

Becoming Radiant Points of Crisis

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At the Aries full moon, we begin the period of the three linked festivals – a time of great potential for change and growth. The first festival – the Festival of Easter – symbolizes for us a time of renewal and rebirth, a time of hope and regeneration.

This year our united meditative focus is particularly important. We know that humanity, as well as the individual, grows through its response to testing, to crises. At this point in time, given the global financial crisis, we are certainly immersed in one of those testing times. Our role, we are told, is to be “radiating points of crisis to produce the needed tension.”¹ This may sound a bit odd. Isn’t there enough crisis in the world already without our contributing to it?

To understand what it is that we are being called to do, we can draw on the concept of *cognitive dissonance* from social psychology. Dissonance results from the perceived inconsistency between one set of beliefs or actions and another. As humans, we have a natural tendency to reduce such dissonance, whether by changing so that there is no longer any conflict or by discrediting the source of the dissonance. The Tibetan describes this process for us when he says, “To this...group [of reactionaries] is committed the work of crystallization that will result in the complete destruction of the old form; to them is given the task of defining the old truths so that the mind of the race will be clarified, that non-essentials and essentials will be recognized for what they are, and fundamental ideas so contrasted with the formulation of dogmas that that which is basic will be seen and the secondary and unimportant beliefs therefore rejected, for only the basic and causative will be of value in the coming age.”²

Fundamental to the process of managing dissonance is an awareness of the inconsistency – and that is where we come in. In the passage quoted above, the reactionaries serve an important purpose but without necessarily knowing that that is their function. Our job is to act consciously to heighten public awareness of the contrast between the status quo that has created the current global crisis and spiritual alternatives. In other words, we need to ask the questions that educate others on the fallacies of the status quo and the benefits of the alternatives. In this process, we need to be extremely careful that we “walk the talk,” rather than discrediting what we wish to promote.

What Needs to Shift

As “radiating points of crisis,” we need to identify the key aspects of the status quo that need to change so that we can hold a clear focus and intent until the issues of this current crisis are brought into bold relief. Only when the options become crystal clear will others be able to see the contrast sharply enough to make the needed choices. So what are the paradigm shifts that need to occur?

The Shift from Greed and Entitlement

There are a number of ways that we could view the issues involved. One is to focus on the matter of greed and the climate of entitlement that has developed, which equates happiness with material consumption. Urged on by “you deserve it” advertising, many have come to feel that, if they want something, they *should* have it regardless of context or consequences ... or even whether they actually need it.

On the political and economic fronts, we see this dynamic playing out with U.S. financial institutions and other large corporations who have been given financial bailouts in order to help their clients but who instead have squandered the money on additional bonuses and perks for their executives – and

now resist any accountability. The extreme greed we have been witnessing, with predatory pricing and executive salaries in the millions while large portions of the world's population are starving, has got to stop. But why would anyone who feels entitled shift away from greed?

The answer lies in seeing positive alternatives modeled in a way that they become attractive to a growing number of people. We can do our part to provide this contrast by examining our own lives. Which of our purchases are actually necessary? How warm do we really need to keep our homes or offices (rather than put on another layer of clothing)? Where can we re-use items rather than purchasing replacements? In short, how can we limit our consumption to that which we truly need and demonstrate that happiness comes from spiritual, rather than material, fulfillment.

The Shift from Fear

Another perspective is to focus on the issue of fear and the multiplier effects of hoarding and other behaviors that go along with "looking out for number one." As long as we share and work collaboratively, we can all survive a crisis. But once people retreat into themselves, there is a domino constriction that accelerates the problems.

Fear is an emotional response to a perceived or real threat or danger. In the present context, fear is being generated most frequently by a belief that there is not enough for everyone. Is that really true? It *is* true that the near term will be challenging, but in the end there is actually enough for us all. It is interesting to note that, while large Wall Street banks are in trouble, community banks across the U.S. are doing fine.

So we can provide a contrast by focusing on generosity instead. In how many ways can we be generous at this time? What about donating money to community food banks rather than purchasing lattes? Are there extra blankets, clothes, toys, furnishings that we can give to charitable organizations helping the truly needy? By modeling such behavior, we challenge the premise on which fear is based.

The Shift from Piscean Values

More fundamentally, we can view the current crisis as part of the shift from outmoded Piscean values to the embracing of a more Aquarian perspective. What we have is a situation where old structures no longer support us and the new structures are not yet formed. The Tibetan reminds us that there are at least four areas in which this shift needs to occur:³

1. *The ideal of paternalism.* Although we have been warned repeatedly by the Tibetan to mind our own business and respect the choices made by others, we continue to support structures where "authorities" dictate what is best for others rather than engaging in dialog. We already have more than enough evidence that collaborative models work better than authoritarian ones, that people need to be free to grow through experiencing the consequences of their choices rather than being protected "for their own good." We can become skilled in group process techniques like appreciative enquiry, nonviolent communication, mediation, and consensus building in order to model alternatives to paternalistic practices.
2. *The ideal of growth through pain and suffering.* Many of us assume that we learn best through painful experiences and that we change only when our current approach is too painful to continue. In other words, we assume we change out of fear or to avoid discomfort. Pain does play an initial useful role in warning us of potential dangers so that we can avoid them. But when we create mental and emotional suffering through the way we interpret that signal of pain, we begin to immerse ourselves in that suffering, which is counterproductive. While we can learn valuable lessons from pain, its most important function is actually to help us empathize with others ... to be able to "walk in their shoes."

