

Ram Dass: *Engaging* in a World on Fire

Introduction

Dear Reader,

In July 1983, Ram Dass teamed up with his friend Daniel Ellsberg to create an altogether unique event at the Lama Foundation in the mountains of northern New Mexico: a seminar on the threat of nuclear annihilation offered within the context of a three-day meditation retreat.

Eighteen months earlier, my wife Johanna and I introduced Ram Dass and Dan to one another, and filmed their first substantive conversation—which we subsequently incorporated into *How Then Shall We Live?*, our nine-part PBS series on personal awakening and planetary survival. Unable to film the Lama retreat, we arranged to have the event audiotaped. Then our friend, the late Skip Robinson, fashioned the transcripts into a book that Crown Publishers believed would be a worthy successor to Ram Dass's *Be Here Now*, which they had published in 1971.

Alas, the book project fell through. When Skip died, all that remained of it was his single file copy of the manuscript.

I have gone through that entire 70,000-word manuscript, treating it as a sacred relic, searching for material worth resurrecting. While Dan's contributions turn out to be mainly of historical interest, Ram Dass's prove to be timeless. It is my honor now to offer you this 8,000-word extract containing the most luminous teachings that Ram Dass has left us for living in our *current* apocalyptic times—with spiritual wisdom as a foundation for conscious social transformation.

Johanna and I are planning to create a site where we will make available without charge the entire body of videos and texts we co-created with Ram Dass on this subject, including both the *How Then Shall We Live?* series and our follow-up PBS series, *Reaching Out*. If you would like to be notified when this site goes online, please email me at the address below.

When we last Skyped with Ram Dass shortly before his death, he gave us his blessings to circulate this piece widely and freely. So, we encourage you to pass it on via email or social media to everyone who might appreciate it and to ask them to pass it along as well.

For an awakened species and a viable world,

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Ram Dass: *Engaging in a World on Fire*

Section One

The immensity of what Daniel Ellsberg has said to us makes me quiver inside with pain, with indignation, with shame, with a sense of fear and urgency, with strong commitment, and with the realization that our lives are going to change very dramatically. There is still a tremendous inertia in most people, little recognition that they cannot quite go about business as usual.

I honor the opportunity to be with Dan and to share these reflections. As humans we obviously want to protect and preserve our society and civilization, and to avoid the incredible suffering a nuclear war would entail on even the most limited scale. Perhaps these reflections will help.

Helen Caldicott, a peace movement leader whom we honor, and who has been instrumental in awakening thousands and thousands to action in opposing the thermonuclear danger, says, "The fear that you have will motivate and guide you and propel you into becoming maybe one of the most powerful people in the world." That may be true. But for the situation we are now facing, we also will need still more. Fear as the primary motivator of our actions will not solve our problems. In fact, it may well exacerbate them. We are going to have to go deeper into our beings to find a more profound source for our action.

Let's start by acknowledging that what these bombs represent is *us*, not *them*. I can't make this into an I-You proposition. This whole process of healing must involve us purifying ourselves. And I realize that the ball stops here. As Pogo said, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

I know damned well that as I get into my MG and drive on a well-paved highway that I like, and when I get into a jet plane to come here to speak, part of me is enjoying being among the six percent of the planet's population with America's King of the Mountain status, despite the fact that these luxuries are in part at the cost of other human beings' suffering and perhaps even survival.

I don't yet have my act together. My appreciation of "voluntary simplicity" recognizes, as Gandhi says, that I must "Live simply, that others might simply live." But, while part of me is righteously indignant about our nuclear coercion of others in order to protect our interests, some part of me is saying to Casper Weinberger, "Go, baby, go, but don't tell me how you do it, because I morally cannot handle it."

I agree with Dan that the government undoubtedly keeps secrets. But at some level we pay the government to keep those secrets. The government is *us*, functioning as an

extension of us, as our cerebral cortex. And when we want the game to be different, it will be different. But most of us do not have enough integrity in our own lives yet. We are all full of righteousness and good intentions on one hand, and on the other we are party to deception, greed and hoarding, and exploitation. That is not good enough—for me, anyway. This doesn't mean I should be guilty about it, for I appreciate how these inconsistencies are a stage in our evolving humanity. But I see where the path inevitably leads: toward an integration. And that integration is the root of effective social action.

