

Transformational Chaos:
How to Survive and Thrive During Change

Offered by

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FOREWORD

In 2007, there is a new term for what we discuss here, “Undoing Ego.” In a brilliant new book by Nouk Sanchez and Tomas Vieira, *Take Me To Truth*, the spiritual underpinnings of this process are explored in more detail. Their basic premise is that we cannot be fully creative beings living happy lives until we undo our “mistaken identity” (housed in ego) that stands in our way with its rigid beliefs and ways.

I first encountered the Identity Crisis process by going through it myself, later taking others through. Even though the concept of the Identity Crisis Process dates back to the 1970’s and is not so clearly explained in spiritual terms as is this later version, I believe both ways of looking at this process are important. I urge readers to check into both. In the meantime, remember this mantra: “We are falling apart. We are not crazy. What is happening is not ‘bad.’ There is an end to this process, even if we cannot see it. It’s time to gather together all our Humility (remembering that there is Something Larger than ourselves) and let things happen as they will!”

----Ilene Dillon, September 2007

DEDICATION

The "Identity Crisis" term and process were introduced to me during my late 20's, a time of great change, upheaval and pain in my life, by a brilliant therapist, Shirley Gehrke Luthman, of Marin County, California. To my knowledge, there is no other written account of this process. Surging emotions go hand-in-hand with change. We are only beginning to welcome all of our emotions, and still don't have a total understanding of their very positive purpose. According to Lazaris (Concept Synergy, Florida), people resist change because “Before change, there is chaos; after change, there is chaos.” Few willingly step into chaos without a driving reason. Yet, in modern times, change **and** chaos have become a part of daily life. Now, more than ever, we mortals need help in understanding the processes and difficulties we go through as a result of almost daily upheaval and change. What follows in this writing can act as both a comfort and a guidepost as you

pass through your own chaos, and as you watch our world pass through her chaos.

Following is a description of the "Identity Crisis Process" as I have experienced it personally, and as I have known it while guiding countless therapy clients through the treacherous waters of personal emotional change. When I worked with Shirley, she quietly supported me with these words: "I believe people don't go through any more than they have to in order to grow." All that we are going through now, as individuals, and also as human groups and societies, is no more than we have to go through in order to grow. To help you thrive through the necessary and attendant chaos, I dedicate this paper to Shirley Gehrke Luthman, L.C.S.W., with my deepest gratitude.

Unconscious Response to Change

"I hope you don't think my whole life has been like this," says Nancy, age 32. "I don't know what happened! Things have always been pretty good, I thought, even after my divorce. But in July, everything started to go wrong. First I lost my job; then my dog was hit by a car and killed. That may not seem very important to you; but that dog was like my baby. I'm still not working, but all I can seem to do is sit at home and cry! My little boy broke his arm in August, and I didn't even care that much. We just patched him up so I could go back to sitting. I didn't know a person could cry so many tears. I have to force myself to leave the house to look for work. And my friends-- they are all too busy to spend time with me. I guess they don't like being with a big crybaby. I don't even feel like calling them, anyway. I am really all alone, now."

Anne, 23, is sitting on the edge of her chair. She looks nervous. "There really is nothing I can put my finger on. About six months ago I just started

to feel depressed. I did all the usual things to get over the depression: I signed up for a class, made a list of all the positive things in my life. I even called my minister and talked with her. Nothing helped! Things just seemed to feel worse, even with all that activity. Lately, nothing that used to work for me works out. I don't understand it. I have been depressed before, but never anything like this."

Tom, 46 and a successful person in his field, says, "All my life I knew what I was going to do. I had career goals. I knew once I reached a plateau what I would do next. It all made sense and I could see my life for years in the future. I've reached most of my career goals. I was even given awards for being top in my field. Now, for some reason, none of it is important. It all seems like a joke. I don't want to do those things any more; but I don't have anything new, either. I can't get up any enthusiasm to get something new started. All I want to do is sit, sleep, and watch television. Sometimes I can get myself to work at my job. Most embarrassing is the crying. I cry over old grade-B television movies!"

Marlene, 54, wipes at the tears running down her cheeks. "There is nothing ahead. I have always had trouble making decisions, but this is ridiculous! I can't even decide whether or not to take out a new washcloth to wash my face in the morning. My children tell me to "get out more" so I won't feel so crazy. But where? For what? They don't understand what is happening to me and I think, frankly, they are scared for me. Nobody seems to know what I am going through. I think I am going crazy and nobody wants to tell me because it might make me go over the edge. Other people don't act this way. I never have, either. I really **am** going crazy! I need some kind of help to get out of this; and I am just hoping and praying somebody can figure out what is going wrong with me."

Though their situations differ, Tom, Nancy, Anne and Marlene are each in pain, and for the same basic reason. For each, life has become difficult, depressing, empty, frightening, without meaning or goal, and above all, hopeless. Things are not going well, and for no apparent reason. Furthermore, nothing better is arising. Even though each has functioned well until now, something has changed so that nothing seems to be going correctly. Life is different; there is no explanation for it. Pain is intense; and there appears to be no way out. No amount of effort or "trying" improves the situation. Thoughts of suicide or death have crossed the minds of each in recent weeks, much to their horror.

What is the explanation? Do these "symptoms" make any sense to anyone? Can anything be done? Who can help?

