

Coming of Age in the Heart

Cultural Evolution and the Initiation of Our Time

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The human race is reaching a critical turning point. On center stage, world events focus attention like never before. Dramas that were once local have now become global. The audience stirs, over six billion strong and still growing exponentially, peeking out from every corner of the globe. Some watch anxiously, with baited breath, others are still sleeping or barely awake, still rubbing their eyes. From living room televisions, car radios, newspapers, magazines, and the World Wide Web, countless individuals are drawn toward the unfolding collective drama, bearing witness to humanity's current rite of passage.

As we meet for coffee, for dinner, for walks, business meetings, or romantic dates, the conversation buzzes, like an audience murmuring between acts. What will happen next? What should be done? What's wrong? Who's right? How do we find our way through? Even those who live outside the theater, far removed from the continual broadcast of western civilization – they too are impacted by the actions taking place on center stage.

As are we all.

In the theater of the world, we are simultaneously audience and cast, playing our scenes to an instantaneous feedback system that continually shows us our reflection. But rather than the image of a single character, we are witness to a global tapestry, weaving itself into a new picture. Its threads, spun from archaic forces long ago, have been woven together by the myths, legends and heroic deeds of our ancestors. To weave a new picture, we must engage these forces and take them into our own hands – with maturity, understand-

ing, and most of all – *with heart*. For those of us alive at this time – whether we like it or not – are undergoing a *rite of passage into the next era of civilization*.

To understand the new picture and find direction for these trying times, we must inquire into the essential questions asked by myths of all ages: *Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?* It is these questions that give meaning to the drama, revealing the genius behind its many layers. Here we find crucial instructions, not only for our personal struggles, but also for the larger story of what we are becoming together – as a growing collective entity, living on a finite jewel of a planet, maturing into the parents of the future.

Who Are We?

We enter the scene in the present moment, well into the show, suspended in a diff hanger between the third and fourth acts. In the drama thus far, humans have become an astounding race of creatures unlike any other. Birthed from the primal womb of nature, billions of years in gestation, we have now risen out of Stone Age infancy, crawled across the land in teeming toddlerhood, and labored through five thousand years of sibling rivalry, to emerge at the present time in the tumultuous throes of adolescence. Highly powerful but still not mature, we stand poised between epic creation and potential annihilation, equally capable of either.

Issues of power and love, war and peace, prosperity and consumption, freedom and tyranny, individual rights and community needs hang unresolved in our

story. While none of these issues are new, it is only recently that they have global consequences, impacting our survival into the future. Though it is a time of unprecedented change, major players in this drama still read from outdated scripts that no longer serve our present needs, let alone those of the future. The curtain is rising upon the next act.

As the scene opens, we find an adolescent race entering into a monumental rite of passage, undergoing an initiatory process into adulthood. Like an adolescent, we have reached adult size in our population and do not have room to grow much further. We have gained tremendous power, yet still naively expect that Mother Nature and the powerful Daddy at the helm will continue to take care of us, even as we struggle against their control. Our entertainment is adolescent: flashy and fast moving, focused on cars, sex, and shoot 'em up power contests.

Unlike tribal initiations at the hands of wise elders, *there are no elders who have already been where we are headed* - into a way of life that has never before existed. Instead, we are being initiated by the byproducts and demands of our own civilization, bringing us blinding paradox at every turn. We are witness to our own creation of heroic achievement and environmental destruction, caught between the ability to splice genes and the inability to feed the hungry. The agents of our initiation broadcast realities into our living rooms, from local snipers in our neighborhood to bombs dropped on the other side of the globe. They appear as data on the information highways that tell us our world is in danger, and news media that keep us preoccupied with stories of mass distraction. They come from transportation systems that mingle cultures from all over the planet and threaten us with terrorism in our own backyard. They come from the possibility of nuclear disaster, environmental collapse, genetic modification, global warming, unchecked population growth, and a technology that is loading real time technicolor into the global brain and taking it to the stars.

As forces compress humanity into an ever smaller world, there is nowhere to escape the

increasingly insistent challenge to our adolescent lifestyle. In every walk of society, we are being asked to wake up, to mature, to come of age as a species. As it is for initiates, the ultimatum is written on every wall: *transform or die*.

