

“A GLOBAL WISDOM CULTURE”

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Lecture

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My main object today is to implant in your brains a new meme and to get you pondering it as I have since I first encountered it. That meme is the phrase *a global wisdom culture . . . a global wisdom culture . . . a global wisdom culture*. There! It's planted. Now I'll set about watering it.

Today, I want to get us thinking and talking together about how human consciousness needs to grow and develop collectively, in order for life on Earth to thrive.

I hope that this proposition sounds self-evident to you, and that you, too, acknowledge that human behaviors are inadvertently or recklessly fouling our nest, degrading our precious planetary ecosystems to the detriment of many hapless species besides our own.

As futurist Duane Elgin sees our situation: we humans are presently in our adolescence, and it's now imperative for us to grow up, to wise up soon and rectify our recklessness while maturing into good stewards of our endangered planet.

To do so means re-enculturating ourselves, learning to live by different values, mores and customs than we now assume and practice.

As it happens, we may be standing at the very verge of such a cultural transformation.

December 21, 2012, is the pivotal date that a number of aging New Agers have determined marks the start of a “Great Turning” of Western culture—toward a new era of enlightened consciousness, toward a radical transformation of our current motivating mentality, and the birth of a “Global Wisdom Culture,” as some have dubbed it.

So proclaim the likes of Ervin Laszlo in *Worldshift 2012*, and Barbara Marx Hubbard in *Birth 2012 and Beyond*, and David C. Korten in *The Great Turning*, and Jean Houston in *Jump Time*, and Edmund J. Bourne in *Global Shift*, and Duane Elgin in *Awakening Earth*, to name just six such “evolutionaries”—as Carter Phipps' new book of that title dubs them—and those six stand among numerous other like-minded visionaries whom Phipps depicts in the course of “Unlocking the Spiritual and Cultural Potential of Science's Greatest Idea” (the subtitle of *Evolutionaries*).

Thus humanity now appears to stand on the verge of a great spiritual and cultural evolutionary leap necessitated by the various traumas that modernity has inflicted on our Earthly habitats and on our contemporary psyches.

Forget about the superstitious prediction of the ancient Mayan Calendar that allegedly names this date of December 21, 2012, as the time of global catastrophe. Think rather that the end of this year symbolically is as good a time as any to begin to experience worldwide not a *breakdown* of overextended and failed world systems, but a *breakthrough* to a higher level of collective consciousness—a global awakening, if you will— that urgently works to rectify the burdens that derelict humanity has imposed on Earth’s ecosystems. Such is the thesis of the authors I have just cited.

To most of us here today, this breakdown scenario is a familiar, if not a trite, depiction of endangered Earth’s plight at the start of the 21st century.

The notion of a collective breakthrough to a higher level of consciousness, perhaps led by those “Cultural Creatives” that Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson describe in their 2001 book of that name (*The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World*), such a breakthrough may be devoutly to be wished, but what would it amount to, and how might it be realized?

How can a Global Wisdom Culture be consciously envisioned, designed and then inculcated into human populations around the planet, superseding deeply-rooted customs and mores now deemed dangerous to Earth’s thriving?

There!—that frames the question that most deeply engages me these days and that I read articles and books to help me explore, and then write essays and verses to help me articulate and clarify my emerging thoughts.

I ask you now to indulge me as I share some of my speculations about the nature of this postulated *Global Wisdom Culture*, which, if we adapt ourselves to it, might allow our planet to prosper, rather than continue to suffer from our immature and reckless depredations.

TOWARD A GLOBAL WISDOM CULTURE

Human beings, as we grow from infancy, are cultivated by the cultures we grow up in. Different cultures produce different behaviors, habits, attitudes and beliefs, programming us according to their customs, mores and values—from the micro-culture of our family to the larger cultures in which we are imbedded: local, regional, national, global (and others in between), and even in the cosmic culture of our ultimate belief systems or assumptions about the Universe—our cosmologies.

But in varying degrees people may learn to reform their behaviors and form new cultures, new patterns and rationales by which they live. Thus we are both

shaped by our cultures and we can *reshape* our cultures, which we would rightly do when our former culture failed to serve us well, just as the chambered nautilus outgrows one compartment in its shell and fashions another one, more accommodating to its needs.

