

ARE WE FULFILLING OUR MISSION?

By William Bloom

All through my life I have believed that I belong to a group of souls – a swarm, a flock? – destined to change the spiritual culture of our planet. For many years I felt we were doing well, but today I also have doubts. These doubts were recently triggered into clarity when I came across the provocative statement of the social activist, Frantz Fanon, who wrote: Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it.

That is a powerful assertion and it is healthy to ask ourselves the questions. How, my friends, are we doing? Are we fulfilling our mission or are we betraying it?

I want to share some thoughts and feelings around all this.

First, I want to emphasise how powerfully I feel this sense of a shared destiny – to birth a new spirituality. I also want to assert how proud I am of what has been achieved. In the midst of so many global challenges, it is worth celebrating the spectacular success of the spiritual and cultural transformation thus far.

We need only to remember what it was like a few decades ago all across the planet. Look at the old culture into which we were all born. Fifty years ago the dominant and ‘normal’ elements included:

The Old Culture

* The repression in general of all women.

* Respect for men regardless of whether it was merited.

* Suspicion and repression of anything metaphysical and occult.

* Respect for age and seniority regardless of whether it was merited.

* Respect for social status regardless of whether it was merited.

* Racism, sexism and homophobia taken for granted.

* The savaging of natural environments with no awareness of the consequences.

* Respect for traditional faiths and their representatives, usually ignoring most of their deviant behaviour.

As a group we then incarnated with a total inability to tolerate those elements. Everything about us rejected those repressive and unjust structures. The revolution of the 1960s and 1970s was peaceful but powerful. Feminism, the ecological movement, flower power, rock music, gay liberation, movies and the new age movement shattered the old hierarchies. A new, liberated and egalitarian culture landed all across the world in democratised and industrialised states. Conservatives may bemoan the ‘loss of values in the 1960s’, but they ignore the quantum leap forward in basic freedoms.

We did well! In the language of Star Wars, the Force was with us.

All of this was not just the result of inevitable social and cultural politics. It is also, many of us believe, the manifestation of great spiritual changes. The zeitgeist, God’s great plan, Gaia’s next emergence, the cosmic rays of liberation, the astrological shifts, the impulse of unconditional love to incarnate more

deeply – whatever you call it – is playing through us.

We are surfers, elements, on a cosmic wave.

And so many people have joined in! The rigorously researched statistics are astounding. The World Values Survey is the most thorough academic research work of social trends. It shows that the majority of people – the majority! – in the West have moved away from traditional religion and traditional authority structures. They have adopted a more general and open-hearted spirituality and a more relaxed approach to cultural controls.

The transformation has become a mass movement and is embedded in modern global culture. In the UK, for example, every national newspaper now carries a large and regular section on holistic health and spiritual development. A recent poll showed that over half the country believes in angels. The richest woman in the US, Oprah Winfrey, has made her bucks and fame from taking an open-hearted, emotionally intelligent, holistic spiritual approach. Holism has recently been given state recognition as a faith community in Norway.

Everything we believe in – everything that was considered so marginal only a few years ago – has become mainstream. Eileen Caddy's medal from the Queen, for example, is also evidence of this.

But in the middle of this substantial cultural change I believe there are several worrying problems that we need to address. And I mean us - not anyone else. We have to look carefully at them because I believe that we are the leaders of this movement and that it is absolutely necessary for us to deal with the challenges, or there is a risk of the movement ultimately failing. By

'failure' I mean the usual historical pattern of religious impulse: a wonderful spiritual inspiration, pure and radiant with integrity, becomes corrupt.

Let me identify some of the problems I see – trusting, as in good therapy, that naming the shadow elements is in itself a useful and redemptive act. And, of course, I have to acknowledge that I am fully involved in all these difficulties and that I claim no innocence, but I trust that my story here is shared. So here are a few of the symptoms that require some tender loving care.