The old story of warring empires struggling for dominance must give way to a new myth of cooperative interdependence. An era of the heart, based on integration, compassion, and community is essential if we are to survive into the future. This is our collective rite of passage. It takes us from opposition to synthesis, competition to cooperation, separation to integration, and most importantly: *from the love of power to the power of love*.

What does it mean to "come of age" as a species? How do we outgrow dependent childhood and adolescent rebellion to grow into productive maturity? How do we create the necessary transformation? And how do we make sense of what we've done in the past, so to better understand what we must do now? Carl Jung said that we become enlightened by making the darkness conscious. Our culture is caught in the shadow of our own blinding light. Our history is our collective unconscious. To truly come of age, we must understand the developmental dynamics of our past, in order to weave these threads into a vision fit for the future.

Where did We Come from?

To answer this question is to examine the archetypal dynamics that ruled previous ages. Here we discover that our collective history mirrors the progression of childhood development, as well as the unfolding of the levels of conscious evolution described in the yoga tradition, represented by the chakra system.¹

Stage One: The Great Mother (approx. 30,000–7,000 BCE).

Life first emerges from the mother. Here we find an awakening of consciousness in the Paleolithic Stone Age (though this era could be seen as starting much earlier), an era that corresponds to the infancy of civilization. Like the newborn child, we began in symbiotic enmesh-

ment with the forces of Mother Nature. Like the child who cannot move too far away from the mother and still survive, humanity was bound to the cycles of nature, unable to deviate from them and still survive. We were earthbound for our survival, following the wild game and collecting plants where they grew, living in caves and makeshift structures, traveling across the land in small tribes. Embeddedness in Nature represents the primal *thesis*, from which all life has evolved. The collective intelligence of this age was focused on *survival*, the consciousness level of the first chakra, whose element is earth.

Stage Two: The Mother/Son (approx. 9,000 - 3,000 BCE).

This stage is marked by the development of agriculture and trade by sea. Its archetypal motif is the dynamic between the Great Mother and her young Son, who is growing out of infancy, but still in a toddler phase. (In some iconography the motif of son and lover overlapped as one.) This era focused on community building, farming, and animal husbandry, with a peaceful religion still centered around the reign of the Great Mother and the cycles of Nature. This era reflects the focus on sexuality and procreation, related to the water element of chakra two. Fertility and birth were revered, which resulted in exponential population growth. This created new challenges in social coordination and necessitated the higher organization of the next era.

Stage Three: The Dynamic Masculine, (app. 3,000 BCE, to the birth of Christ).

As population expanded, land and water rights became the cause of wars and skirmishes, resulting in a militaristic society based on hierarchical rule. This period is typified by the patriarchal domination that overthrew the Great Mother and forced higher levels of organization through the development of human power structures. It is marked by the use of fire to forge metals and make weapons, the beginnings of technology, sacred kingships, city-state politics, and territorial expansion through violence and warfare. The archetypal motif reflected here is exemplified by the maturing Son who

breaks away from the Mother and transforms the cultural values of the previous era into their complete opposite, *creating an antithesis to the original thesis*. Thus the power to kill held more influence over behavior than the power of birth. Heaven was holy, earth was profane, men ruled, women were subordinate. This age, corresponding to the third chakra element of fire, brought us power, technology, individual will, and personal freedom, along with its shadow of destruction, violence, domination, and environmental pollution. It pulled us away from our basic thesis, in order to make a new polarity, but in this pulling away, we lost vital parts of our roots.

Stage Four: The Christian Era (birth of Christ to present).

This fourth and most recent stage contrasts and balances the Mother/Son-lover motif with the archetypes of the Great Father and his wife whose status was diminished to that of a daughter. In this way the values that were antithetical to our basic nature became the central values of our current era. All that was holy in the earlier phases: nature, the feminine, the body, sexuality, emotion and and worship of Nature became repressed or marginalized, while "higher" values were placed on the masculine aspects of mind, spirit, control, aggression, technology, militarism, and institutionalized power. Clearly these values still hold predominance today.