In the arduous course of human history, *just now* seems to be a time for a profound cultural shift to occur, by way of a world-wide effort to develop a planetary culture designed to maintain Earth's viability for the thriving of its multifarious and interdependent life forms, which reckless human behaviors are now damaging and extinguishing—in addition to the wanton crimes we commit against other human beings in the name of various nefarious ideologies.

Just now would be an excellent time for the emergence, all around the planet, of a Global Wisdom Culture to which all thoughtful peoples could happily subscribe and educate others to join, because of the self-evident benefits to all life on Earth. Just as so many other aspects of human experience in the 21st Century have “gone global,” likewise, and most imperatively, so should the culture that cultivates us to become good citizens of Earth.

The impressive *Global Ethic* document (1993), sponsored by the Parliament of the World's Religions, is one example of recent efforts to “think globally” in fundamental ways. Also, the World Wide Web of the pervasive Internet system now facilitates global communication to the extent that some consider it a “global brain” that is now awakening—the circuitry by which human beings can think holistically about the state of the Earth (with the exceptions of captive cultures like North Korea or isolated tribes in remote pockets of the world).

Now is imperatively the time for all human beings to “think globally” in ways that contribute to the development and refinement of a global culture, a Global Wisdom Culture, programming us for a kind of collective sanity new to the world but necessary for the world's survival and thriving at this critical juncture of its history.

Here is an apt question I have recently asked myself:

QUESTION: If there were indeed to be a general “transformation of human consciousness,” as is sought for by Human Potentialists and other visionaries who forecast a New Age of Enlightenment—how then would people behave, and how would human societies function in what some have prospectively called a “Global Wisdom Culture”?

At this point, I would like *you* to take a moment to observe what answer or answers to that question come to *your* mind.

If you can envision a “Global Wisdom Culture”—a superior way for individuals or institutions to behave than is normative today—how would you wish that to be? In a Global Wisdom Culture, what would you hope to find?

Finally, here, for your critiquing, is what came to my mind.

ANSWER: Presumably, we would then be motivated by different values than presently prevail.

1. “Looking out for #1 would be altered to an active concern for the well-being of all, prompted by a powerful empathy and compassion, as if all men and women were beloved brothers and sisters.
2. Competition, conflict, antagonism, egotism, selfishness and greed would have been transcended and outgrown, replaced by the generosity of loving-kindness.
3. Attitudes toward work and productivity would be fundamentally reconceived: the proper object of labor is not to acquire wealth and goods for oneself and one’s dependents, thereby to gain higher power and status emulously and egotistically. Rather, people should voluntarily and generously contribute effort and skills to accomplish necessary goals to the benefit of all. The idealism of “*from each* according to one’s abilities; *to each* according to one’s needs” would be justified in a Global Wisdom Culture subscribed to by people who have matured in generosity and whose egos have been tempered by kindness. Assured that all reasonable needs will be met as fully and justly as possible, wise global citizens will accept their fair portions with equanimity.

Ah! But what of ambition, striving and initiative? Are not those motives derived from egotism, the engine of enterprise, heroism and pride? What of the human drive to excel, to exceed and to transcend, doing better and doing best—and thus winning glory and distinction?

ANSWER: Individual pride will be subsumed in the collective victory for the human family. The object of a human life is to find fulfillment in flourishing, a mutual enterprise in which we help one another to thrive spiritually, becoming wholly-realized human beings as nearly as we may.

What does that mean, that ideal of a *wholly-realized human being*, a hero of humanity?

Well, until we arrive there ourselves and know directly, we’d do best to study the paragons of history, those men and women revered for their great souls, for their magnanimity—from all eras and cultures. Who were the great ones, the sages and saints, the noblest exemplars of wisdom, both contemplative and active?

Let’s find them out—and walk their ways.

Let me end, by way of a coda, by reading two of my sonnets.

THE NEW AGE

Here at the leading edge of history
Humanity stands at our last frontier:
The gateway to that Golden Age to be
When finally our intellect grows clear.
At last, and with so little time to spare,
We are about to enter a new age
Of Global Wisdom to displace despair
And darkness, folly, misery and rage.
We have the knowledge and technology
To chart a better course for all of Earth,
Though we still lack one thing collectively
Without which nothing can arise of worth.
For all the plans and schemes we may devise
Will come to nothing—if they are not wise.

