

Noetic Now, Issue Nine, April 2011

## Toward a Consciousness of Oneness

by Robert Atkinson, PhD

At a press conference immediately following the earthquake in Japan, President Obama noted that “for all our differences in culture or language or religion, ultimately, humanity is one.” A century ago, earthquakes in California, India, and Italy similarly evoked shared grief and mutual assistance, although oneness was not yet part of our mainstream vocabulary – nor our consciousness. This significant shift in awareness during the last century illustrates the power and promise of evolution. A century and a half ago, evolution wasn’t discussed, but once Darwin’s work brought it into popular discussion, we grew to understand that everything evolves – life, societies, cultures, civilizations, science and technology, and consciousness itself.

### Humanity’s Wake-Up Call

We stand at a critical juncture in our collective evolution. As our twenty-first century society undergoes rapid change, people seek more solid ground in ethical and moral values to serve as guideposts for navigating these uncertain times. We want answers to the deep questions, which continue to perplex us: Is there an underlying purpose that drives evolution, or do change and transformation happen randomly? And if there is a purpose, what is evolution moving us toward?

Humanity faces the crisis of a divided consciousness. As we struggle through a time that begs for a momentous breakthrough, will we let this crisis get the best of us, or will we midwife our current transformation-in-progress toward collective harmony and planetary sustainability?

Our collective story is lagging behind, resisting the flow of evolutionary change. The pre-twentieth-century story we have carried with us into the twenty-first century – built on the assumptions of duality, separation, and boundaries – has lost much of its meaning, power, and, most alarmingly, hope for the future. It faces crisis after crisis without offering any lasting resolution. The once well-understood principle of continual progress toward a collectively desired and beneficial goal is missing.

We need a new chapter in our evolving story that will restore hope, infuse new meaning into the wondrous process of creation, and unify our consciousness with a vision we intuitively trust. We need a story that keeps renewing itself. The one we have will not abruptly stop on December 21, 2012, with the end of the Mayan calendar, though some think it will. The Mayans believed in cycles: at the end of one calendar cycle, another begins with year zero. Our story is meant to continue and evolve, from one chapter to the next, just as natural cycles continue from one to the next.

## Principles of an Evolving Story

We are living in a time of convergence. Some aspects of society are breaking down, while others are coming together more meaningfully. Dramas that have been considered fragments of chaotic circumstances, such as war and ecological breakdown, are increasingly being seen as elements of a greater transformational process – however difficult – which has played out over and over in our collective history and ultimately led to the advancement of civilization.

It may just be that a growing awareness of our oneness is at the heart of an evolutionary process designed to lead to personal and global transformation on ever-escalating levels. I have identified seven underlying principles shared by the world's wisdom traditions that are governing this process of change and growth, which has been unfolding since the beginning of time and will continue to direct the course of our evolution for millennia to come. This process includes the progression of multiple communities with a duality consciousness (pitting one against another) toward a global community with a oneness consciousness (where equality, justice, and compassion prevail).

Using “principle” as an *essential tenet that explains a natural action or order in the makeup of reality*, here are the principles I believe are guiding our evolving story:

- 1. Consciousness is a potentiality set in motion by a dynamic process.** We are born with an inherent urge to understand reality, unfolding through our desire to make sense of life's mysteries. Our fullest potential for consciousness is realized as we independently investigate the twin knowledge systems of science and religion while integrating our own life's lessons.
- 2. Change is inevitable and necessary for evolution.** On both the micro and macro levels, from algae to weather systems, the nature of everything is constant change. There can be no evolution without change. To navigate this time of unusually rapid change, of universal reformation, we need a transformation of consciousness, which will become the change agent for the evolution of civilization.
- 3. Growth by degrees is inherent to life.** The pace of growth enables all life forms to evolve toward their potential. Historians, mystics, and developmental theorists understand that growth on the individual and collective levels is regulated by a creative, dynamic, universal force and designed to occur in a gradual and ordered progression.
- 4. Transformation occurs through the conscious confrontation of opposing forces.** Individually and collectively, we participate in the inherent dialectic of life not only by being tested to our limits but also by being pushed beyond them to confront unknown realms. Just as change is necessary for evolution, so is transformation. The trials and tribulations of life have purpose; they are the cause of great advancement. Opposition is a catalyst for transformation and is essential for maintaining the law of balance in the universe.