We can be most helpful by reminding others (and ourselves!) that the choices we make in interpreting our experience create our emotional state. Joy wells up as we reject the role of victim and

embrace the role of creator. While the energy of suffering is constrictive, the energy of curiosity and experimentation and appreciation is that of an open heart.

3. *The emphasis (particularly for women) on the ideal of self-sacrifice.* While it is true that growth requires the ability to set limits and postpone individual desires for the good of the group, the only true sacrifice is that which is self-initiated. If the sacrifice is imposed by requirement or expectation, then we have coercion. For women as the expected caregivers, the dynamic of putting others' needs before one's own becomes ingrained in childhood, often to the point of exhaustion and ill health. Many women are so absorbed in anticipating others' needs and responding to "shoulds" that they no longer have a sense of their own unique self. In order to sacrifice oneself, one must first have a "self" to sacrifice. While this dynamic is not restricted to women, it is important to keep in mind that many of the teachings on sacrifice (as in placing the needs of the group ahead of one's own) are actually aimed at individuals who are self-absorbed, not those who are already behaving altruistically. We can be most helpful by questioning why the burden of physical or emotional support should fall on only certain individuals and not be shared equitably.
4. *The idea of the immediate satisfaction of desire.* One would think that the over-abundance of material goods and sensations would have brought people to a point of satiation, but unfortunately that is not the case. We still have a cultural mandate of "more is better" or "bigger is better," and an assumption that aggression in order to get what we want is acceptable. We can help by refocusing on concepts like simplicity and sufficiency to offset the emphasis on acquisition.

We can also identify a fifth area of needed shift from Piscean to Aquarian values – i.e., from a belief in scarcity to a belief in abundance. The mechanistic "either/or" model of Newtonian physics continues to dominate the way that we conceptualize our universe and our choices even though physicists and cosmologists have long since disproved that worldview. In fact, economics has been defined by Lionel Robbins as "the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means that have alternative uses."⁴ Actually we live with in an abundant universe, supported by a Sun that daily transforms four million tons of its substance into light that we might exist.

Making the Shift from Crisis to Tension

We know that our growth trajectory is to move from points of crisis through points of tension to a point of emergence or resolution.⁵ We have the role of creating and holding the dissonance that precedes choice. In our present situation, what is the dynamic that will help us along this change sequence? We are told that "the clear light of love must sweep away all this [agonizing and self-preoccupation] and joy [shall] be the keynote of the coming new age."⁶ So what would it mean to live joyously?

Joy is a quality of the Soul that produces a delight so extreme that we radiate and express it spontaneously. It is similar to happiness, but does not involve having achieved some result. Our natural state, as Souls, is joyous. Shifting to a focus on joy involves a conscious *experimental approach* to life. We need to love obstacles, to welcome making mistakes as part of growth. We need to encourage ourselves in risk-taking instead of aiming for a static state of perfection. Risk-taking, after all, is critical for learning to make appropriate choices. Instead of focusing on our mistakes or on what we are giving up – e.g., attachment to specific outcomes, criticism of others, a sense of separateness and superiority – we need to focus on what we have learned from our mistakes and on strengthening our compassion for ourselves and others.

Holding the Tension

Tension implies potential, a sense of anticipation. While others are bemoaning the terrible saga unfolding, we need to hold fast to our understanding that there are still critical lessons for humanity to learn. The crisis is not yet ready for resolution, and this is perhaps our most challenging task. It is similar to not allowing a wound to close while there is still infection inside; otherwise, the wound will

fester and not heal properly. Just as it is our responsibility to provide an educational contrast so that the issues become clear, so too is it our responsibility to stimulate dialogue and experimentation until a true and sustainable paradigm shift has been reached.

Perhaps another analogy might be helpful regarding our role with tension. Picture a violin with a broken string – the global financial meltdown. Simply placing a new string on the violin will not help. It needs to be tuned to the correct pitch. That tuning involves repeated tightening, almost to the point where it might snap. But it is precisely at that point – just enough tension, but not too much – where the sweetest sound can be produced ... or, in our case, an informed choice can be made.

So how can we help to “birth” the tension needed to produce the needed paradigm shift? Living joyously focuses in the moment on what we gain from each experience. It involves releasing regrets over paths not taken or options not chosen. It requires an openness to experimentation and growth. Choosing to live joyously rather than fearfully allows us to experience the interconnectedness of the cosmos. Learning to live joyously is not the only answer to the current crisis, but it is fundamental to the changes that we are challenged to undergo.

Another way of thinking about our role at this time is to frame it as holding the questions open about how best to proceed, resisting premature closure. This position of poised tension is captured beautifully by Vera Grace Frances in the following poem:⁷

I stay my heart,
I make delays
For what awaits this eager pace?
I stand amidst the eternal ways
And what is mine will know my face.

As we celebrate this Festival of Easter, may we each stand calmly and joyously at the crossroads holding the tension of potential and opportunity for humanity.



¹ Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1960), 589.

² Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1934), 328.

³ From Alice A. Bailey, *Education in the New Age* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1954), 119-121.

⁴ Lionel Robbins, *Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (London: Macmillan, 1932).

⁵ Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 623.

⁶ Bailey, *Education in the New Age*, 120.

⁷ From Vera Grace Frances, *I Have Loved Beauty* (Madras: Solar Printers, 1961).