A GLOBAL WISDOM CULTURE

for Ervin Laszlo

What kind of culture would the wisest be?
That one in which all people deeply care
For one another in the global family,
Are disinclined to hoard, but freely share
The wealth they cultivate by gentle means,
Respectful of our fruitful biosphere,
Acting no longer like self-centered teens,
But knowing all of Earthly life as dear.
The Turning that will take us to this place,
Though long the lore of mystic prophecy,
Lies just ahead if we can find the grace
To live in holy, blissful charity.
This means a revolution in the soul,
An evolution that will make us whole.

RELEVANT REMARKS

“We stand at the threshold of a new world and a new identity that is spurred on to assume its role within a broader environment.”

Lewis Mumford

“Human consciousness and our sense for others will make a quantum leap forward. Everything will change. We will turn into completely new human beings.”
Paul Williams

“We’re not merely on the Titanic about to run into a single iceberg, and we’re not merely driving our car dangerously toward the edge of a single cliff. Try this metaphor: *We’re entering an era of a cascade of crises*. It’s as if humanity goes whitewater rafting, but we’re not remotely ready for the cascading rapids ahead. We’re about to find out if we can live in a world in perpetual crises, lurching from one to the next, each crisis feeding still more crises. It could kill us.”
Paul Ray

“Clearly the present hyper-consumerist, ultra-promiscuous and super-materialistic lifestyle will have to give way to a more holistic paradigm in which spirituality has a significant role to play if humanity is to survive in a sane and secure global society.”
Karan Singh

“We can survive in a drastically depleted world, but we cannot be fully human in one.”
Deepak Chopra

“Our capacity for denial in the face of the obvious is startling and recalls with urgent need the fact that the entire German nation went off the cliff with the Nazis as “willing executioners,” including 6 million Jews who went to the gas chambers without any sustained open revolt. This level of denial is present again today. With few exceptions, most seem to be doing little more than living lives of quiet desperation and denial in the face of a growing global catastrophe, and the question: what can wake us up? is the most pressing question in the world today The consciousness that produced the problem must be radically re-examined and the consciousness that can solve the problem must be immediately discerned. . . . It may well be that we are in a condition of such extremis that we are actually experiencing the end of the Axial Age and only a fundamentally new vision will enable the courage to do what must be done to preserve civilization as we know it; and if not, then to somehow ensure that a remnant of humankind can survive the deluge being produced by our very own hands.”
Jim Garrison

“There are those who see the world as it is, and ask why. And there are those who dream of things that never were and ask why not.”
Robert Kennedy

“A new order of values is necessary if we are to survive at a personal and global level.”

Yehudi Menuhin

“Although we have probably the best knowledge which ever existed on earth, we still don’t know what keeps the bodies of the stars floating in space. Knowledge without the wisdom of the heart is about to lead us into a dictatorship of those who today have access to knowledge, technology and resources.

“300 years ago in the western world Enlightenment discovered individuality and reason and addressed the magical and irrational beliefs of the crowd, but it didn’t deal with the no less irrational beliefs of the accepted religion. Instead Enlightenment has put itself in the place of religion and created new superstitions like positivism, materialism, capitalism and atheism. Now Enlightenment has to make a second step and open up for ”the physics of the non-material world“. Also it must integrate the perspectives of non-western cultures which have been left out by the first step of Enlightenment or suffered from its colonialistic and technocratic misinterpretation.

“Different from the world’s teachings about wisdom throughout time, wisdom itself cannot be taught. But we can provide the cultural environment in which wisdom will prosper. This very process is in itself an act of wisdom.

“Fields of action are the educational systems worldwide. Key principles among others are: free schools, self-determined education, social learning, introducing wisdom to the academic world, developing language to better reflect sustainable values, reintegration of female values, reintegration of the elders into society and ...concepts of new work and basic income to give people freedom to evolve.”

Ervin Laszlo

“We are privileged to live at the most exciting moment of creative opportunity in the whole of the human experience. Now is the hour. We have the power to turn this world around for the sake of ourselves and our children. We are the one’s we have been waiting for.”

David C. Korten