The Challenges

1. Remember those precious insights and objects that we cherished and freely shared – the rocks from special places, the religious ornaments, tribal musical instruments, the insights about new tools for spiritual transformation, the companionship of spiritual advice freely given and received, the pilgrimages and retreats, the herbs and compounds? Commercial forces and globalisation are, to a degree, taking them over. Spiritual insights, tools and support have become cash commodities. They compete in today's marketplace and are frequently valued according to how popular they are and how much cash they generate. Practitioners and sharers of these great things, therefore, may be seduced by the glamour of success, lose touch with the free source of their inspiration and become hijacked by materialistic self-valuing.

2. Without wise guidance and encouragement in our new spiritual environment, many people adopt the new spirituality and think that it is only about achieving happiness, health and success, and fulfilling their personal development and personal needs. They

do not appreciate that spirituality is about expanding consciousness, redeeming suffering and manifesting love. At its most vulgar, meditation, prayer, compassion, renunciation, sacrifice and self-reflection may have lower 'spiritual' status than a well-decorated home, the ability to use quick-fix strategies, organic clothes, flat stomachs and lovely skin.

3. Another more subtle problem is the continuation of spiritual elitism, cultism and prejudice, whilst pretending to be part of a universal and all-including spiritual movement. We can see this in the behaviour, for example, of some people who belong to particular schools of therapy, meditation, shamanism, esoterics, meditation, mysticism, philosophy and are unable happily to welcome criticism of their particular method and belief. They often also are snobs and actively exclude or excommunicate other approaches, usually with the traditional passive-aggressive smile of pained superiority and pretended compassion common to most adherents to a belief hierarchy. There is this tendency, then, amongst some of us to enjoy the community of the new spirituality and use it for emotional sustenance – which is good – but we may then betray it with our lack of that authentic open-mindedness and open-heartedness that releases all fixed beliefs to the universal ocean of mystery. We may protect our corner and pretend to be engaged and modern.

4. Then there is the hazard of self-engrossment. The important growth of psychological literacy and the therapeutic movement has led many people into being so interested in their own private stories that they forget the collective suffering and the collective endeavour. And when they do relate to the communal problems, their attitude

is often just to appropriate the drama, project into it their own sense of victimisation and simply complain, criticise or target. Have we stopped transforming our culture and become caught up with only transforming ourselves? And just as bad are some of us making a living out of training people to train people to be self-engrossed, thinking that we are benefiting the collective but actually colluding with narcissism and alienated individualism?

5. There is also some fatigue and laziness. The revolutionaries and idealists of the past may now be now more concerned with the value of their homes and where their slippers are. We may have achieved some comfort or status – and we do not want to lose them. We think and feel that we have paid our dues, as if age and seniority give us some licence to disengage from the noble struggle.

6. There is also some fear and collective anxiety due to past-life or archetypal memories of religious persecution. This may lead us to being over-sensitive to criticism and cultural pressures, endlessly seeking consensus or approval, when perhaps we should be asserting our truth and our utopianism more publicly. At worst, it may freeze us into inertia. All of the above are totally understandable. They are part to the human condition and, writ large or small, in all of us. They are just part of the territory.

My sense now however is that it is time to unstick ourselves from all that stuff and to mobilise for another sustained and dynamic out-breath. Whilst writing this piece I did an interview for the main BBC radio religious programme about my new book and the new spirituality, which

many of us are calling Holism. (It's an appropriate word.) A patronising and dismissive bishop preceded the interview, describing us as well meaning seekers who might possibly at some point find the truth. The interviewer himself was also patronising and aggressive.

I managed the situation because I have done many of these interviews and confrontations, but I was given pause for thought because the producer of the programme had agreed in advance not to set up the usual polarity and argument, but to have a more appreciative enquiry. Despite the agreement, there was the usual ambush.

Why had they done this, I wondered. Why, when so many people are into this new spirituality, had they been snobbish and aggressive? One of my conclusions is that they could not see the value in our movement. They could not see the wood for the trees. All they could see was the shallow supermarket spirituality, the interior décor, the escapism and self-concern, the crystals and all the rest of it.