The pictures presented by Marlene, Anne, Tom and Nancy are very familiar to helping professionals. When old ways of running our lives no longer work for us, the pain we feel drives us to find new solutions, to find out if someone else knows the answer. Usually, people put off seeking help, trying to fix things on their own. They wait, typically, until the pain of trying something new seems equal or less to the pain they are already experiencing. Then they seek help from a therapist, complaining "I am not myself," or "I am going crazy and I'm frightened."

Traditional psychotherapy addresses the situation of Marlene, Anne, Tom and Nancy as "nervous breakdown" and "personality disintegration." Both labels connote a negative process, one to be avoided or postponed. Traditional treatments include hospitalization (including medication) and outpatient medication, combined with differing levels of talk therapy. Those passing through this process have frequently felt ashamed, been labeled as having a "sickness" and have been given the information that they are unable

to handle what is occurring in their lives. Because of this negative connotation, those experiencing the symptoms have felt themselves to be an "unprivileged few" who have "something wrong" with them.

IDENTITY CRISIS

The therapeutic Growth Model employs the term "Identity Crisis" to describe the experience of these four people. This label connotes a positive process, which is to be faced and gone through. Treatment methods include increased support to assist the individual to face and complete this important growth process, and encouraging the individual to treat him or her self gently while s/he goes through this emotionally challenging and apparently chaotic process. Seen as a growth process, it really comes as a reward and monument to our own growth efforts and dedication to find truth. With understanding and assistance, as well as some hard work, a person encountering the "Identity Crisis" can emerge joyously victorious, with "everything right" and renewed from their successful encounter, without the aid of hospitalization or medication, in a majority of cases.

Though most of us experience "Identity Crisis" at least once in our lives, most therapists with whom I have talked are not familiar with the process in the terms discussed here. Their clients persist in feeling like the therapist "doesn't understand what I'm going through" or is "scared for me." Often, unfamiliar with the positive nature of the process and fearful of suicide or psychosis, a therapist may actually discourage it, causing the client to have to postpone his or her growth and go through it at a later point in life, this time certain that things are worse than ever. Once embarked upon the

"Identity Crisis" process, there is no turning back. The process continues until completion, no matter how many times we postpone that completion. While an individual may get distracted from direct work on the issues of "Identity Crisis," even for years, there is a continuing pull from within to complete the journey.

IDENTITY CRISIS EXPLAINED

In a nutshell, "Identity Crisis" is a process of emotional death and rebirth, wherein the person we have learned to become (as the result of our upbringing, choices and life experiences) is destroyed, so that the true personality (present at birth) can successfully emerge and express in daily life. Because the assumed or "old" self has been thought to be necessary for survival, each individual passing through the "Identity Crisis" wrestles to maintain the "old self." When it is pointed out to such individuals that this struggle is a losing battle, as well as one their inside self **wants** them to lose (because they will then be free, more conscious and more at-choice), the struggle abates and the rebirthing process is speeded to completion.

The "Identity Crisis" process is a three-stage process: "Innocence," "Cynicism" and "Innocence with Wisdom." Most people present themselves for psychotherapy during the middle stage, the "Period of Cynicism."

Innocence

Young children walk in a special world where each day is similar to the one before, with rules of operation spelled out for us by parents, teachers,

coaches and other authorities. If there are problems, we can go to others to have them help put things right.

It may be, for example, I know if I play quietly when my mother is reading, she will smile and like the person I am being. If I am loud or whiney, I know she will be angry with me. I know that mother will be happy with me, will love me, and will want to be with me, if I play quietly. My father, however, likes me to sit and rub his forehead after a day of hard work. He gives me a hug and says "I love you," and everything is right with my world. I know the "rules of the road;" and as long as I follow them, everything works out right, people love me; and I am wanted.

This Period of Innocence is different for each person, even for siblings. When we are grown, we go back to it as "the way things always were" or "the way I have always been," even "the good old days." In later life, we use the learning (first experiencing) we did here as "givens," assuming that the way things were for us when a child is in fact the way things are supposed to be in the world. (A book by Dr. Brad Swift published in 2007, *Life on Purpose*, describes what we bring to adult life from this time "Inherited Purpose".)

During this period, children also enter into what are known as "survival contracts." If, for example, I am a loud child and my parent is offended by loudness, I will opt to quell my own nature and become quieter. I do this because of my concern that my parent will not want or love me if I do not behave the way they want me to behave. These "survival contracts" are especially common in dysfunctional families. After years of practicing quietness, I will come to think of myself this way, and by adulthood I may assert, "I am a quiet person." Even though I was not a quiet person by nature, by practicing quietness for so many years, I will think myself to be the way I remember always being. I will, however, be living a lie. Who I was

at birth was a noisy person, not a quiet one. In order to survive to adulthood, I have become the person I think others want me to be. The "real me" is hidden so far inside I don't even remember that individual.

As therapists know, even when reality is smashing us in the face, we humans still insist that things are "supposed to be" the way they were in our childhood. Usually, we do not think much about what we learned in the "Period of Innocence" until our "givens" are forcefully challenged, leading us to the next stage, the "Period of Cynicism."

Period of Cynicism

As long as I am in my family or in a cultural situation with the same rules for living, I remain "innocent." When something happens in my life, which severely challenges at least one of the major rules that has worked for me and held my world together, I enter the Period of Cynicism.