The Christian era, with its tenet that "God is Love" began as a much needed attempt to get to the heart, or fourth chakra, but one that failed to achieve that goal because it arose in a paradigm of separation between essential aspects of our wholeness. It didn't foster equal relationships between the powers of heaven *and* earth, mind *and* body, male *and* female, but instead overvalued one at the cost of the other. Rejecting half of humanity and the reality of our physically embodied and ecologically embedded lives cannot lead to unification or to a true paradigm of the heart. Furthermore, enforcing this great separation requires a state of internal warfare: mind at the expense of body, rules at the expense of instinct, obedience at the expense of empowerment.

When essential aspects of the psyche are repressed, their shadow becomes projected onto others. The Crusades, the Inquisition, and the often brutal dominance of indigenous cultures by Christian missionaries, disguised as they were in moral righteousness, can hardly be seen as fostering the compassionate love of the heart. This dualism wastes precious energy in struggle, whether it be between nations, races, religious beliefs or political parties.

Where Are We Going?

In all of our past mythologies humans have been in a childlike position to parental gods. This creates an infantile expectation to be taken care of, to follow rigorous parental codes without question, and to engage in collective sibling rivalry over whose god is right, the basis of many wars. While it is certainly important to retain humility in light of divine forces, we have failed until now to employ a mythology that encourages *balanced partnership between the genders and a co-creative relationship with the divine*. Represented by the Sacred Marriage, or *hierosgamos*, this new archetype, as a symbol of balance and integration, emerges as the guiding archetype for our present era. Its symbol, two intersecting triangles, is coincidentally the same symbol within the heart chakra as drawn in the Tantric texts.

Having experienced the original *thesis* grounded in the archetypal Mother, followed by its *antithesis*, experienced through the masculine Father, the time is now ripe for a new and higher *synthesis*. We are no longer helpless children in the ever abundant garden of Eden where Mother and Father supply our every wish. We are now ready to meet each other as equals, just as adolescents begin to form equal relationships between the genders. But like adolescents, we are still clumsy at relationships and too egocentric to really love. We have barely awakened our hearts.

The intersecting triangles of the heart chakra imply that it is the great *integrator* whose chief property is one of balance: balance between above and below, mind and body, masculine and feminine, heaven and earth. This means we must place equal spiritual value on

the beauty of the earth and the power of nature as we do on a transcendent God, denying neither. Only then can we address environmental challenges that are essential for our survival. We must reclaim the rejected body as an undeniable aspect of health, equal to the powers of the mind. Only then can we live healthy and embodied lives. We must integrate the values of the feminine along with the masculine, valuing the distinct offerings of each gender. This means valuing both rational and intuitive modes of thinking, both structure and process in organization, both thinking and feeling in our experience, and both progress and sustainability in our civilization. Just like a window or a drawer becomes stuck when one side is more advanced than the other, we must achieve this balance in order to move forward into the future.

Awakening the Global Heart

Lasting transformation cannot be generated by fear, guilt, or control, but must come from a true inspiration of the heart – literally from the act of falling in love, perhaps the most transformative experience a person can have. When we truly love something, we care for it willingly, even joyfully, such as we do for our children or mates. Can we fall back in love with our world?

In walling ourselves off from nature, as we did for the purpose of defense during the third chakra stage of sibling rivalry, we reduced the world around us to something "other," to an inanimate thing, devoid of spiritual value, a view which became crystallized during the "enlightenment" of the 17th century. This created an "I-it" relationship with nature and with each other. From the slaves of distant times to the exploitation of the environment, we inspected, dissected, used and abused, without regard to the subjective experience of the other. We can worship inanimate things as idols, but this is not love. For love requires that we recognize the sacred subjectivity of the "other." In this way we move beneath the surface, to the interior of another being, culture, or ecosystem. It is through this depth that we mature.

