "The whole idea of compassion", Thomas Merton says, "is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another and all involved in one another."³

Such an awareness, among those of the emerging planetary consciousness, comes about with a shift in attitude, in "an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole" (Fromm, 1963⁴). From this perspective, their attitude is a striving towards a mature, and not sentimental, love--towards overcoming human separateness and attempting to honor that universal human longing for union spoken of by philosophers, mystics, and psychologists of all times. Fromm maintains that this is a syndrome of attitudes to be found in the mature person who "only wants to have that which he has worked for, who has given up his narcissistic dreams of omniscience and omnipotence, who has acquired humility based on the inner strength which only genuine productive activity can give." (Fromm, 1963⁵). This sort of attitude is seen by people involved in this transformation as conducive to a more effective and meaningful participation in the world.

From another perspective (Capra, 1983⁶) people involved in the new emerging planetary consciousness adopt a new vision of reality, a *systems* view of life, which is also based upon the essential interrelatedness and interconnectedness of all phenomena--physical, biological, mental, social, cultural and spiritual. As such, it is a vision that transcends current cultural, disciplinary, and conceptual boundaries evolving along with new organizations and institutions. Given the strong experiential nature of this phenomena, many individuals, communities, and networks of people in the world and in the San Francisco Bay area are now developing new ways of thinking and being and are organizing themselves according to these emerging principles.

For example, these people tend to be oriented toward developing in their own lives a balance between their physical, emotional and mental health, their interpersonal

relationships, their work life, their contributions to their communities, their relationship with nature, their leisure and creative self expression, and their sociopolitical responsibilities. In this meaning, the process involved is an expansion of consciousness and sense of *self* incorporating a multidimensionality of life. Some people are devoted to various forms of service that may range widely from, for example, peace activism on an international level to working for the homeless to caring for a dying person. Others are in the emerging field of holistic health, which is a manifestation of the growing awareness of the interconnectedness of the body, the mind, the emotions, and the environment--and from this holistic perspective, there is not even such a concept as the isolated, individual enjoyment of personal optimum health.

Other areas that highlight the emerging systems view of life include ecological awareness and eco-feminism which speak to the core of the interrelatedness of all natural phenomena, human and non-human. The concept of "person/planet"⁷ expresses this basic interdependence for optimal survival. The growing awareness of and consideration for the biosphere on the part of this population, for example, is an indication of the compassion and responsibility that comes with this expanded awareness. So is the emphasis on building support networks, and communities.

In this sense of collectively, incorporating all areas of experience, the emerging planetary consciousness is a holistic phenomenon. This process is holistic also in the sense that people draw in their daily lives and practices from truly trans-disciplinary and cross-cultural sources. They draw insights from science, mysticism, personal experience, body signals, intuition, and politics, and they draw from among any available culture or tradition. Thus they acquire a wealth of integrated combinations including Western technology, Eastern philosophies, shamanic traditions, and ancient mythologies. Among those engaged in physical development, for example, one can observe people engaged in the practice of aerobic exercises, Eastern martial arts, yoga, various holistic diets, herbs, etc. People may be observed developing psychological

self-awareness by way of Western psychotherapy, Eastern meditation, or creative self-expression; or they may be involved in spiritual development practices such as various ceremonies, religious traditions, pagan rituals, meditation, vision quests, shamanic journeys, and many others.

During the 1960s and the 1970s, we witnessed different people in the San Francisco Bay area specializing in different forms or practices such as holistic health, community building, psychological self-awareness, physical fitness and health, political activism, or spiritual development. Now, increasingly, we see in the same people a converging and combining of these various forms and practices into a multidimensional and integrated daily life process.

People involved in this transformation of consciousness display such a wide array of behavioral diversity that untrained external observers tend often to fail to recognize the basic unifying thread that underlies it. Most observers tend to focus their descriptions and interpretations on isolated behaviors, such as psychological development or spiritual practices, presenting a picture that is reductionistic at best, or else to trivialize it.⁸ The mutual interrelationship between all aspects and areas of their lives, as it is expressed in the lifestyles of people experiencing this emerging consciousness is, in my opinion, a key factor in the nature and impact of the transformation.

I have selected people that seem to be typical of the manifestation of this consciousness. Each, in his or her own way, with his or her own individual experience, can be taken to be significantly typical of this transformative process in general. I met them through my involvement both as a participant and as an observer. Some of them are well known beyond their own inner circles of activity, articulating their experience for the benefit of others, helping to map out the new terrain, so to speak. Others are grassroots people, perhaps with less public recognition, but nevertheless with remarkable commitment and adeptness in this transformative process. Collectively,

they represent major *themes* that are salient in the emergence of this planetary consciousness. Among these representatives we will see, for example, a transcending of the contemporary linear positivistic scientific paradigm, and an integration of intuition, experience and mysticism into a new construction of reality. We will see among these people a profound transformation of their experienced boundaries of self and a strong sense of caring and voluntary responsibility manifesting in life-preserving behavior such as activism in the areas of ecology, peace and civil rights.

¹ For discussions of the dominant scientific paradigm and exclusion of inner experience see: Willis Harman, Ph.D. and Howard Rheingold, *Higher Creativity. Liberating the Unconscious for Breakthrough Insights*. An Institute of Noetic Sciences Book. (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc. 1984); Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point. Science, Society, and the Rising Culture*. (Toronto, New York, London, Sydney, Auckland: Bantam Books, 1983), and Stanislav Grof, ed. *Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science*. (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1984).

² Willis Harman, "Participative Wholes and Autonomous Parts: The Organism Metaphor in Science and Societal change." *From Organization to Organism*, (Forres, Scotland: Findhorn Foundation, 1987). pp.9-26.

³ Thomas Merton, "Marxism and Monastic Perspectives", in John Moffitt, ed., *A New Charter for Monasticism*. (Notre Dame: 1970), p. 80. (Quoted in Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing*, (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear and Company, 1983). p.277.

⁴ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 1956. (Bantam Books, 1963). p.23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.27

⁶ Fritjof Capra, *op. cit.*, p.265.

⁷ see Theodore Roszak, *Person-Planet: The Creative Disintegration of Industrial Society*. (Anchor/Doubleday, 1978).

⁸ See Charles Y. Glock and Robert N. Bellah, eds., *The New Religious Consciousness*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1976), and also Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism. American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations*. (New York: Warner Books, 1979).