Many things could happen to trigger the Period of Cynicism: parents may die, my spouse may divorce or die, a child may be born, or I may marry and work to be a good spouse, only to find "happily ever after" is not so happy after all. As a newly wed wife, for example, I may reach out to my work-weary husband to rub his forehead and make him feel better. A very private and quiet person, always sensitive to intrusion, he snaps at me: "Why are you always grabbing at me? Can't you just leave me alone when I come home? I can't stand your intrusiveness." I sit down quietly and smile at him, gazing confusedly into his face seeking clues of how I am to behave. I want him to love and like me; but I do not know what to do. "Don't you have anything useful to do?" he yells at me. "Don't just sit there and stare at me!"

Amazed, confused and frightened, I withdraw. I wonder: What have I done wrong?"

As wife, I have done everything I learned (during my "Period of Innocence") that I am "supposed" to do; and all the wrong things are happening. I feel very helpless and hopeless.

As husband, I have learned rules about being strong and not too emotional. Newly married, I come home tired from work, where things have not been going well for me. I am worried about money, security and providing well for my wife and myself. According to the rules I learned in my "Period of Innocence," it is not "right" for me to tell my wife how scared I am. I am "supposed" to puzzle things out and find a solution without worrying her. When I sit down at last and my wife comes to rub my forehead, I feel like crying. But I should not be "weak" and "break down." I will feel guilty to tell my wife what is bothering me. "Why are you always grabbing at me?" I yell, hoping to keep her from touching me and infiltrating my shaky protectiveness. "Can't you just leave me alone?" Then she stares at me and I have to work harder to cover my feelings, so I yell at her again. When at last she goes off hurt and cries, I am puzzled. I have been doing what a man is "supposed" to do and my wife is not understanding. Why is she not respecting my efforts fully the way she is "supposed" to do? Doesn't she know what she is doing is making things harder for me? I wonder what is happening.

In an effort to steady my spinning world, I try utilizing other approaches, using techniques and taking stances that have worked for me in the past.

As the wife, I may be very nice for several days, making extra efforts with meals, attentiveness, dress and humor, only to have my husband withdraw from me more, accusing me of "bothering" him more than ever. When I seek

help from my mother (or best friend), she suggests having a long talk. I know he will not talk because now he will not even stay in the same room with me!

As the husband, I may bring my wife a box of candy, remembering too late that she is dieting. I try to have patience with her, but every effort she makes to get closer feels intrusive, and I shove her from me emotionally. I confide in a friend at work: women are impossible to understand or communicate with. They just don't understand the stress a man is constantly experiencing.

One by one, whether wife or husband, the things I know how to do no longer work for me. I begin to notice that *nothing* I have learned in the past really works for me any more. Everything is different. The rules have all changed. I have nothing on which to count; and I have nothing with which to replace the old, now useless rules. Something definitely feels wrong. "I" am not working any more. Am I crazy? What am I doing wrong? Is there something I am not seeing that a brilliant expert can show me?

There definitely *is* something wrong...the person I have until now thought was "me" is breaking apart. I cannot stop this breaking apart; I have nothing to put in its' place. My pain is excruciating. The symptoms I develop, when I notice them, scare me and cause me to think I am surely crazy or very sick. They may go on for a while, and seem just to "pop up" in my recent past. They can include:

1. Physical symptoms such as lightheadedness, nausea, trembling, backaches, anxiety attacks, irregular breathing, near blackouts, flushes and accidents, both large and small.
2. Extreme mood swings such as happy and invincible one moment, and totally depressed or sad the next. Most vexing is the apparent lack of cause for these mood swings.

3. A concern with death: thinking about death, considering suicide (perhaps for the first time in my life), feeling very afraid of death or being concerned that others may die (sometimes the concern is that I might kill or hurt them).
4. Confusion. Nothing makes sense.
5. Cynicism. Nothing really seems to matter any more. I would like to get interested in something, someone, but I do not really care about anything or anybody. Caring, I reason, would probably only result in more pain and rejection.
6. A conviction that I am crazy (often accompanied by a stated desire to check into a hospital or get my hands on some medication).
7. Feeling totally alone and disconnected, "knowing" that nobody will ever understand or want the crazy person I have so recently become, and that nobody really cares about me.
8. A desire to make change (with accompanying despair because I cannot seem to make decisions about what changes to make).
9. A desire to withdraw, sleep for days. (Some people use tranquilizers or other drugs or alcohol to achieve this withdrawal during this time.)
10. A compulsion to "understand" what is happening, with accompanying frustration because nothing seems comprehensible and everything is topsy-turvy. Besides, I feel like I'm developing early Alzheimer's, because I cannot make decisions or remember things as I usually have.
11. Panic. Many people describe themselves at the edge of a black abyss or tunnel. Things seem hopeless and unending.

12. A desire to contact family and old friends, to make contact with the past (and it *never* fills the void).
13. Pain...excruciating, with a feeling that I cannot stand another moment of it. Death may be the only way out of this much pain. Because I cannot see light at the end of my tunnel, I despair, thinking this is "the way life is now," and "if it is, what's the point of living?"
14. Giving up, knowing I cannot tell anyone about this crazy experience. At the same time, I feel like I cannot do all this alone.
15. Loss of interest in physical things, especially sex.

