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Signs of an Emerging Worldview

Humanity finds itself in the midst of a major shift in worldview. Such a shift involves a fundamentally new way of perceiving the world, the environment, each other, and ourselves. Accompanying this perceptual shift are fundamental changes in values and priorities, in what we deem important. This shift involves a movement away from a material view of the universe and our place in it to a more spiritual view. Instead of the ultimate "stuff" of reality being material, with consciousness secondary and derivative, consciousness is coming to be understood as the underlying foundation of reality, out of which the entire cosmos arises. Nature is no longer merely a neutral object for scientific investigation or a resource for industrial exploitation. It is a sacred order infused with intelligence and purpose—one with which humanity needs to cooperate. The emerging worldview restores a profound sacredness to the world.

Before exploring facets of this emerging global shift, it's worth examining a number of important societal trends that signal such a change is actually taking place. The following ten trends are just a few among many. Collectively they point to the emergence of a new worldview that both perceives the universe as fundamentally conscious rather than material, and to an increasing emphasis on spiritual over material values.

Popularity of Eastern Philosophies and Spiritual Practices

Interest in Eastern philosophy and religion in the United States and Europe can be traced all the way back to the popularity of the theosophical movement in the late 1800s or the teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda in the 1930s and 1940s. This fascination with the East gained traction with the introduction of transcendental meditation by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the 1960s and the widespread interest in the 1970s in going to India to study with saints and gurus. In the 1980s numerous American students of Buddhism and Hinduism, such as Ram Dass, Joseph Goldstein, and Jack Kornfield, helped disseminate teachings about meditation and yoga. Chinese and ayurvedic medicine became more widely accepted, and transpersonal psychology emerged as a significant field of study. Finally, in the 1990s, the teachings of the Far East went mainstream. Traditional Western medicine incorporated mindfulness meditation, largely through the efforts of Jon Kabat-Zinn, and research on Chinese and Indian medical systems received government support. The National Institute of Health established a program on complementary and alternative medicine to study the efficacy of acupuncture, yoga, meditation, and contemplative practices. Presently, mindfulness meditation is being used by psychologists to treat depression and anxiety disorders.

The Environmental Movement

Over the past forty years, a group of diverse citizens—professionals, scientists, indigenous people, religious devotees, and others—have contributed to humanity's growing awareness of its essential interconnection with the earth. Though diverse, the environmental movement can be defined by certain common values: an emphasis on sustainable management of natural resources and stewardship (rather than exploitation) of the earth.

Historically, environmentalism can be traced back more than a hundred years to American conservationists such as John Muir and George Perkins Marsh. However its emergence as a significant movement dates back to 1972 with the United Nations

Conference on the Human Environment, the first time a large group of countries engaged in a discussion of the global environment's status. Significant environmental legislation, such as the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Air and Water Acts, was passed in the United States following the conference.

Since the seventies, the movement has grown on both scientific and popular fronts. The science of ecology—one of several scientific disciplines that emerged at that time—studies how the abundance and distribution of organisms is affected by interactions with their environment. Similarly, environmental medicine investigates, among many topics, the impact of environmental toxins on the epidemiology of diseases.

The current acute environmental crisis has catapulted the movement from a small group of people and organizations to a widespread concern of the public at large all around the globe. Movies such as *An Inconvenient Truth* and *The Eleventh Hour* have helped to sound the alarm about global environmental problems—particularly climate change—to wide segments of the population.Promoted in countless magazines, books, and TV programs, the current environmental movement offers many guidelines on how individuals can live more sustainably, embracing new products and technologies that reduce carbon emissions and preserve resources. (Some of these guidelines are described in chapters 19 and 24.)