When you are not integrated, that is, when you are at odds with yourself, how can you know peace? And if you are not peaceful, you are not going to live in a peaceful universe; just as if you are not rooted in love and compassion, this is not going to be a loving or compassionate universe. Similarly, if you cannot find that place in you that is free of fear—even though you acknowledge that there might also be a part of you that is frightened—you are not going to be able to contribute to a universe that is free of fear. So, as far as I am concerned, social action must have at its very foundation a spiritual focus.

Martin Luther King said, “I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into the hell of nuclear destruction. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality.”

Too often when we say words like love and truth, we think of them as weak words, and we think of the MX missile as powerful. But I see the MX missile as being rooted in fear and feelings of weakness. And I see that an action arising out of love comes out of the deepest truth in us, a part of us where there is no fear. And something arising out of roots not fraught with fear is strong.

But even though we find ourselves afraid, and not feeling peaceful, and less than fully loving and compassionate, we must act. There is no way you can be in an incarnation without acting. We cannot wait until we are enlightened to act. We all hear the way in which our silence is itself an act of acquiescence to a system. That is as much an action as walking. Since we must act, we do the best we can to act consciously and compassionately. But in addition, we can make every action an exercise designed to help us become free. Because the truth that comes from freedom, and the power that comes from freedom, and the love and compassion that come from freedom are the jewels we can cultivate to offer to our fellow sentient beings for the relief of their suffering.

Gandhi did not recommend we wait until we are enlightened, either. What I see that Gandhi did was that he spoke out of two sides of his mouth—not in a negative sense, but in a positive sense. On the one hand he said, for example, “I could not be leading a true spiritual life unless I identified with all of humanity.” You can hear that word “identify” from the networking point of view, meaning “feel relationship with,” or “Identity” (in the formal sense), meaning “I am one with.” He had this transcendent awareness.

Yet, for perfectly understandable political and practical reasons, he created a social action form not based on people having awakened spiritually, in the true sense of the mystical awakening. "I am," he said "a practical man. I cannot wait for India to recognize the practicality of the spiritual life in the political world." He worked with what he had, and at the same time he knew what the true source of the force was and encouraged others to recognize the source in themselves as well.

A wise fellow named David Spangler said in an interview: "The response to nuclear war is coming from deeper places in people than it did in the '60s. For instance, I may protest nuclear war because I am afraid of it, because I have personal fear of what I might lose: my life, or my support systems in my world. I may protest because I have a larger altruistic sense of the well-being of the ecology, and so I say 'Hey, this is really stupid. We have no right to do this to our world.' I may protest it because I have a sense of how it damages the economy and robs other needy social programs. There can be many motives. But there is some very deep level of myself that I can touch where I can simply say, 'I do not really need any of these motives. I just know it's wrong.' Well, it's more than that. I say, 'This shall not occur.'

"It is a release of will. It is not a release of fear or violence. It's a release of will that, in its own way, is not in conflict with the nuclear issue. If you were doing something and I say to you, 'Stop doing that. I do not like it,' then we can become polarized and you may be strengthened in your resistance to me. So, in a sense, my protest only makes you, my adversary, stronger. However, I can assert a will. I can just say 'no' to something that is not really directed to you at all, but is just a statement of presence, a statement of fact. It is not an issue of conflict ... I feel that that kind of 'no' is beginning to really emerge from the collective consciousness of humanity."

That particular 'no' to which David refers comes from a place in us in which we are attuned and identified with a deeper source than our own separateness. That 'no' has power. As Gandhi says, "That soul force is indestructible and it goes on gaining power until it transforms everyone it touches."

Section Two

It is time to very gently move closer to the fire. I can feel that where the mind might be frightened, maybe the heart can walk forward with courage about the immediate future.

I do not feel that you came here just to "stay on the edge" but to really climb in. And if we are going to act from the space that I am suggesting, we really have to learn to "keep our hearts open in hell." To do that requires acknowledging inside ourselves a place of equanimity, and learning to rest there even when our hearts are being tossed violently about. I don't have to go far afield to find a hell realm to describe. All-too-

familiar images close at hand will provide your heart with the traumatic material for its work. Consider:

- A world in which millions die of starvation although enough food is produced;
- A world fraught with increasing insecurity, anarchy and violence;
- A world agonizing with the silent screams of political prisoners;
- A world in which we are living at the edge of moral and physical catastrophe;
- A world in which the cost of war material is draining our energy system and thus perpetuating poverty and hunger and resultant political instability;
- A world in which vigilante justice is castrating our international organizations;
- A world in which foreign aid is focused on national self-interest instead of human interest;
- A world of runaway ecological pollution and squandering of non-replenishable natural resources;
- A world in which business and government are increasingly non-accountable;
- A world of political chauvinists, obsessed with national pride and loyalty which supersedes loyalty to species or to life itself;
- A world of suddenly-appearing epidemics, such as AIDS, which defy understanding as to cause or treatment;
- A world in which children do not expect to grow up.