It is easy to see why people in the "Period of Cynicism" are frequently given tranquilizers or placed in psychiatric wards. Merely observing this process is frightening, especially if you have not fully experienced it yourself. (It is horrifying if some behavior on your part appears to have triggered this process!) If you do not understand the process as a positive growth experience, even an experienced helping person will want to help relieve the obvious and terrible pain of the individual in as fast and complete a manner as possible, simultaneously fearing dire consequences that seem nearly impossible to direct constructively. (Drugs take effect quickly, but usually only mask the process, making the individual's work doubly difficult.)

To date, few helping people operate with the understanding that *the pain itself* is important to the success of the process, and should not be curtailed. The pain operates like a fire which the farmer uses to burn off his field in the autumn. It is a purifier, vital to the continuing balanced ecology of the field. Emotional pain comes as both a signal and a release. The signal says "change." Regardless of how frightening or chaotic, you must now make

change (in fact, you are already in the middle of it, guided by some inner force or “knowing”). The release you are experiencing is of all the emotions that have been tucked away over the years in an effort as a result of your “survival contracts,” the things you did to become the person you have thought others needed you to be.

How many people tell a person in the midst of the Period of Cynicism that what you need to do is "get out and meet people," "take up a hobby," or "get interested in something." This is excellent advice for a person beginning reconstruction and entering the period of "Innocence with Wisdom." Now, however, it offers only to cover the internal work that must be done in order to thrive through this transformation. People in this desperate situation already want to "grab onto" something to make their world stop spinning. Ordinarily, they either "get married, get a job they bury themselves in, or get religion." (Consider, for example the tremendous appeal of Jim Jones' Temple, The Moonies, and other religious sects to which people flock during times of pain and transition, such as when first leaving home.) This solution will alleviate the immediate pain. But the pain will lurk under the surface, only to re-emerge, even more intensely, at a later time. Life's process will offer another major change, such as illness, loss of job, death of a partner, or disillusionment with church or hobby, and the whole process will resume immediately, and usually in a more forceful manner.

The most effective way to deal with the "Period of Cynicism" is to go through it. The ancient and spiritual principle is *On Earth, you must go through something in order to get beyond it.*

"But what can I *DO?*" people usually demand. The answer is: You can *do exactly nothing.* This is a process of “being,” one you will need to go through.

Once started, there is no way to reverse or end it until the process is complete. You can sometimes postpone the process, but like childbirth, once your new self starts to be "born," there is no way to stop the process until it is completed.

What is left for you to do, then, is to batten down the hatches, like a sailboat in the eye of a storm, and experience the storm, which is raging through you predominantly, though it may also be raging around you as well. You may hold onto something, but make that "something" a therapist, coach, minister or counselor whose contract with you *is* to turn you loose and help you get on your own as soon as you are ready. And make sure that individual realizes that you are passing through a growth process and transformation and will be there as your partner, and is not afraid of your process.

Then spend your time experiencing all the many, powerful emotions which tear through your insides. (In fact, the emotions are like a wound, cleansing by releasing its pus to drain.) Cry, scream, feel joyful, hurt, moan, hold your body, and go through the pain. It will come in waves. It usually comes over a period of time, which can be anywhere from six months to two years, depending upon how strong or stubborn you are, how well supported, and how much you have to clean out of your system. (2007--Our conscious awareness has increased since first writing, and the time we have to work through things has decreased, since first writing. You are going through a re-working of the central nervous system, so it will take time—but perhaps now not as much time.)

The crucially painful time usually lasts about six months, with the remaining months spent in steadily decreasing cynicism and pain, with steadily increasing wisdom and understanding. Be alone. Let yourself sleep. Let yourself feel vulnerable. Take some time off from work if you can (some

people "unconsciously" obtain jobs which are not too demanding while they go through the "Identity Crisis" process). Ask little of yourself, other than to ride through this storm, going wherever your emotions take you.

And remember, *There is an END to this process!* The "sentence" is not indeterminate.

The "Period of Cynicism" is a period of cleansing. All the old ways, all the emotions, that had to be withheld due to the survival contracts you made, are now flooding out of you so they can be gone forever. Emotions that are held inside tend to grow, so you will wonder at times where *so much* emotion originated! Keep in mind that once released fully, which you are now doing, they will never build up to this force or depth again. You are in the process of getting free!

In spite of the extreme pain that most experience, it is a time for rejoicing. At last, after long years, the emotions you tucked away as a child as part of your survival, are leaving you. For a long time, they have been as heavy baggage you pull along with you every day, but which you no longer need. In addition, the person you have come to see as "Me," but who is not *really* "me." is dying. Without understanding of the process, most people think it *is* "Me" who is dying. Instead, it is an aspect of "Me" that you no longer need. You are cleansing yourself of hearsay and gossip about you or how to behave in your world, given to you in the past by parents, teachers, and other to whom you gave authority. This hearsay and gossip does not fit who you really are as a person, who you came to this planet to be. With courage, you are opening yourself to find out who you are, separate from what you have been told or shown in the past. What an adventure! You are freeing yourself from the past, so that you can live with the present as it

really is, rather than as you imagine or remember it to be, or have been told it is. You are becoming free!

