

A VIEW ON TRANSFORMATION

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The world is a creation of the mind; its language is that of symbol and abstraction. The mind operates by projecting the contents of the collective unconscious onto events to interpret them. We are, in some sense, our ideas. Thus, a transformed world requires a transformation, not only of our conscious beliefs, but also an alteration of the structure of underlying unconscious ideas and abstractions which hold the world in place.

A word recreates an experience in the mind, even though that experience may no longer be present to the senses. That, indeed, is magic. It not only creates a 'presence' where there is none, but, in the discrepancy between what is experience, 'in the mind's eye' and what is actually present at hand, it creates unconsciousness itself.

Symbols and abstractions cannot be held totally in the conscious mind. They are the link between the conscious and the unconscious, the mechanism by which the differentiated parts of the 'self' speak to each other. Each of us is always totally in touch with our symbol system--it

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all we can use to interpret sensory data, and each symbol contains not only the conscious characteristics we choose to examine, but also all of our unconscious associations as well. Every symbol has these multiple associations, and since the total content of our minds (conscious and unconscious) is a system, each symbol is ultimately linked with every other symbol, and every experience we have ever had is related to every other experience.

We cannot hold the entire contents of our experience simultaneously in our awareness. Consciousness is limited and can only hold a few aspects of a situation in 'real time' simulation before the mind. This is why the desire in our age to 'expand' consciousness, to envelope and digest the entire contents of our unconscious, to become totally conscious, cannot be realized. As we expand our awareness and insist on holding symbols in our conscious mind we destroy them, make signs out of them -- and lose touch with part of ourselves.

The cost of destroying our symbols is the loss of that aspect of ourselves which strives for wholeness, and leads to growing neuroticism of the personality. We become dominated by fragmented symbols torn loose from their integrative moorings as part of a "system" of symbols - a mythology that works for most people.

The attempt to recapture the sense of wholeness and balance of the old system cannot succeed. It is not easy to restore the old value system. We are no longer capable of believing in the old God. Our God is a concept derived from the sphere of consciousness. God is no more the unconscious experience of a transpersonal symbol. Our God is derived from the sphere of consciousness.

Individuals in the modern world are isolated in an egotistically self-centered, personal world, suffering from formlessness, meaninglessness, and loss of vitality of the will. With the collapse of this old order, individuals fall prey to single, isolated symbols which take possession of people. These symbols include "work," "power," "experience," "money" - but are not limited to the self-serving obsessions. Religions, parties, ideologies, movements - including those deifying the environment, peace, youth, transformation itself - are all part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. Each isolates the individual from family, friends, and community. This situation leaves little or no room for a personal life that has much meaning.

The idea that a new civilization will be born without birth-pangs is unrealistic. We are already paying a high price for the death-producing obsessions of those who still claim the old order can be salvaged by suppressing the emerging new one. The apocalyptic visions of religious fundamentalists within each of the major religions may, tragically, be prophetic. Their world, after all, is really coming to an end.

One characteristic of a belief system, a set of symbols, can, unfortunately, be the "unicist" view, that there is one, and only one, true religion, and all others are false and to be eliminated. This view is an essential part of the classical religions and remains the official belief of authoritarian despots and political leaders.

Dealing with such intractable people is not easy, especially in a world of nuclear weapons that lacks either agreement or alignment on principles which could move us towards a world that worked for everyone. Each of the remaining unicist systems - despite their clear

inability to provide their adherents with what they truly want from a mythology - continues to insist on primacy and superiority, not parity. But humankind is one and every balanced myth system is true. A belief system is a "language" for human experience. In some sense, to speak a language, one must accept, on faith, that it is "true" - that is, that it is an internally consistent system which can be useful in manipulating reality. One must act as if one's symbol system is relatively accurate. But, as we have seen, the integrated, balanced belief systems of the past, even if they were "true" at one time, are no longer operationally true, even to their remaining adherents. It is the discrepancy between what people say they want to believe and what they presently experience that feeds their anger and alienation.

These modern "true believers" have lost touch with the higher teachings of each of the great religions. In Buddhism (Zen), Islam (Sufism) and Christian mysticism, the system is seen as a way, a path, a training designed to transform the individual into what Maslow calls a 'transcender,' and, by achieving a critical mass of converts who have taken such a path, to ultimately transform humanity as a species.

The great teachers--the Buddha, Christ, Muhammad--are thus instrumentalities of the eminent God-consciousness potentially in everyone. Each teaches the necessity of operating individually and collectively in the world in a way, which if carried out, would result in a transformed world. But none of these great teachings is doing well. Each of the religious traditions has fallen captive to the old kind of consciousness-- the "you" versus "me" world which produces much suffering. Each appears dominated by authoritarians, rather than transcendents, people who are more concerned with self-righteousness than with compassion.

Is it possible to discover a teaching which might achieve the goal of moving from a condition where a few, isolated individuals achieve personal transformation to a situation where institutions or societies are transformed?

Each age has its appropriate metaphors. Our task is to discover the symbols which are appropriate to our condition. In calling for the construction of new symbols, it is important for us to know that new symbols cannot be created, only discovered. We must now look deeply into our traditions, our art, our poetry to identify those forms, those abstractions which truly speak to our condition.

A new ethic, a new integrated set of symbols will have to allow humanity to experience itself as complete, whole, as we already are, without major psychic surgery. The new system must value acceptance of the self as a whole, embracing the unconscious as well as consciousness, emotion and intuition as well as reason, evil as well as good, suffering as well as joy. The integration of the personality at the individual level will be the metaphor for the integration of humanity at the species level.

Transformation, above all, is a shift in the locus on consciousness, a change in the quality of experience. Our awareness is expanded beyond previous limitations, we integrate more and more of the collective unconscious into our personal consciousness--not in the form of domination, but in the spirit of accepting a long-lost friend back into our hearts. We allow ourselves to experience the richness and vividness of ideational thought without averting our attention from the power and energy of apparently negative, hurtful images and feelings.

Until now only a few individuals were able to realize

personality integration. Those individuals were often overwhelmed by the elemental forces they liberated in others before their message of love, life and acceptance was fully heard. The cost of elevating awareness can be quite high. For humanity to embark on a course designed to achieve the highest realization at the level of species is to play for the highest stakes.