The equanimity to face all of this cannot be rooted in denial. Rather it must be rooted in an acknowledgment of how it all is. But to look head-on at the horrible beauty of the universe *as is*, without hiding behind fantasy or denial and selective perception, takes guts. To look Shiva in the eye, to acknowledge the violent as well as the gentle, the ugliness as well as the beauty, the greed and selfishness as well as the compassion and mercy, the sickness, death, and decay as well as health and life, and to all of it, ALL of it, to say “YES!”—that is the ground on which true equanimity rests.

We protect our hearts because of fear that they will break. Yes, they *will* break. But out of the pieces will be forged a new heart, a strong and fearless heart, a compassionate heart, a heart that is invulnerable. That is what is required. Nothing less!

So, to be effective agents for social change we have to start with ourselves. First, we have to work on ourselves until we can be in the world without being automatically reactive. As the stuff of the world about us comes pouring in on us, instead of reacting with fear and aversion, or greed and grasping, the art is to introduce a moment of clear quiet awareness between the input (or perception) and the output (or response). By adding this moment of awareness, we break the chain of reactivity that keeps us all so unconsciously bound.

Look around and see how reactive people are to each other and how little space there is in the system. Just bringing a bit of awareness to each moment can help. Gandhi says, “What you contribute may seem very insignificant, but it’s still very important that you do it.” With a bit of quiet awareness, you have a different perspective in situations. And sometimes with that perspective you can see alternatives that shift the entire dynamic and bring space and possibility anew.

The political arena does not usually attract very conscious and spacious players, and as such it may not be the optimum vehicle for social change. However, even there, true statesmen and stateswomen, beings with a quiet inner context, can potentially bring about profound changes.

Besides quieting the mind, we have to learn to keep our heart open. Social movements attract people for a lot of different motives. And we meet many people in social actions whose motives are not the same as ours. Although this confusion of motives makes our work together more difficult, we can still do a caring and effective job. What I’ve learned, however, is that my first job is to not get caught in either my judgments of them or in their projections about me.

If you are in the forest and seeing many different trees—oaks, fir, pine, aspen—you aren’t inclined to be continually judging: “That pine should be an oak.” But the minute we get near humans we start judging. It’s very funny. We are constantly saying, “If only everyone were working for the motive that Gandhi was working for.” Open-hearted appreciation of individual differences in humanity rather than just judgment is very important.

Kabir, the Sufi mystic, said, “Do what you do with another person; but never put them out of your heart.” As I’ve studied being involved in more and more social action, I’ve begun to see that learning how to say “no” without closing my heart is also very important, disagreeing with somebody without seeing the person as an opponent, staying in the place just behind that so that even the “no” heals as opposed to being divisive. Most of us, especially those who have children, face having to say “no” often. They ask for something, and you’re going to say “no” out of the best motives in the world. Yet you know that they are going to be frustrated by not getting what they want. There’s a part of you that empathizes with them. Furthermore, because they are frustrated, they’re going to look for an object of aggression, and it might well be you.

And it hurts for someone you love to be angry with you. So, you get a double whammy of negative feeling when you say “no.”

In a situation like this, you tend to close your heart down just a little bit so as to be able to handle these feelings. So, what message we really send the child is not only a “no” message. We push them away emotionally, as well.

Social actions are fraught with disagreements and the saying of “no” to others. It's a great opportunity to watch your heart close down and open and close and open.

For a long time, I've had Casper Weinberger on my prayer table, because I find it's very difficult to keep my heart open when I think about that man. I watch him lie on television and manipulate the media and lead us toward Hell. There is this thing in me that goes “grrrrrrfff,” and I say, “I guess I'm not ready yet,” because my heart closes. But I know I'm going to have to learn how to be able to keep my heart open if I'm going to someday meet Secretary of Defense Weinberger and say, “Casper Weinberger, no!” And say “no” from the place where he can hear it. I'm going to have to say it in such a way that he feels so loved by me and by my “no” that he hears it as “No, but I love you,” or “No, but let's work it out,” or “No, but let's go on from here.”

Can you hear these things? Since we're not starting other than from our humanity, all we can do is use the situations in which we close down as exercises to work on ourselves, to watch how we lose it again and again. We must be very compassionate with ourselves, and each time just center again, quiet again, and begin again.

