

Opening Meditation

This work is a continuation of my writings on what I have called an anthropology of Spirit. In an earlier work, I tried to show how such an anthropology relates to the contemporary world and the problem of the intersection of many diverse worldviews.¹ These diverse worlds, ranging through both global space and historical time, have collided in the present, creating turbulence, confusion, and disorientation for many people. The conservative reaction—to preserve old-order thinking by maintaining an exclusive devotion to a particular worldview, thereby denying the value and validity of the worlds of others—increasingly faces the inescapability of convergence on a global scale. No single worldview can act as a unifying medium for all others cultures, times, and places. Instead, we face the challenge of learning to live within a context of increasing pluralization, diversity, and spiritual complexity.

In that earlier work, I also addressed the problem of how this convergence leads collectively to a “transpersonal horizon” in which we face the collapse of lineal historical thinking for emergent, shared visions of the present. In this transpersonal present, the intersection of worlds creates a climate of powerful, creative resources for the reformulation of new collective identities. In this process, an “anthropology of Spirit” manifests as various stages of historical reflection in search of wholistic patterns of meaning no longer based in prioritizing the present as more adequate than the past and no longer valuing the future as the hoped-for resolution of present problems and conflicts. The present, in the deepest and most urgent sense, encompasses that past and future in proportion to the depth and fullness of our individual and collective maturity. This emergent

maturity is not simply a psychological or social fact—it is a profound process of collective spiritual transformation, an *awakening* to a transpersonal horizon whose call lies with each of us to realize the full and extensive depths of our spiritual potentials.

The arising of this transpersonal horizon is itself an event of great importance because in that event, however formulated in the experiences of the individual, we begin to discover infolded orders of perception no longer conditioned by a strictly rational, lineal model of consciousness, or by unilinear theories of development and growth. Perceptions must extend back into the past and reabsorb the value and good of past modes of perception and self-realization as occasions for reflection, as instances of potential that lie within us, urging us toward new interpretations and new visionary realizations. Perceptions must also rise to occasion new, emergent states of awareness and more expansive fields of self-reflection. The future, as instantiations of those occasions in moments of lucid spiritual illumination, points toward an integral continuity with past and present attainments in the realms of comparative spirituality. The “making real” of these inner potentials, in the present, requires courageous living and a willingness to cultivate genuine sensitivities for alternative worlds of meaning. Not only must we examine our own “native” worlds, but also the worlds of others both strange and sometimes alien, in order to fathom the depths of being as a medium for a multitude of collective transformations. The diverse roots of these transformations require us to leave no stone unturned, to look into every corner and aspect of alternative spirituality, to look carefully into the visionary worlds of others—but with deepest respect and appreciation for the value of those worlds in their contribution to emergent spiritual awakenings on a global scale.

This work explores the context of global spirituality as a living anthropology embodied through mutual relationships with others—past, present, and future. As such, it offers an alternative ontology, a new kind of being-in and being-with whose constitution is not simply analytic but synthetic, not a detached disassembly but a personal reintegration of many complex processes. Nor is it articulated strictly within the language games of religious theology or analytic science. Instead, it is written in an inspirational language based in visions, dreams, and reflections on spiritual meaning in a world colliding, even imploding, with radically divergent visionary potentials. It is anthropology as firsthand report, as a living ethnography of

transformation and change, *medias res*, which attempts to formulate a meaningful synthesis, a global spiritual view, integral to the emergence of the transhistorical horizon. As such, the symbolic center of this particular work is based on a series of reflective meditations on the concept of "Spirit" distinct from any locus in a historical tradition or any explicit Judeo-Christian theology. These meditations are embedded in a context of global spiritual transformation formulated around the question: How might we, as contemporaries of global culture, uncover the reciprocities that unite us as spiritual beings? How might a living anthropology of the spirit contribute to our shared well-being, to a healthy world, to a thriving and vital ecology, to the development of mutually reverent and responsible beings whose aspirations are to care for all those who inhabit our shared, multidimensional world?

The answers to these and other such questions requires more of us than simple thought or detached intellectualism no longer alive to embodied needs; it requires action and personal commitment. These needs, both social and spiritual, require a living and embodied sense of community, the structured rituals of shared becoming, the importation of intentional action and values into the situation of being human. That is why I call these reflections something other than philosophy in the modern sense and something more akin to anthropology. Such an awakening requires our whole being, our full humanity, not just life in the abstract sense but in an actual life world of full existential concern and commitment, in a living spiritual praxis. All spiritual traditions realize the necessity of bringing mental reflections into a context of practice, into the central hall of the temple, into private prayer rooms or communal meals, or into the daily life of faithful living. The twin axes of awakening and understanding must entwine around a central theme that seeks to embody itself in real practice, in realizing the potential of belief or thought in communal relations and becoming, in exemplifying inner spiritual vision.