**5. Consciousness expands along an eternal continuum.** Consciousness pervades all of creation; it's at the heart of an interconnectedness that links all beings. Our consciousness of ourselves, each other, and the universe – our spiritual development – has been ever-evolving and increasing in complexity over time. Evidence for this includes an increasing capacity among many to think globally and identify themselves as world citizens.

**6. Consciousness progresses toward unity.** As we journey through our lives, we discover many viewpoints, experience many identities, and confront endless pairs of opposites. At some point we may even glimpse an inherent unity to it all, a hidden wholeness. This is not a fluke. Evolution has been leading us toward a more complex understanding of this mystery and toward a greater appreciation of our essential oneness.

**7. Reality is a unified whole, and revelation is continuous.** On the horizon of eternity, out from behind the illusion of the many, all veils pass away, and all that remains is the One. Only through the eyes of unity does reality appear as changeless yet evolving. Unseen but ever-present spiritual forces, revealed progressively and cyclically, have always been and still are being released, pushing evolution to higher levels of convergence, signaling humanity's coming of age. The motifs and archetypes for a story of renewal and regeneration are embedded in these seven principles. They tell us a great deal about who we are at our core and where we are headed. They operate on an evolutionary basis, both linearly and cyclically as well as individually and collectively.

## **A World Giving Birth**

The fourth principle, on the nature of transformation, is key because it is the bridge leading from the world of opposites and duality consciousness (the first three principles) to the realm of unity and oneness consciousness (the last three principles). Transformation is essential in the evolutionary process of birth-death-rebirth – we cannot get from birth to rebirth without it.

The end of the Mayan calendar represents the symbolic death of one cycle and its rebirth into another. As Jung noted some eighty years ago, "It seems to me that we are only at the threshold of a new spiritual epoch . . . What is significant in psychic life is always below the horizon of consciousness, and when we speak of the spiritual problem of modern man, we are dealing with things that are barely visible," things that have their beginnings in the dark night. The birthing process of authentic transformation is usually long and difficult, and the emergence of a new global consciousness is now well into its natural cycle. According to Ervin Laszlo, the eventual result of the process we are witnessing *and* experiencing will be "a consciousness that recognizes our connections to each other and to the cosmos . . . a consciousness of connectedness and memory . . . [that] conveys a sense of belonging and ultimately of oneness . . . a wellspring of empathy with nature and solidarity among people."

"We are already living in two worlds," Deepak Chopra writes in the foreword to Laszlo's *Worldshift 2012*. "One world moves ahead by inertia from the past, like a massive luxury liner drifting at sea,

while the other steps into the unknown, like a child entering the woods for the first time.” The critical shift occurs in consciousness and nowhere else.

Futurist Barbara Marx Hubbard also uses the birthing metaphor to describe this particular moment in our conscious evolution. We are in the midst of a great shift, she says, that is bringing about planetary birth. The crises we are facing are essential to the process. They are the evolutionary drivers, accelerating our spiritual development.

### **Moving Across the Consciousness Continuum**

Jung’s notion of archetypes, in which the aptitudes, instincts, and preformed patterns we most need are provided to us by our heredity, puts consciousness on a continuum, which we move across as we grow and develop. These “inherited possibilities of ideas,” as Jung called them, not only represent “the authentic element of spirit” or “a spiritual goal toward which the whole nature of man strives” but also the first step in the evolution of consciousness that can be seen as our original state of inherited oneness. The archetype is that which potentially connects us to our divine nature.

We meet each challenge along the continuum as we live within the world of opposites and take on a divided consciousness – our acquired consciousness of duality. The final step brings us back to a consciousness of oneness when we recognize that reality is a unified whole. This would be our reacquired state of intended oneness.