Section Three

Dan may feel some frustration with me, because he'll give me the facts and the urgency and I'll take it all in and say, “Yes, I hear you.” And then he'll say, “Well, if you hear, why are you going to go to India now instead of staying around?” And I say, “Dan, I can't give you a rational explanation of that. I feel we are in a long pull here, and I can feel the amount of change that's happened deep in our hearts over the past year as many of us are learning how to bring the spirit into social action. I've spoken to more than 100,000 people about nuclear issues in the past year on my circuits, a lot of whom didn't particularly want to hear. That wasn't what they came to my lecture for. But I did say it, and they did hear it, and a process is happening. And now part of my contribution requires the perspective that living in a country such as India gives.

Hopefully, when I come back from India, I can help—if the earth is still here—in a way that will justify the journey. I don't think we can all lock step, because we're not all perceiving from the same place. It's our collective perception out of which wisdom comes. I don't feel that I'm wiser than Dan, nor that Dan's wiser than I. Each of us can only intuitively feel something and then do what he or she must do. It's a very tricky

question, you know. I want to hear it. And I want to act. But I don't want to perpetuate or increase the root cause of the Bomb in the first place. I consider the root cause to be fear.

There was a moment when the Congress Party wanted to get rid of the British. They went to Gandhi and said, "We've really got to get rid of them now." And he said, "I'll meditate on it." They came back in a week and he said, "I'm meditating." They came back in two weeks and he said, "I'm meditating." "Well," they said, "Gandhi-ji, you know, this is urgent." And he said, "I'm still meditating." For three and one-half months he meditated until he saw the optimum act: the Salt March. He was tuning until he could hear that act which would gather power through its resonance with people's intuitive sense of rightness.

When I saw on television the Vermont town meetings discussing the Nuclear Freeze, I saw so many actions which came out of that deep intuitive place inside people. I saw a movement that is building, rooted in truth. And I have enough faith in the universe to feel that these forces build at a rate necessary to bring about a timely transformation.

It seems to me that it behooves us to demand of ourselves a way of communicating with another human being at the place that is common to all of us, even as we oppose them or love them or join them or whatever we do. It's an interesting challenge for us, isn't it? I mean understanding that that's a goal.

I see that the earth is a plane at which we incarnates have a lot of work to do. A lot of it involves very abrasive stuff. It involves egos, and it involves the way things are. I have seen visions of heaven in which everything is united. I look at earth and I see divisiveness and struggle and growth. Deep inside I feel its perfection just as it is. That's a scary one to say aloud. And that's one you don't say at a weekend like this very much, you see? You don't say it. But part of what we have to do is expand to be able to embrace the two planes of reality, one where you see the perfection of God's manifestation, including all of it, and the other in which your human heart says this is scary and terrible and we must do everything we can to change it. Both of these realities are real.

A conscious being has to embrace both of them. You can't rest in one, and you can't rest in the other. If you rest in just your human concerns, fear, and pain, you have lost the appreciation of the grand design of the game or form. If, on the other hand, you rest just in the grand design, you've lost your humanity. To me, the mature being, the "Mensch" (another Sanskrit word), is one who can expand to embrace both. Out of this comes a toughness where we can work to stop nuclear proliferation and at the same moment appreciate the perfection of just how it all is. I know that if in the process of living life, I lose my appreciation of the perfection, I've lost my connection to God in the process. I really have. And I don't think I can afford that even to try to help save the planet.

As a human with a heart, of course, I am *very* attached to the outcome. But there is also a part not attached to the outcome at all, like Don Juan describing the death of his son. He said, “At this point if I look above his body, I see his spirit moving out into the light, and I see the perfection of it all. If I look down at his body, I see this beautiful young man who is crushed in the prime of life, and then my heart breaks.” And you see both of them at the same moment. That’s what’s so hard.

Hinduism, in which I have steeped myself in recent years, conceives of vast spans of time that are called ‘yugas’ and ‘kalpas’ which follow one another in cycles of millions of years. At the end of each ‘kalpa’ (which is made up of four ‘yugas’) the entire universe of form dissolves back into itself, and then it all starts over. These cycles go on and on. And we have been through these cycles in our many incarnations again and again. We have passed through the beginnings and the ends. We have passed through births and deaths not only of us as incarnates, but of cultures, and of ages, and of form itself. From this vast perspective, there is little or no attachment to the outcome of a single incarnation or even cycle.