Thus, the symbolic center is not simply reflections on Spirit but on how Spirit may be embodied in actual practice congruent with an emergent, transhistorical horizon. This is not a matter of simply articulating a particular practice or technique, however valuable those may be, but of something deeper. Technique should not become a substitute for insight and understanding, nor should it become a routine that masks the necessity of continually deepening thought, prayer, or reflection. A "technique" per se, or a behavioral formula,

may well abrogate responsibility through a substitute rigor founded in obedience or in dogmatic or authoritative rules, or social prohibitions or conventions. The challenge is to allow for an intrinsic freedom of self-formulation, to find the creative behaviors that bring to realization inner beliefs and ideals. Praxis, in the transhistorical sense, is not a matter of communal “rules” but of an interior clarity of purpose or intention that guides in accordance with spiritual values or principles. The unfolding of potential within each individual cannot be reduced within the transhistorical horizon to a fixed or authoritative pattern. This horizon challenges us, opens us to an emergent ethics of self-responsibility, in a world of respect and reverence for others, to find the unique ways that will indeed lead to the desired fulfillment. This is an individual challenge on the deepest level and we need not look beyond the integrity and maturity of our understanding to value that potential authentically.

We do need, however, to formulate clearly those spiritual principles that act to guide and direct our actions toward a positive and creative praxis. Thus, in this work, I lay out a number of those principles as they relate to the concept of Spirit. I attempt to integrate those principles along the lines of spiritual values and behavioral guidelines whose actualization can only occur through their adaptation and reformulation by interested others. The groundwork for this reformulation constantly depends on a flexibility of interpretation centered on the viability of Spirit as a real, vital, powerful, and mysterious presence imbuing life with more-than-human potential. The principles articulated are by no means exhaustive or complete; nor are they presented as a bound system of ideas. Instead, I have chosen to explore just those themes and concerns I see as relevant to our more immediate circumstances as a community on the threshold of personal, global, transhistorical transformation. My own praxis has long involved intensive communication, sharing, and introspection as well as long-term study, writing, meditation, dreaming, and vision-seeking in a diversity of spiritual communities. The heart of these meditations is found in the genuine love and sharing I have experienced with other engaged spiritual seekers. Such sharing, plus the ongoing processes of contemporary cultural transformation and global awakening, has made me increasingly aware of the need we have for articulate principles to guide us in our long and remarkable journey.

In laying out these principles, I make no attempt to embrace or subsume other traditional spiritual paths. This process, as a creative

anthropology of self-reflection and meaningful action, has arisen out of perceptions and communications based in my present, eclectic cultural-spiritual circumstances. The formulation of these principles occurred in a single spontaneous burst of inspiration, unsought at the time, but flowing forth with an intensity and momentary clarity of mind, heart, and intent that was truly memorable and transformative. As such, the bare bones of those principles have subsequently been modestly reworked and clarified for the purpose of setting up, in a first-hand report, the basic outlines of a contemporary concept of Spirit not, I believe, incompatible with other traditions. Without doubt, other spiritual traditions, particularly the mystical traditions of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, have all influenced my perceptions and I owe a debt of gratitude to those spiritual teachers. The meditations on these principles came later and much more slowly, but they were by no means lacking in intensity or in a sense of the spiritual immediacy of the subject. The authentication of the experience, the intensity of the moment, has often opened the trans-historical horizon to me with a vivid and sometimes breathtaking clarity of presence that has left me truly aware of how vast and how profound the depths are that yet remain unexpressed.

This kind of anthropology also reflects a postmodern sensibility insofar as there is no authoritative ground other than the actual lived experiences, reflections, and processes of development that have occurred to me in over thirty years of study, exploration, and practice. The constructive aspects of such a postmodern perspective have evolved through a gradual creative synthesis outside of any institutional or legitimizing body of religious persons representative of a traditional perspective. The deconstruction of "authority" is a major part of the transformation of the interpretive frameworks by which spirituality is made meaningful or valuable in a living, personal, postmodern context. This deinstitutionalization also means seeking a language and discourse that is not bound by the authoritative structures of a purely rational epistemology. Rationality is not the defining index by which spiritual values and insights can best be articulated. These values and insights arise through many nonrational means: dreams, visions, psychic intuitions, processes of symbolization, imagination, story, and through empathy, feeling, and relatedness to others. These are all viable epistemological means for exploring and articulating a living anthropology of Spirit. The postmodern context moves us beyond any particular privileged discourse,

beyond institutional sanctions, and beyond empirically rationalized methods and into the creative articulation of spiritual principles based in direct experiential knowing and creative communication and expression.