A person *can* make it through this "Period of Cynicism" alone. Very few actually wish to do it alone. Having friends or relatives assist you usually does not work, because it is too easy for you to repeat your "survival contract" behaviors and patterns from the past. Those people are too important to risk losing, so you hold back, fearing their loss. A therapist, counselor or coach, on the other hand, is a paid (though caring) employee, whose job it is to listen and help without extracting an emotional price. You owe them nothing more than a check. It is beneficial for you to ally yourself with a therapist who will be non-interfering, understanding, supportive, respectful and who is not frightened or does not rush in to do your work for you.

This is a job you need to do on your own, ultimately. Inside you know this, even though you may be puzzled about why your friends seem to have all dropped out or to back away from you (they know it, too!). This is a very delicate operation. You are cleansing yourself and are very vulnerable to the influence of others, an influence that can affect you even if all they do is walk across the room in which you are sitting. Those others you allow in close to you *must* be willing to make you and your process *number one*. This is a dangerous, uncharted mission, so your base camp (you and your assistants) *must* operate with full efficiency, ready to help you whenever you encounter major obstacles. You cannot ask yourself to hold back any emotion or any part of yourself, in fear or out of love for others, any more.

One last note. Most people fear that if they allow themselves to draw inward to this extent, they will not really ever care about others again. They get concerned that they will become totally selfish and withdrawn from the world for the rest of their lives. Fortunately, this is not true. If you let

yourself go all the way with this process, and withdraw totally for a period of time (until you *feel like* coming out again), then you will *want* to come out. And because you are now following your own personal rhythms, when at last you come out, you will be glad to be out and will want to stay out. You will not have to go back inside to this painful depth in just this way again. Once you have faced your demons inside, you have cleansed them, including the space in which they have resided. They have no place to which to return!

Now what begins to happen with you is this: You will begin to feel so good inside, so complete, that you will feel almost driven to share yourself with the outside world. By taking the time to face your demons, release the old emotions, and move at your own pace, you have begun to love yourself—a process that includes the respect of accepting yourself just as you are (as you were from your first breath on the planet). This process has begun to fill you up with love. A cup, which is filled up, begins to spill over.

This time, you cannot be knocked off your feet again by what the outside world has to offer you, positive or negative. This time you are full *from the inside out*. This is what it is like to be in the "Period of Innocence with Wisdom". The curious fact is that *after* you belong to yourself, you give even *more* to parents, lovers, spouses, children, friends and society, because you now have so much more inside of you. The fear we all have about drawing inward and never coming out *has not*, in fact, held true for anyone with whom I have worked in 35 years of helping people through the Identity Crisis process. Drawing inward gives even greater impetus to move outward, and to give to others. This time the giving is done from “fullness” rather than fear, “have to’s” or “shoulds.”

The Period of Innocence with Wisdom

At long last you complete your journey through the Period of Cynicism, and slowly and steadily, begin to own your life (as you intended from the beginning). Instead of dreading the next day, you begin to look forward to the new adventures coming your way. Instead of things appearing hopeless and gloomy, they begin to take on interest. You actually feel like spending time with others and notice their presence seems to give to you instead of take away from you. You begin to become enthusiastic and happy about life again.

At first, many new things appear attractive. You sign up for a class, begin an exercise program, join a group, or take up a musical instrument. After a few meetings, what you have selected no longer feels good or right. You want to quit. It all feels like a mistake. "What is wrong with me?" you ask yourself. The answer is, "Nothing!"

Look at any child between the ages of 11 and 16. Watch them get totally interested in something or someone. They dream about, talk about, study about and immerse themselves in their interest. They are totally involved in what is striking their interest. After a short while, ask them about the coveted person or topic. "Oh, them?" they respond. "I don't like them any more. I like somebody (or something) else now!" Frustrating, but normal, behavior for this age group.

This is the same behavior that is going on as you explore, in depth, what might fit you, now that you have returned to your real self. Left uninterrupted, you will explore each new interest or person until you clearly see it does not fit you. Then, after one meeting, after a short visit with someone, or even after a semester of hard work, you will want to drop it. For your continued growth, "drop it" is exactly the right thing for you to do. Drop

it and go on to the next thing. Explore it as thoroughly as you need to (it won't take as much time as the teenager, because you have experience and a mature brain, which they have not yet developed). Then be a "quitter." The "Identity Crisis Process" is not a time in life to make permanent choices and decisions. Being a "quitter" is your job during this process, especially in the "Period of Innocence with Wisdom."

Eventually, over time, those people and those ideals, those "rules" and those things that really fit each of us will be what you have left. You will know they fit you because you have found out *from inside of yourself* whether or not they are right. You have not relied upon someone else's teaching, rule or opinion to find out whether people or things fit you.

You have, in essence, rediscovered the innocent, "I know what the rules are" days of childhood. Only this time, you have *wisdom*: you know that the rules can change. You know that you cannot always rely on the systems or presence of others. You know that change is expected and that chaos accompanies it. You also know, however, that nobody can take away your system for living in the world, because it comes from your own insides. No one can die or divorce or challenge and wipe you out. The base on which your Foundation for Life is built each day is *yours* and comes from deep inside. You are no longer at the command of others, your emotions or of circumstance. Your life operates as you direct it. Welcome back!

What In the World?