One’s attention from an Eastern mystic point of view is not on when you die, but on how conscious you are in life and at the moment of death. That determines what happens next in an evolutionary sense. Ideally one passes through the door of death (or “dropping the body” as it is called) remaining conscious and not trapped by the drama of the death itself. Of course, for a Western philosophical materialist this is all nonsense. When you die, you’re dead.

Stephen Levine created a guided nuclear meditation, a twenty-minute countdown from when you hear the Bomb is coming to drop on your town. In the meditation you are to imagine you are with people you love. At first there is the horror, the denial, the anger, the guilt, the despair—the stages of approaching death. And then the thing is so imminent, so irrevocable, that it takes you through into acceptance. “Okay, here I am.” The minutes become very precious. And in these moments your awareness is heightened. You experience your awareness as separated from your body, just as has been described by Raymond Moody in *Life After Life*. And once free of the body, you experience equanimity. Then the chaos of the actual explosion, seen from a distance. And after death the consciousness continues.

A powerful meditation.

Another meditative technique is to work with imagery of the Holocaust. This can help free you from your own denial and open up the pain and anguish. Once open, you find you can bear the unbearable. And that is growth.

An example of such imagery is in a book, *Black Rain*, which is the story of the Hiroshima bombing. “They all had skin blackened by burns. They had no hair because

their hair was burned. And at a glance you couldn't tell whether you were looking at them from in front or in back. They held their arms bent, and their skin, not only on their hands, but on their faces and bodies, hung down. I can still picture them in my mind, like walking ghosts. They didn't look like people of this world. They had a special way of walking, very slowly. I myself was one of them."

It seems to me that whether you believe that there is continuity of awareness after death or just hope to survive, it behooves you to develop a deep and quiet center of spacious awareness to be optimally ready for what happens next.

I have said to audiences night after night: "You and I may next meet under a bridge eating rotted food out of a rusty can after the Bomb. And if we do, we will look into each other's eyes and I'll say, 'Are you here? I'm here!'"

And then we'll do what we have to do. Those who are not conscious beings will be totally lost into the drama of survival and death. Probably if you are lost in this drama this weekend, you'll be lost in that drama. If you're not caught in this one, perhaps you will be clear in that one. Most people are so busy being identified with that in them which is in time and space, they never quiet down enough to recognize that which is not.

And *that* is not vulnerable. That is not vulnerable.

Section Four

As you come to recognize that part of you that is not lost in time and space, you experience peace and happiness with what is. Then you become an environment for other people in which they can come up for air out of the dramas of time and space if they are ready to do so.

The game, of course, is not to force anybody to do anything. As an appreciator of individual differences, you see that each human being has her or his work to do. They have their incarnation, they have their work. It's presumptuous of me to decide what they have to do. So, instead, I become like the earth in a garden in which flowers can grow. For example, when I am with a person who has, say, an advanced and probably terminal illness, my job is not to force them *not* to deny it, but to be an environment in which, if they would like to explore the issue of death, they can be comfortable doing so. What I do is I merely come into a room naked of concepts, because if I walk in with a plan and a credential for dealing with "dying persons," forget it!

You will begin to see how every model you have in your head pushes somebody away. It keeps them at a distance. So, you walk in as just another being coming in, sitting down, and hanging out. You're just right here, or as much "here" as you are.

I remember a Christmas Day some years back. I arrived in Marin County to visit a woman lawyer who was 28, had three or four children, and had a very advanced brain tumor. I came in speedy from the freeway drive, and I found myself too soon propelled into her room.

I sat down by the bed, and because I was not quiet or centered inside, I immediately started to come on like a wise man. Then I just happened to look into her eyes. There was this being who was just so clear. And she was just waiting for me to calm down, to be with her. All I could do, finally, was just slow down and hold her hand, and let her help me until I could join her in the “now.” And her dying was like—she was so free of her body and all of her social stuff at that point that her dying—the only image that came to the mind of one of the people with her was ink going into water. It was just this kind of dispersion into being. She was just so clear and quiet at that moment.

By the way, it’s these kinds of explorations that are what our Hanuman Foundation Living/Dying Project and our Dying Center are about. In the Dying Center there are no professional die-ers. We do this work rather as work on ourselves. One of the optimum ways to confront root attachments to survival is to be in the presence of death. You really get a strong sense in this work of something leaving the body, of the separation of body and spirit. So, it’s extremely useful for us to be around a dying person for our own spiritual work. Our clients are the many people who are dying who are also trying to awaken. Our project is just a marriage between two people, both of whom want to work on themselves, and they’re using this particular person’s dying as the vehicle for both of them to work on themselves. It’s a collaborative experiment.