Positively, a postmodern spirituality is one that is no longer conditioned to a single methodology or a single empirical strategy; it is deeply and intrinsically pluralistic, multivocal, and relative to the interpretive frameworks of others. In writing on postmodern spirituality, I am not seeking to express some absolute, authoritative “truth” but to explore a coherent, meaningful expression of relative principles as a viable spiritual path. The principles I articulate are nonarbitrary yet relative to an individual perspective and are a nonaggressive expression of passionate belief. There are many ways to formulate a meaningful spirituality, some perhaps better or more effective than others; but no one path will suffice for all. The postmodern context takes fully into account the claims of every spiritual tradition as meaningful and more than adequate for the followers of that tradition without postulating some “universal” hierarchy of values. Nor does a postmodern spirituality seek to postulate the authoritative claims of any one tradition as superior over all others, however central that tradition may be to the life and concerns of a practitioner. The assertion of such a claim is only more of the old premodern contestation in values and worldviews—a circumstance I see as increasingly untenable in a converging world of diverse interpretative perspectives. To move beyond this older embattled discourse means to offer creative interpretations in a nonauthoritative but passionate voice dedicated to revitalizing spirituality as a primal basis of human joy and well-being.

Another aspect of the postmodern context involves breaking out of the disciplinary boundaries of academic studies and engaging in reflections on meaning that have their proper locus in the fullness of personal experience. Spirituality is about the passions of the soul, about the needs and aspirations of the heart, about the search for fulfillment and the inner resistance, struggles, and conflicts overcome in reaching that fulfillment. And it is a creative process, drawing on all aspects of our human potential and capacity in the face of our personal fears, anxieties, and emotional and mental boundaries. The postmodern context is not about the systematization of ideas, nor is it about the capacity to sustain a particular methodology tied to a necessarily limited epistemology. Spiritual life proceeds by leaps

and regressions, by climbing up and sliding back, by struggling to maintain a threshold and then, often suddenly, being overwhelmed by infinite depths and immeasurable horizons. Postmodern spirituality is aphoristic, epigrammatic, and engaged in the project of exploring the creative use of language and metaphor in pointing toward the boundaries of language and the relevance of alternative discourse styles. The convergence of a multitude of spiritual perspectives opens the horizons of meaning to *dialogical*, not dialectical, discourse and to diversity in expression in order to invoke the multivocal character of spiritual life. It is a nonsystemic process, an exploration, an awakening to being, not a summary or a conclusion.

Subsequently, the style of this work is not strictly linear nor is it based in a systematic argument, or in an analytic working out of rational ideas. It is first and foremost a reflective, meditative style that should be read slowly and in stages congruent with a general absorption of core ideas discussed in a variety of contexts. Themes in this work intermix, submerge, and reappear as diverse textures in the painting of a cosmological mural whose story is more than individual or narrowly scholastic. It is “cosmological” in the sense that it seeks to articulate a “place” within a living cosmos that may be inhabited by individuals whose spiritual identities are not rooted in a particular “traditional” religion. In creating that place, I have chosen a style of writing that is consciously reflexive in calling the reader back to the principles as they are articulated in a variety of interpretive locations. Such writing reflects a genre of meditative works, aphoristic and reflexive, that attempt to show how the various principles (or beliefs) apply to multiple circumstances. The symbolic form is a Hermetic circle, rich in interpretive possibilities, and not a rational line or a diagrammatical deconstruction of a sentence. This circle is simultaneously an inward- and outward-evolving spiral that necessitates a repetition of themes intrinsic to the meditative process by which the principles are learned and actualized. To read means to read slowly, from the inside out and the outside in, and not in a rush or in search of a few key concepts lineally connected. The gestalt as a whole is best absorbed in a gradual process of reflection and testing of principles in real-life situations, only in this way can the value of the work be known.

Finally, this work is not meant as anything other than a testimony of how an emerging horizon of spiritual meanings may be constructed from a visionary world. In my earlier work, I have referred

to this process, I will only say here that the arising of any visionary world in the contemporary sense can only hope to contribute its relative quantum of meaning and insight to creative processes that truly surpass any individual manifestation. The very act of surpassing is itself part of the emergent process by which any work becomes another stage on the way to greater collective and individual maturity. In such a transforming world where static images can only reflect the momentary synthesis, the challenge is to communicate the vision and then, to move on, following where Spirit leads, to fuller and more complete realizations. It is my hope that the readers of this work will understand that these principles may be articulated in many diverse ways and that such formulations are entirely relative to the needs, aspirations, and attainments of the readers. To see them as they are meant to be seen is to see them as relative formulations, as resources, and as occasions for reflection and possible insight. The greater challenge is the integration of such principles into meaningful action and authentic spiritual intentions resulting in the vibrant well-being of self in loving relations with (all) others. The realization of such intentions goes far beyond the text and into the context toward which the texts points.