In terms of popular culture I am certain that Holism – the new spirituality by whatever name it is known – has landed and claimed its space. But where are its leaders? Where are its values being clearly communicated? Where can people go to understand how crucially all of this affects our global community? Where is the moral guidance and the confident articulation of the ethics and conscience?

This, I believe, is the next step of our mission – confidently to articulate and manifest in local and global citizenship the values and essence of a universal and multifaceted spirituality. There is a mass movement emerging out of Gaia and humanity, and it requires clear

voices to assert its meaningfulness, relevance and value.

I believe that with careful self-reflection, with psychological sensitivity and with a clear appreciation of social and ecological realities, we need to be proudly radiating and expressing our messages. We will all have different ways of explaining and understanding it, but its essence for all of us is clear. This new spirituality is the expression of wonderful values concerned with Love, Connection and the Sacred nature of all life. It is do with community-building – in families, with neighbours, in our towns, countries and the globe – towards a local and planetary society of justice, peace and the creative fulfilment of all beings.

On a new turn of the spiral, we need to engage with the music of the zeitgeist playing through every cell of our beings. We need to turn the volume up on our idealism, up our brilliant desire to create heaven on earth.

In supermarket queues, bars and cafes. At work, at home, at leisure and in voluntary organisations. With strangers, with friends and with relatives. On school and hospital boards, in local and national politics. Wherever and whenever we are. Within ourselves to anxious or lazy aspects of our own psyches. We need to feel, incarnate and assert that we live in an inclusive, powerful and benevolent cosmos of unconditional love, that everything is sacred and precious, and that the purpose of our lives is to build a global community of harmony, justice and abundance for all. If we do not assert this message and create the changes, who will?

It is we who must do this because there are new generations coming up behind us. They are not the same group of souls as we are. They have a different mission. It is our job, not theirs, to

complete what we began and to provide the space for their next steps. Are we leaving behind a legacy of which we can be proud? Are we laying the foundations that will serve our grandchildren and generations to come?

To repeat Frantz Fanon's question: Are we fulfilling our mission?

The word enthusiasm, as many of us know, comes from en-theos, to be filled with the divine within. So there we are. I am ready for more enthusiasm. For more engagement. For more confidence and divine wilfulness. For more alignment. For more understanding of whom we are and

what we are meant to be doing. It may be risky. We may make mistakes. But what a great feeling – to fulfil the mission!

William Bloom is director of The Holism Network the purpose of which is to clarify and publicise the core beliefs of Holism, and to gain representation on any official decision-making body where other faith communities are represented. For more information – www.holism.info. William's new book *Soulution – The Holistic Manifesto* has just been published. www.williambloom.com

A POSSIBLE HOLISTIC MANIFESTO

We live in a period of remarkable change out of which a new spirituality is emerging.

Open-Hearted

Holism is an open-hearted and open-minded approach to spirituality, religion and the meaning of life.

Diverse

Holism welcomes and celebrates diversity of culture and belief.

Beautiful Mystery

Holism honours the beauty, power and mystery of nature, the universe and all life.

Connected Development

Holism recognizes that all life is connected, interdependent and developing to fulfil its potential.

Ethics

Holism supports the core morality of all faiths, combined with the insights of ecology and psychology: Love, Support and Protect all beings.

Daily Living

Holism develops the core of all spiritual traditions:

- Connect with the wonder, power and beauty of all life.
- Develop compassionate self-reflection and wise self-development.
- Be of active service to the community of life.

Action

Holism is dedicated to the creation of:

Social Justice – World Peace – Environmental Harmony –
Development, Prosperity and Fulfilment for All.

In short

All life is sacred, interdependent and growing to fulfil its potential.

Love, Support and Protect all beings.

Connect – Develop – Serve

From William Bloom Souldution – The Holistic Manifesto