

# A NEW CULTURE

## ESCAPE

When we get out of the glass bottles of our ego,  
and when we escape like squirrels turning in the  
cages of our personality  
and get into the forests again,  
we shall shiver with cold and fright  
but things will happen to us  
so that we don't know ourselves.

Cool, unlying life will rush in,  
and passion will make our bodies taut with power,  
we shall stamp our feet with new power  
and old things will fall down,  
we shall laugh, and institutions will curl up like  
burnt paper

**D.H. Lawrence**

The concept of culture is very complicated, and the word has many meanings, though it is most commonly used in three ways.

- Excellence of taste in the fine arts and humanities, also known as *high culture*.
- An integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior, based on values, principles and related goals.
- A story of origins and the unfolding process of life – a functional cosmology – that provides essential meaning and purpose.

Each of these reflects a level or stage of the human process where each is founded on and expresses the previous. Thus an integrated pattern of knowledge and behavior and the values that are its base, is founded on the meaning and purpose that a shared story offers, while *high culture* represents the ideal or epitome of the previous two.

There are three forces that impact and shape a culture: religion, science and experience or circumstances. Experience refers to individual and collective interactions with the world, while science reflects the knowledge that is born of this experience, and religion offers meaning and purpose derived from both. Together they create the culture that holds the group together and also enables the members of the culture (and the culture itself) to change and evolve in the face of new challenges and in the light of new knowledge.

Culture, in short, is like the soil that enables seeds to germinate and grow. In this case, the seeds are human individuals and human institutions, and, like soil, culture needs to

be cultivated so that it can better serve its task. So, if the individuals and institutions of a culture are unhealthy, it is the culture that needs to be examined and renewed first, and not simply the institutions or the individuals who serve them.

This work begins at the most basic level with the outlook, attitudes, values, moral goals, etc. that are themselves founded on and born of the essential experience of interconnectedness with the world. So, the work of renewal is always initially about fostering this experience of interconnectedness, followed by a deepening of our understanding of this experience, and the creation or discovery of shared understanding about the implications of this interconnectedness for individual and collective life.

Today we live in a world without an appropriate or adequate culture. In the past, people lived in many cultures that were separate and interacted mostly only for the purpose of survival, often through conflict. This situation has changed radically and over a relatively short period of time and we now live in global world, with global knowledge and global challenges but without an adequate global culture that offers a shared story to provide a sense of meaning and purpose or an adequate morality that would enable us to adapt and respond appropriately to the things we encounter. As a result we flounder in a sea of increasing confusion and fragmentation that threatens to destroy us all.

We desperately – and urgently – need a new culture that reflects our global circumstances and provides expanded values, principles, beliefs and structures, and a new *high culture* that would deepen and refine these values and beliefs. We need a new culture to generate a new human civilization.

In the past, religion was the main source of meaning and purpose that would inform our principles and values and the morality that came from them. But institutional religion, like all the institutions of our society, has itself been shaped by an old, increasingly inadequate culture and has also lost its way. As a result it has been slow, or unable to take up this fundamental task.

What we need, then is a new – interim, perhaps – religion to do this work. We similarly need interim or temporary institutions to address our various human needs of governance, business, agriculture, healthcare, education, law, etc.

In the case of religion, Christianity might take inspiration from its Jewish heritage of re-interpreting tradition in the light of new challenges and new knowledge, though realizing that tradition is not to be confined to the archives of our religious institutions but includes also the arts and other forms of inspiration or revelation in the broadest sense.

Mindfulness Dialogue, with its ability to interact deeply with skill offers a method for this work. Mindfulness Dialogue brings together the practice Mindfulness with the skills of Dialogue in a way that enables us to interact skillfully at deeper levels: to be present with empathy, to understand with self-awareness, and to build with creativity. This

method implies – demands – personal practice of the related skills. It also provides a model that uses these skills for doing the work.<sup>1</sup> Rumi touches on the heart of the process:

**NOT HERE**

There's courage involved if you want  
to become truth. There is a broken

open place in a lover. Where are  
those qualities of bravery and sharp

compassion in this group? What's the  
use of old and frozen thought? I want

a howling hurt. This is not a treasury  
where gold is stored; this is for copper.

We alchemists look for talent that  
can heat up and change. Lukewarm

won't do. Half-hearted, holding back,  
well-enough getting by? Not here.

**Rumi**

This work is the 'great work' of our time, which has been described as redefining the human at the deepest – species – level. Doing so would generate the new culture that we need as the foundation for every aspect of our interaction with each other and the many others with whom we share this planet: values and principles, laws and policies, structures and institutions – our essential morality.

The central Christian concept of 'resurrection' can be stretched, as it were, in a way that will provide a framework of meaning and purpose for this redefining work. Some theologians have described resurrection as the way of all things: becoming through entropy; dying into new life. This theme is reflected in many other religious traditions but also in modern science. As such it provides a potential starting point for a Mindfulness Dialogue.

The process would need to engage all the stakeholders, including not only every human perspective but also all other forms of life that share our common home of earth. I can imagine strategies for this Mindfulness-Dialogue process that might begin with and focus on a global declaration of rights and responsibilities. We have such a declaration in

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<sup>1</sup> Mindfulness-Dialogue consists of adding mindfulness to the three stages of Dialogue: Connecting, Exploring and Discovering.

the existing Earth Charter that I contributed to in its early stages (see Appendix). Such strategies would promote Earth Charter-based Mindfulness Dialogues in every place of learning, in every place of government and in every forum from agriculture to healthcare and from law to business. Such a process is clearly quite imaginable but will require some form of catalyst and inspirational leadership to initiate and support it.

The remaining questions are simply: if not now, then when, and, if not us, then who?

The rising hills, the slopes,  
of statistics  
lie before us.  
The steep climb  
of everything, going up,  
up, as we all  
go down.

In the next century  
or the one beyond that,  
they say,  
are valleys, pastures,  
we can meet there in peace  
if we make it.

To climb these coming crests  
one word to you, to  
you and your children:

*stay together*  
*learn the flowers*  
*go light.*  
**Gary Snyder**

***Danny Martin***  
***April 27, 2019***

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **THE EARTH CHARTER PREAMBLE**

I am because we are.

The crisis we face today is a spiritual one:

We have forgotten who we are  
We have lost our sense of wonder  
We have degraded the Earth  
We have exploited our fellow creatures

And we have nowhere else to go.

In our ignorance we have disrupted the balance of life. Now the air we breathe hurts us and the water we drink poisons us.

All things are bound together:  
If we lose the sweetness of the waters,  
we lose the life of the land;  
If we lose the life of the land  
we lose the majesty of the forest;  
If we lose the majesty of the forest,  
we lose the purity of the air;  
If we lose the purity of the air,  
we lose the creatures of the earth.

Not just for ourselves but for  
our children – now and in the future

But a new spirit is being born, and a new awareness of our place in this delicate balance. This spirit call us to:

- a transformation of our hearts and minds
- concrete changes in our way of life
  - the renewal of our religions
  - the creation of a global society

Today:

We remember who we are  
We reclaim our sense of wonder  
We acknowledge our responsibility  
We commit ourselves to the Earth

We turn toward each other in friendship  
We turn again together towards home.