Everyone is unique. You’ve got to listen to the human being. You’ve got to listen to who they *think* they are and how much they really want to come up for air. There are very few people who really want to awaken. Most people just want to avoid pain. And you’ve got to honor that. Give people plenty of space. Work to keep your heart open with them just as they are. That way you become an environment in which they can change if they’re ready to. If your heart closes down when they are who they are, that’s called conditional love, and that keeps them locked in that form. But it’s very hard to be an unconditional lover. You can only be an unconditional lover if you’re resting in a place that isn’t vulnerable. If you think you have something to lose, you are bound to be conditional in your love. Do you see?

So, perhaps you can see why you’re driven to finally go deeper into the spirit all the time. Imagine we have been born *into* our separateness. And then we begin to awaken and see that who we thought we were in the separate body and personality is merely the vehicle, and that there’s something inside of that. That’s the first awakening. With that awakening you are then attracted to spiritual techniques designed to establish you in spirit as opposed to form or matter. You come to appreciate what Christ talks about as being *in* form but not *of* form. In certain stages of this process of awakening, one can

get enamored of the spirit and push away form. It's called "getting high." But sooner or later you see that the pushing away of form is still an attachment, and as long as you are attached, you are not free. And finally you open once again to form, and the circle is complete. The stronger your connection to the spirit that has developed with faith over time, the more you can dive into your humanity and be in it (yet not of it), and be in it joyfully and richly and enjoy your incarnation and be an unconditional lover of others. And you can enjoy social action.

You're not free by pushing away anything, either your family, or your body, or your sexuality, or your emotionality, or your political identity, or your ecological consciousness. You finally see, as you get more connected to the spirit, the perfection of the form that is the creation, and you begin to appreciate it and to fulfill your unique part in it. And, from moment to moment, you listen for the forms in which you will manifest.

Can you see that there are two ways in which our action is related to spirit? In the first way our action is a *yoga*, or a method for awakening Spirit. Then, once we are resting in spirit with true faith, the other way happens in which we experience action as the play or dance of Spirit. That is true joy. And it includes suffering too. Everything! All of it!

Section Five

Anyone who has shared with another person deep effort or hardship in pursuit of a "something" that is felt to be deeply and intuitively right knows how that bonds people together in an extraordinarily beautiful way. Such bonds are appearing in this country and throughout the world among significant numbers of people who are sharing and acting upon their concern about nuclear weapons. The impetus for these actions is coming, of course, from many levels, some of which are quite deep spiritually. I would like to share with you some reflections about two levels of spiritual consciousness from which these actions in opposition to nuclear weapons are being manifest.

The first is what Marshall McLuhan has called the "global village." That is the interconnectedness of all beings on the planet. This recognition has been facilitated mainly through technology. Television, transportation, communication all have changed our concepts of time and space and the relationship among all of us. The space programs have given us new pictures of the earth and seemingly instant communication with any point on earth, and changed our sense of who we are. Add to this our emerging consciousness of ecological interdependence, with issues such as acid rain, and economic interdependence reflected in multinationals, and the sense of global village becomes ever more real.

You might at this moment be wearing an item of clothing produced in part from oil from the Middle East, manufactured by cheap labor in Hong Kong or Taiwan for a

multinational corporation based in New York, which moved its goods to the U.S. market aboard a Liberian freighter, German trucks and Japanese conveyor belts. You can see how multinationals make nationalism anachronistic, though obviously nations are not about to roll over and die. And of course, as in most villages and towns, our global village has the other side of the tracks, the poor folk of a Bangladesh or African state or a Nepal.

Our increasing awareness that even a decision on the part of a Nicaraguan or a Lebanese can start a sequence of events that will affect you and me and somebody in Russia and somebody in China and somebody—isolation is just not a tenable position anymore.

Not only are people interconnected in ever more obvious political and social ways, but the leading edges of physics and chemistry are ever uncovering fresh evidence of the interconnectedness of all matter, an interwoven web of form, including us.

What the technology of communication has reflected, though by no means created, is the interconnected web of mind among peoples.

This vast networking of mind is of evolutionary significance. It suggests a new identity for us as part of a larger organism—perhaps the earth itself (the “Gaia” hypothesis).

So perhaps the game was *not* all designed for humans; we humans as individuals are but a step in the process, only an evolving part of something much more vast, in which we each have a function and unique role—but we are not quite as special as we thought.