What is happening to our world? We have all noticed that we are experiencing climate change, business breakdowns, natural disasters and manmade disasters, war, debasing of our religious institutions, revelations of impropriety and prejudice perpetrated by entertainment stars and

politicians, and of widespread greed (regardless of its consequences to people or to our earth), to name only some of the things that seem to be falling apart.

To most of us, it seems as if we have been living our lives as “good people,” following what we have learned as “the right way” to live a good life. Yet now millions of people live in fear every day. We are afraid to allow our children play in their own yards, to travel lest we be hijacked or exposed to an insidious disease, or to live in homes that are not equipped with anti-burglary devices and alarms. What is happening? The wonderful innocence of earlier years has been cruelly snatched away from us, leaving us in an ever-changing, dangerous world that is transforming so fast that we truly can never go home again—the neighborhood is probably no longer there!

To understand what is going on, we need to remind ourselves of an ancient spiritual principle: *As above, so below*. In this case “below” is the individual level; “above” is the collective, world level. What can happen with individual people can also happen with cultures and with human beings (and *vice versa*). From this perspective, it is possible to see that our world is going through an Identity Crisis. Let’s look at the stages and see how this may be happening.

Innocence

We used to walk in a special world where each day was similar to the one before, with rules of operation spelled out for us, the way things were in the early 1900’s. We lived our whole lives near our loving families, turning to them for support, understanding, and help. We all helped each other put things right.

Men earned the living, chopped the wood and dealt with affairs of the world. Women washed the clothes, tended the house, made the meals and raised the children. Children everywhere were taught to respect their parents. Communities functioned as “extended family,” making it difficult for children to disobey the rules without someone speaking to them about it or reporting their transgression to their parents. “What the neighbors think” was important. We wanted our neighbor’s respect and to avoid their criticism. We knew what the rules were. We attempted to follow them. We worked to do “the right thing,” didn’t ask for too much, worked hard (and all our lives), and made sure to vote (because we believed our vote really counted!)

To live this way, we made “survival contracts,” that included putting the family or the community ahead of individuals. Few people talked about “personal growth.” Personal sacrifices were (usually willingly) made for the good of the whole. We were “good people” living in a “good world,” following the rules we had been taught by our parents and theirs before them.

This Period of Innocence may have had different variations for individual nations or even groups within nations. Nations had particular character, separate money systems, national costumes and spoke their own language. We were separate and proud of it. We were “not the same” at others. We now know this to be incorrect (read Gregg Braden’s inspiring book, *The God Code*, for his proof that we are all One.) But we all were in “innocence.” We thought of ourselves as being the way we remember always being. The “real truth” of our human One-ness was hidden so far inside our nationalistic borders and thinking that we didn’t remember that we are One people as human beings.

We did not think much about what we had learned in the "Period of Innocence" until our "givens" were forcefully challenged, which first happened during World War I, but most profoundly during World War II, when nations moved beyond their nationalism and women joined the work force. This led us to the next stage, the "Period of Cynicism."

Period of Cynicism

As long as we had the same circumstances and rules for living, we remained "innocent." Then things happened that severely challenged several of the major rules that worked for us and held our world together. These changes pushed us into the Period of Cynicism.

As human beings, husbands and wives, and national citizens, we had done everything we learned (during our "Period of Innocence") that we were "supposed" to do; yet all the wrong things began to happen. The cozy 1950's, for example, led into the tumultuous 1960's, during which our children grew long hair and rebelled, a war was fought that could not be won, Women's Lib refused to allow women to return to domestic servitude, and fathers began to realize how much they had missed in working for the family and not taking time to relate to their children! Things we had taken for granted began to fall apart; and as a result, people began to feel very helpless and hopeless.

We tried to steady our spinning world, using techniques and taking stances that have worked for us in the past. We began to legislate behaviors that had previously been informally regulated in families and communities, giving ourselves "rules to follow" in place of our former "community watch" system. This did not work well, because the world had begun to change so fast that people found themselves in situations that were so new that they

were not covered by the rules just made! Television, technology and the explosion of the Internet made this situation increasingly worse.

One by one, no matter what we tried, we found the things we knew how to do no longer worked for us. We began to notice that *nothing* we had learned or used in the past really worked for us any more. Everything is now different. The rules have all changed. We have little on which to count; and we have nothing with which to replace the old, now useless rules. Something definitely has felt wrong. "Things are now what they used to be! They all seem crazy. What are we doing wrong?" We began to turn to self-help, business and other "gurus" in the hope that whatever it is we were unable to see some brilliant expert could explain or use to make things right.

There definitely *was* something wrong. Our world was having the same kind of "nervous breakdown" we can observe in individuals. Who we thought we were was breaking apart. We could not stop this breaking apart. Even at this writing, we have nothing to put in its place. Our pain is excruciating; our fear suffocating. The symptoms we develop, when we notice them, scare us and cause us to think we are surely doomed. Our symptoms include such things as:

1. Physical illnesses, such as cancer, striking a larger proportion of the populations than ever before.
2. Extreme mood swings such as happy and invincible one moment, and totally depressed or sad the next, especially in response to natural or man-made disasters. Sometimes, however, there seems to be no apparent cause for these changes in mood, or the cause (for example, as reflected in our stock markets) seems very small.

Stress results.