The individual’s evolutionary journey has its parallel on the collective level as well. As part of our genetic makeup, these inherited possibilities help explain why tribal and indigenous cultures are based on the principle of unity in homogeneity, or unity in sameness. Unity is built upon the very qualities and values that define and sustain them – mutuality, cooperation, stability, and interconnectedness. *Oneness*, or unity, is then the first stage in the collective evolution of consciousness, in our movement across the consciousness continuum.

As cultures and societies migrated, became more complex, and experienced conflict with each other in the natural course of evolution, this consciousness of oneness was severely tested and an eventual shift occurred. Unity within and loyalty to one’s known group was replaced with a need to reconcile with a new and larger group which happened to carry different and often foreign views and values. The disruptive forces of colonization are an obvious example of this.

From this forced transition period of chaos and conflict came the second stage of our collective consciousness, *duality*, or unwanted, nonreciprocal pluralism, in which distinct cultures interact, find differences, and nevertheless need to get along. This second stage is characterized by separateness and disagreement, which has led to a long history of oppression, prejudice, and

conflict between various cultural and ethnic groups, tensions that are still playing out on every continent.

At the same time, greater and greater levels of unity were slowly being established on social levels. This can be explained as a progression of cooperation, from simple levels of interpersonal interaction to more complex social or communal levels. The writings of the Baha'i Faith describe this as, "Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal toward which a harassed humanity is striving."

This most basic pattern of the collective evolution of humanity is completed with the third stage, which returns us to where we began: a consciousness of oneness, or unity, but on the grandest scale. The pattern as a whole can be described as *oneness followed by duality followed by oneness*, or inherent unity followed by intentional separateness followed by intended unity.

### **Reclaiming Oneness**

After a period of unity in sameness followed by phases of duality and forced pluralism, we are now entering the third stage, characterized by unity in difference, or unity in diversity. This entails nothing less than the unity of all humankind, in which, "all nations, races, creeds, and classes are closely and permanently united," as the prophet-founder of the Baha'i faith, Baha'u'llah, envisaged in the mid-nineteenth century.

"Unity in diversity" is not just a slogan or buzz phrase. It is a way of explaining the principle of humanity's oneness with itself and the entire creation. It honors and cherishes all the natural and unique forms of diversity that exist both within the human family, from every ethnic group to each individual temperament, and in the natural world. Diversity in the cultural, personal, and natural realms is just as vital and essential to the well-being of humanity as it is in the realm of the human gene pool.

As more and more individuals come to understand the essential unity of humankind and begin to live accordingly, our collective cultural and spiritual development will move ahead toward its next stage of maturity. As greater numbers embrace a global consciousness and identify themselves as world citizens, and as this is reflected in various spheres of action, from interpersonal to social, cultural, economic, and ecological, the principle of humanity's oneness has the potential of becoming accepted in our time, as that of nationhood was in its time.

The awakening of a global consciousness, along with the acceptance of a global ethic, can only succeed when it is simultaneously linked to and understood as interdependent with the core principle of our time – the oneness of humanity. When this principle is affirmed as a common understanding, all will be in place for the practical organization of humanity into working relationships of oneness, harmony, and unity, which are the building blocks of world peace and

prosperity. As Ervin Laszlo puts it, this would be when “all things are subtly but effectively tuned to all other things, and in some respects act as one. This has been known for thousands of years in the world’s religions and spiritual traditions. For religions and spirituality the key words have been *love* and *oneness*, and for scientists they are now *connection* and *coherence*. In the final count, they mean the same thing.”

---

## References

Abdu'l-Baha. 1982. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust.

Atkinson, Robert. 2002. Culture and the evolution of consciousness. *The Baha'i World 2000-2001*. Haifa: Baha'i World Centre.

Baha'i International Community. 2005. “The Search for Values in an Age of Transition.” Haifa. Accessible online at <http://statements.bahai.org/05-1002.htm>.

Effendi, Shoghi. 1974. *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*. Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust.

Jung, C. G. 1973. *Psychological Reflections*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

——— 1933. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.

Laszlo, Ervin. 2009. *Worldshift 2012: Making Green Business, New Politics, and Higher Consciousness Work Together*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.

Marx Hubbard, Barbara. 1998. *Conscious Evolution: Awakening the Power of Our Social Potential*. Novato, CA: New World Library.