As expressed by the late systems theorist, Erich Jantsch, the *I-it* relationship is a product of rational thinking, as in documenting the scientific details of an ecosystem or a population. It is objective, full of information, but devoid of meaning, which can only be arrived at by looking at the whole. By contrast, the *I-thou* relationship is mythic, emerging not from details but from the essence. When we experience the world around us as "thou" we touch its numinous quality. Then we can love something for its own sake rather than purely selfish interests. This kind of love seeks to preserve rather than exploit. From the *I-thou* perspective, we see our world as a living entity, and this mythos gives us new meaning and purpose. Only then we can grow into the co-creative evolution of a collective "we."²

In order to truly love we must heal the heart by reclaiming what has been rejected and neglected. We need to integrate the values of psyche and of society that have created division rather than unification. This integration occurs through the realm of relationship, for the *act of relating* creates compassion and awakens the heart. We are less likely to harm something to which we relate, just as we are not likely to eat the family cat, even if we otherwise eat meat from the market. As we learn about other cultures, other environments, other ways of being, awareness begets relationship and offsets harm.

This requires compassion and empathy, essential aspects of the heart chakra. Empathy develops when we acknowledge our wounds, our shadow, and reclaim the feeling function that allows us to "feel with" another. Empathy allows us to move from an *I-it* relationship, into an experience of *I-Thou*, a realization of the other as equally sacred.

This is where the role of initiation comes in. Initiation breaks down the narrow minded arrogance of adolescence and opens a larger vista. Initiation often begins with a wound or loss that strips us of our innocence and develops empathy. The events that destroyed New York's World Trade Center on 9/11/01 can be seen as an initiatory wound for the U.S., one that opened many people's hearts to the larger matrix of suffering that exists and is even

caused by the hidden shadow of U.S. foreign policies. Despite the governmental decisions to repeat the tragedy of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, there has been a deeper outcry against these wars with larger peace marches and more public discussion than has ever occurred in history. This outcry was not just among Americans but occurred worldwide. Such awakening is clearly not coming from the dictates of the father at the helm, but from the growing population of individuals who are awake enough to have empathy and caring for the innocent victims of war on the other side of the globe.

Such a longing for peace reflects the Sanskrit name of the heart chakra, *Anahata*, which means, "sound that is made without any two things striking." When we have at last risen beyond the constant struggle of opposing forces, both within and without, the energies previously spent in defense, destruction, and control can then be harvested for building a more cooperative and enlightened world.

It is in crisis that we are confronted with the loss of what we have denied. It is through initiation that we are stripped of our old way of being and launched into a larger vision. From the initiatory wounds of the 9/11 disaster in the U.S., to the floods, famines, and fires that ravage people's lives, humanity is faced with threats that are breaking down barriers of separation and forcing community cooperation. Our problems are too overwhelming to solve in any single aspect of society, but must be confronted with a whole systems approach, bringing all aspects of our world back into *relationship* with each other

As the essential feedback mechanism in an evolving system, our media can enhance or inhibit the awakening of the global heart. We can view sensationalist stories of celebrity sexcapades and numb our senses with constant violence or we can witness the reality of nature and our fellow humans as they are: beautiful, exotic, precious, and seriously threatened. It has long been said that the truth will set us free, and it is the job of the media to broadcast truth into the homes and hearts of every global citizen. Unfortunately, public media is often distorted, like a funhouse mirror, giving us an inac-

curate picture of our collective reality. But beneath the increase of reporting on violence, crime has declined by half, social organizations with altruistic goals have increased exponentially, and the quality of life continues to improve globally, even while others lag behind. Fortunately the World Wide Web and the instantaneous availability of information can foster networking and reorganization on a global scale, at least in the developed world. For it is the developed world that has the capacity to save or damn our future.

Even in these wee hours of the dawning, there many of us who are awakening from slumber. We are becoming repossessed by the sacred instead of dispossessed by its lack. We are bringing ourselves into deeper and more informed relationships with both self and others. Our vision is weaving a new tapestry of healing and restoration.

When the global brain achieves the self-reflective consciousness that allows us to see both the light and the shadow of our world, we will awaken the passion of the global heart. With open hearts we enter the adult realm of the world community. As global citizens, we become cellular elements beating in unison with the soul of the world itself. This is the task of our initiation, but we must undergo the rite to discover the mystery.

Correspondence

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Notes

1. For more on charkas and developmental stages of childhood, see *Eastern Body, Western Mind: Psychology and the Chakra System as a Path to the Self*. Anodea Judith, Celestial Arts, 1997.
2. Erich Jantsch, *Design for Evolution*.