3. A concern with death: thinking about death, feeling very afraid of death or being concerned that others may die. Fear is a constant companion for far too many people.
4. Confusion. Nothing makes sense.
5. Cynicism. Nothing really seems to matter any more. People don't vote, because they don't trust the process or think their vote does not matter. Anomie reigns; we do not really care about much except a high level of hedonism.
6. A conviction that we are crazy (which is accompanied by enormous numbers of children and adults taking daily medication just to get through their days).
7. People feeling disconnected, willing to kill, expecting to be killed, and behaving in ruthless or wild ways because "nobody cares" and communities no longer know all their citizens.
8. A desire to make change (but accompanied by despair because we cannot seem to make decisions about what changes to make).
When a new "problem" is revealed, we pass a flurry of legislation, hoping to cover the issue with a new set of "rules, which, increasingly, we recognize are doing nothing but creating enormous tomes to hold the paper on which they are written.
9. A desire to withdraw, to sleepwalk through life. Take a look at the young people of the world to see how many of them are using alcohol, drugs, music, movies, computers, and other things to withdraw from life. Fewer and fewer people have any kind of connection with nature.
10. A compulsion to "understand" what is happening, with accompanying frustration because a study that proves one side of

an issue on Monday is often directly challenged by another study released on Friday! Few things seem comprehensible and everything is topsy-turvy.

11. Panic. Many people describe themselves at the edge of a black abyss or tunnel. Things seem hopeless and unending.
12. Pain...excruciating, with no end in sight. When the fires are put out, there is an earthquake. When we get the tents put up for the earthquake victims, others need help from a tsunami, a hurricane, floods, wars, religious or ethnic persecution, and so forth. Many feel like they are engaged in a worldwide game of Monopoly, and someone else owns all the hotels! Many despair, thinking that if this is "the way life is now, then what is the point?"

We could go on with this list, which only serves to show that our world is now going through its own "Period of Cynicism." As a group, human beings are in the process of getting back to who they really are, Spiritual beings who came to this earth to go to school.

We need to understand that *the pain itself* is important to the success of the process. Our pain operates like a fire which the farmer uses to burn off his field in the autumn. It is a purifier, vital to the continuing balanced ecology of the field. Emotional pain comes as both a signal and a release. The signal says "change." Regardless of how frightening or chaotic, we must now make change (in fact, we are already in the middle of it, guided by some inner force or "knowing"). As we allow ourselves to feel our pain (and that of our Earth), we are experiencing all the emotions that have been tucked away over the years, tucked away because we thought that was necessary in order to live a life on this planet.

The way out of this Period of Cynicism is the same as for individuals—we need to go through the breakdown, experience the resultant emptiness, and begin to discover our real selves once breakdown is complete. As we all need to do our internal work, examining what has not worked and redesigning the ways in which we live on this planet, we will pass through the world's transformation and thrive.

Though we want "grab onto" something to make our world stop spinning crazily, such a solution will only alleviate the immediate pain, yet not deal with the real issues lurking under the surface. The real issue is that we have forgotten who we are. We have begun to think that we "own" the world, rather than realizing it is here for us to visit as we grow our understanding and love. As when individuals are in the "Period of Cynicism," the most effective way to deal it is to go through it, following the ancient and spiritual principle is *On Earth, you must go through something in order to get beyond it.*

"But what can I *DO?*" you may demand. The answer is: You can *do exactly nothing.* This is a process of "being." Focus on being, on learning who you really are! The most any of us can do is reconnect with ourselves, which means a reconnection with nature and caring for our earth. Our collective new selves are already in the process of being "born." We must go through the transition until it is complete, being as loving to ourselves, each other and our planet as we can be during our passage.

What is left for us to do, then, is to batten down the hatches, like a sailboat in the eye of a storm, and experience the storm, which is raging through us and our world. The only thing we can now hold on to, which will work, is our essence, our Spiritual essence. If we don't have an idea of what that is, then discovering our Spiritual essence needs to be the focus of our

attention and our days. Many, many wonderful teachers are now emerging to help us in this process.

Since 2004, this writer has hosted an Internet radio program, Full Power Living, (www.worldtalkradio.com Studio A, Thursday 9 a.m. PT) that is focused on “awakening the world to the power and importance of human emotions.” There are too many people to be listed here, all of whom are working to wake us up, support us, show us the way, and help us find our true selves. Their appearances are archived on World Talk Radio and at www.emotionalpro.com/ We can make faster progress when we get on board and make our changes. Listen to these many wonderful souls, some of whom will be speaking directly to you, and are waiting to help you thrive through this transition.

Remember that *there is an END to this process!* The "sentence" is not indeterminate. The "Period of Cynicism" is a period of cleansing—for individuals and for the world. All the old ways, all the emotions held in over the past years are now being released. Emotions that are held inside tend to grow. We have held onto many, all of which have now grown in intensity, giving rise to what may seem like *so much* emotion! We, and our earth, are going through a deep cleansing, giving us the real possibility of not having to go through this force or depth again. We are—all of us, now-- in the process of waking up and of getting free! In spite of the extreme pain, it is also a time for rejoicing. We have the opportunity to become fully conscious and to remember the Spiritual, loving Beings we are, all connected, all One.