Part of the turmoil of the moment is that we are at a time of evolutionary transition in which the new has been made obvious but the old has not yet given way, the old being that specialness of ego (individual, or projected out as nationalism) and the specialness of the human who feels pitted against nature to survive. Florence Kluckholm, the anthropologist, spoke about those cultural transitions where people went from a world view of “human *under* nature” to one of “human *over* nature,” one in which we control and master our environment. Now we must graduate into the next level of evolutionary consciousness, that of “human *in* nature,” as *part of* nature. In this stage we will recognize that we are just another part, and that a function of our part is a stewardship role, in the same way the frontal lobe of the brain has stewardship. But stewardship does not mean that the brain is more important than the liver. Without the liver the stewards do not do so well either.

And with this realization, this consciousness of the network of awareness in the Universe, we can appreciate that what we do affects us as much as those to whom we do it. The Bomb is certainly a good example of that.

There is a powerful quote from Gandhi that says, “So far as I can see, the atomic bomb has deadened the finest feelings that have sustained mankind for ages. There used to be the so-called ‘Laws of War,’ which made it tolerable. Now we know the naked truth. War knows no law except that of might. The atomic bomb brought an empty victory to the Allied armies. It resulted for the time being in destroying the soul of Japan. But what has happened to the soul of the destroying nation is yet too early to see.”

That kind of network awakening you can feel in the culture at large. You can feel people beginning to appreciate their interdependence with other human beings. And what is called the networking movement is the barely visible tip of that process. But you can feel it. The way in which the computer has changed the whole game. Information storage, retrieval, and transmission has changed the nature of who we are. It has led to meta-systems in which we must accept our part, rather than our supremacy. So, we cannot live anymore in little self-contained units in which we are supreme. That teeny, little microchip has done a big job in changing our social identity.

This transformation to a networking consciousness has been both facilitated by and a creator of the increasing power of the have-nots. We who are 6 percent of the world’s population who use 40 to 50 percent of the world’s resources can no longer keep the other people over there somewhere. They are no longer *them*. They are *family*. They are *us*. The implications are profound for inevitable changes politically and economically.

But this whole networking stage of evolution still leaves us as individuals. Parts of the network, yes; but still separate entities working together. Networking consciousness is still, however, a big step. You and I will learn from it that we can no longer say, “I’m going to hoard and collect just for me, and screw you.” There is the increasing awareness that we cannot get away with that very much longer. We as individuals must still be concerned with our survival, but we can see how our survival is now becoming inseparable from the survival of all of us. Similarly, our happiness is becoming inseparable from the happiness of all of us.

Let’s go back for a moment to reflect on the cause of the runaway nuclear weapon horror, so brilliantly enunciated by Dan. Why do nations hoard? Why do they threaten? Why do they build arsenals? At its roots it has to do with fear for survival. It’s based on seeing oneself in a hostile universe: a little me in a vast unloving universe, and I must arm myself to survive.

And where does that idea come from? Well, for fun we could go back to the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden, where they had been dwelling in un-self-conscious shared awareness. They are thrown out into their own separateness directly as a result of eating the apple of self-conscious knowledge. The change is obvious. It leads God to ask, when they cover themselves with fig leaves, “Who told you you were naked?” i.e., “Who told you you were separate?”

From a cosmic or transcendent point of view this separateness was inevitable. It was part of the nature of the human journey. These separate identities became our space suits for functioning on earth. And identify with our separate entity-ness we surely have. And, for the most part, we have forgotten the whole cloth from which we were cut.

These fragile little separate identities are at the mercy of time, and the inevitability of change and of death. Our vulnerability in the face of time fills us with fear about survival.

How we deal with that fear is reflected in the basic warp and woof of all civilization. History has demonstrated again and again that if we are not very conscious about the way we go about dealing with our fear and its symptoms, the symptoms destroy us or merely come out in another way. This has happened again and again. The Bomb is really the latest symptom of the intrinsic fear attending a human incarnation on earth when we identify only with our separateness.

What networking consciousness brings us is a fundamental appreciation that we are not alone. We are all in here together. From this comes incredible new strength and some alleviation of the root fear. But since networking consciousness still is based on our separateness, its interdependence does not totally eradicate the root fear. Actions grounded in networking consciousness can alleviate some of the fear, and at the same time perpetuate the root cause of our nuclear weapon predicament.