Because we have not understood the process, large numbers of people have begun to focus on their fear of the complete destruction of our world as we know it. It looks like we are all (including our planet) dying. In fact, we **are** dying. Yet it is only the “mistaken identity” part of us that is dying, the

people and ways we have been unconsciously being that really do not work. The parts of us that have been asleep, unconscious and not in our own best interest, are sloughing off. We are now cleansing ourselves of the myths, blindness and lethargy that has become part of being human, once we “forgot” who we really are. It no longer fits us. We are—each and all—so much more. With courage and awareness, we have begun opening ourselves to find out who we are, separate from what we have been told or shown in the past. What an adventure! We are becoming free!

Together, we are cleansing ourselves. With so much breaking down, we are also very vulnerable. To make the transition, we cannot ask ourselves to hold back any any part of ourselves in fear. It is time for us to joyously and courageously claim our true birthright. This can be done when we focus on Faith, Trust, and most of all, Love. Once we have faced our demons and cleansed them, we will live life differently, consciously. Our world will **not** be as we know it; it will be much, much better.

Once the breakdown is complete, and we pass through an empty period, what will begin to happen is this: we will begin to feel so good inside, so complete, that we will begin to accept ourselves as we really are. This will cause us to begin to fill up with love. We cannot be thrown off track again, because we will know ourselves fully *from the inside out*, having taken this time to clear out the old, poisonous patterns. As we fill up with love, we will begin to be like a cup filled to the brim with coffee or tea, into which more is being poured--we will begin to spill over. Thus filled (and constantly refilling), we will continuously operate on the basis of love.

We will have entered the "Period of Innocence with Wisdom". In this, we will begin to *give* because we need to give in order to make room for all the love that is continually filling us up. Filled up, we will claim our full

consciousness. As conscious, giving, full and loving beings, we will transform ourselves and our world for centuries to come.

The Period of Innocence with Wisdom

As human beings and the Earth complete their journey through the Period of Cynicism, they will slowly and steadily begin a new type of existence on this earth that we can barely imagine. People will base their lives and decisions on love, will be responsible for themselves and to others, will have no reason to hide and thus will be truthful, will take joy in giving, will take time to love and connect with the Earth, and will recognize their connected selves. Joyously, people will appreciate and work with their Giant School, which will turn “problems” into “puzzles,” taking the pain and sting out of life. People will be enthusiastic, happy and joyful. Many things will change as a result of people’s new internal attitudes, thoughts and beliefs, because of the ancient principle is *what you have inside of you, you tend to attract from outside of you*. When people have enthusiasm, happiness and joy inside, this is what they will create and attract.

Because of these current difficult times, people will realize that such joy and happiness can be “lost,” yet life will return to the steady sureness people have felt in the past, during our collective “Period of Innocence.” We will return to our “innocence,” but we will bring with us our “wisdom” from this journey. We will be able to deliberately direct the course of our existence; and we will direct it according to the principle, art and skills of love.

SUMMARY

In my book, *Born to Learn*, I give a full explanation of how our world operates as a “Giant School,” to which we have all come to grow and learn.

Every experience we have offers us lessons and opportunity to learn. When we learn the lessons, we can go on from these "same old" experiences and have new ones. (Failure to learn the lessons causes us to go over and over the same territory, getting painfully mired, just as if we got our car stuck in the mud and kept spinning the wheels so the car sank further and further into the mud.) The learning process never stops throughout our life on earth. To avoid, put off, tranquilize or get otherwise involved in "other things" does not get rid of any of these lessons; it just builds pain and makes the whole experience take longer.

The "Identity Crisis" in which we are all now collectively engaged, painful as it may be, is one of the most exciting and wonderful processes we can experience in life. It is part of breaking us free, allowing us to become joyous learners once again.

It is never too late to grow. Whether we are talking about all of humanity or each of us individually, if you see yourself in the process described here, do not despair. You are definitely not alone. You are not crazy--or wrong, bad, or guilty of anything, either. You should not be tranquilized into oblivion or locked up in a hospital. You are growing--growing up! We all are. Accept the process. Seek help from those who support your growing up in a clear and helpful way. Do not grab on to anything as "The Answer" everything in this process is (of necessity) temporary. Help your government, community, friends and family to "pass through" this process, urging them to let go. Make your Mantra this little prayer that was once offered to me:

“Rhythm, Harmony, Balance, Peace.

Hold, release. Hold, Release.

Thank you, God, I am at Peace.”

Then, just feel. And experience. And be grateful that at last your life will be your own. Some morning in the not-too-distant future, you will wake up and ask yourself "How do I feel today?" and "What is right for me to do today?" Without having to consult anyone else, you will **know** the answers, which fit you best -- and, you will live them without fearing who or what you will lose. You will have returned to being the person you were at the earliest moments of your life. You will be your real self. You will be free! We all will.

Joyously, the same is true for our world, and for all of humanity. We are in the midst of great chaos, **because** we are making the joyous journey, transitioning from the sleep-walking, disconnected and self-protective people we have become to the joyous, awake, connected and loving people we are designed and came here to be. Without having to have "rules," we will **know** how to benefit ourselves and others; and we will want to do those things. We will be living without fear or self-protectiveness, returned to a state of innocence and wonder that rivals that of the Garden of Eden. This is what is in store for us as we make our individual, and human, transition from life as we have known it, into life as it is possible to be.

Out of the chaos into the sun. We all know we are here to make this journey. We are making it together. Let us now embrace it and reclaim the rightful heritage of our authentic selves, our Soul and our healthy Earth.

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