Joanna Macy said that the fear around the Bomb, which is a combination of anxiety, hopelessness and dread, cannot be banished by optimism and positive thinking. Obviously, that is clear. She points out that it must be named and validated as a healthy human response to the planetary situation in which we find ourselves. We have to open to the pain and the horror and the despair, and the ways in which we just want it to go away. We have got to open to our feelings. And then she says that "if we just open ourselves to our own grief, the joy of recognition of mutual belonging follows." That is an incredible statement about the way in which fear and trauma can create a healing network consciousness.

When we observe natural disasters, people band together and find joy in their shared dealing with hardship. It is a spiritual awakening, a spiritual awakening that comes out of networking consciousness, a networking consciousness that was forced into awareness by trauma.

This awakening into a sense of interconnectedness is, however, but the first stage of spiritual awakening. The seed of fear rooted in separateness remains. The most profound and truly transcendent stage is yet to come. And it is awesome indeed.

In the Divine Comedy, Dante speaks of it thus:

I have been in that heaven the most illumined
By light from Him, and seen things which to utter
He who returns hath neither skill nor knowledge;
For as it nears the object of its yearning
Our intellect is overwhelmed so deeply
It can never retrace the path that it followed.
But whatsoever of the holy kingdom
Was in the power of memory to treasure
Will be my theme until the song is ended.

This deep awakening is an awakening to that which we are, which is beyond our separateness. With this awakening comes the recognition that the separateness with which you identified and which was the root of so much fear is only a relatively real construct of your mind. That “who you are” is not separate at all—in fact never was. Only “who you thought you were” was separate. “Who you are” is not in time, is neither born nor dies. Only “who you thought you were” is in time and is born and dies. A Buddhist monk refers to this awakening as “snatching the Pearl of Freedom from the Dragon Time.”

Mystic poets have attempted to describe this recognition. One of the best comes from a saint named Ram Tirtha.

I am without Form, without Limit
Beyond Space, beyond Time
I am in Everything
Everything is in Me
I am the Bliss of the Universe
Everywhere am I.
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute
I am That, I am That.

What you call this new identity is arbitrary. You could call it “God”; but, as the Hebrews point out, you can’t spell God. It has no name. And it has a thousand names. You can call it the Void, the One; it does not matter. It’s the awakening that matters. For with it comes the realization that you never left home, that you belong somewhere; that you were not separate to begin with; that you did not go out of the Garden of Eden.

But what that apple of illusion did was attach you to your own thinking mind; and your own thinking mind, because it thinks *about* things, leaves you always one thought away from where home is. Because you are always *thinking* about finding a home for yourself, you are always reinforcing your alienation. In your thinking mind, you are even an object to yourself. You are separate from the Universe; and you feel scared shitless. So, you hide in caves, and you pick up rocks, and pretty soon you have missiles.

Coda

Let me point out that although we have been focusing on the nuclear issue, this application of altered states of awareness to turning around nuclear weapons proliferation is only a special case of the more general application of spiritual consciousness to all worldly matters.

So, what is possible?

What is possible is the awakening of collective awareness, the awareness that embraces all beings rather than that which is divisive, the awakening of an awareness out of which come acts that are compassionate, the awakening of an awareness that does not have to avert its eyes from anything in the world in order to remain centered and find its own happiness.

The situation we find ourselves in is one in which the spirit of humanity is impoverished. But perhaps this is the grace that will force the awakening, and out of it will come reasonableness and compassion.

I see a shifting in the balance of consciousness and moral appreciation in the world at this moment, forced by the predicament we find ourselves in. I feel an *ocean* rising, a groundswell of intuitive righting-of-the-ship. I feel that you and I are recognizing that, as Gandhi said, “Your act may be insignificant, but it’s very important that you do it.” And as we act, we can feel that we are part of this groundswell that goes deeper than anything our mind thinks we are doing—that we are part of this shift in the balance of consciousness.

This is a chaotic time, a frightening time. It is also the optimum time for this awakening to happen. Earth will not become Heaven, for we, the people of Earth have much work to do that involves confronting our own greed, and fear, and agitation, and doubt, and confusion. But that work also involves a deeper connecting to truth, to wisdom, to spirit, and to love. This perilous path through incarnation is merely a part of our evolution towards the light of full awareness. That light will come through each of us differently, but its collective effect will be one of growth and strength that we previously thought impossible, strength to look death in the face, to look fear in the face, and to stand together with our hearts open.

If it only seemed like a downward spiral, there would be no sense in having gatherings such as this. But you and I know in our hearts—and will express in our actions—the deeper possibility of which we now are a part.