The seriousness of the environmental crisis is motivating many individuals, organizations, and corporate groups to make an effort to repair the significant damage caused by 150 years of industrial and commercial development. Thousands of citizen-based groups throughout the world are working on problems such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, exploitation of animals, destruction of habitats, soil erosion, water depletion, and many other environmental issues. .At the government level, states such as California and countries such as Denmark and Germany, are making major changes in their economic infrastructure, pursuing goals of increased energy efficiency and reduced carbon emissions. Last but not least, a few progressive corporations such as

BP Amaco, Dupont, Wal-Mart, and Toyota are demonstrating greater environmental awareness. A new respect for the earth is emerging.

The New Physics

Authors such as Fritjof Capra (1975) and Gary Zukav (1979) have described numerous parallels between the findings of early-twentieth-century quantum mechanics and ancient Hindu and Buddhist conceptions of the universe. Physical reality is not what it appears to be. It is not solid but almost entirely space. At bottom it does not consist of substantial particles but highly interconnected fluctuations of energy. An actual particle of "stuff" only comes into existence as a result of somebody's *observing* these fluctuations or waves. In short, substance turns out to be a construct resulting from the observation of something fundamentally insubstantial. Time and space lose the absolute character proposed by Newton; rather, they can shrink or expand depending on the speed at which one travels. At light speed they vanish altogether. Empty space is not really empty; it is a sea of virtual particles constantly arising from and returning to nowhere. The energy contained in empty space exceeds that in all matter by a factor of ten followed by forty zeros. All of these findings suggest a correspondence, at least at the quantum level, with ancient Hindu and Buddhist notions that the entire visible world is *maya*—a transient illusion. Matter, space, and time have no absolute status; they are, as Immanuel Kant suggested long ago, constructs of our mind. The ultimate nature of reality is beyond our comprehension.

In the 1970s and 1980s it was empirically demonstrated that two particles separated by a great distance could affect each other simultaneously without any intervening signal.(Radin, 2006, 226-227) For any possible causal relationship to exist, an intervening signal would have to exceed the speed of light, something prohibited by Einstein's theory of relativity. Einstein himself referred to the potential for this sort of phenomenon as "spooky action at a distance" and never accepted the idea. The fact that it

has repeatedly been demonstrated has led to the notions of quantum entanglement and nonlocal interactions in physics, phenomena that have not been adequately explained by quantum theory to this day. Physicist David Bohm has proposed a radically interconnected universe—interconnected through what he calls an *implicate order*, whereby the two ostensibly separate particles that simultaneously affect each other are ultimately one and the same event (1980). This, too, parallels ancient Hindu and Platonic philosophy. What appear to us to be separate events turn out to be merely different permutations of one seamless, underlying reality.

One of the great remaining challenges in physics is to integrate quantum theory with the theory of gravity implicit in Einstein's general theory of relativity. The two don't mesh, and physicists are looking for a grand theory that could explain everything in a single framework. A major development of new physics is string theory, as discussed in such popular books as Brian Greene's *The Elegant Universe* (1999). In string theory, fundamental particles observed in particle accelerators are replaced by tiny strings shorter in length than even the smallest subatomic particles. Different types of particles are understood as different vibrational frequencies of these exceedingly tiny strings.

To date there are many different string theories, none of which has yet been empirically verified. However, with the opening of the Large Hadron Accelerator in France in 2008, preliminary evidence for string theory may become available. One intriguing aspect of string theory is that it requires additional dimensions beyond the usual four associated with space-time, anywhere from ten to twenty-six dimensions. The strings vibrate in these multiple dimensions. One can only speculate whether these additional dimensions correspond to the subtle dimensions proposed by various cosmologies and metaphysical systems throughout history (notions of astral and causal planes, heaven or bardos). At the very least, these extra dimensions offer one way of explaining the seemingly mysterious connections that occur in nonlocal events.. Thus string theory, though not yet verified, may turn out to support a basic tenet of the

emerging worldview: all phenomena are fundamentally interconnected. Quantum entanglement—*which has been empirically demonstrated*—does so as well.

The Gaia Hypothesis

Thirty years ago, James Lovelock, a noted British biologist and environmentalist, proposed an interesting hypothesis in his 1979 book, *Gaia: A New Look at Life*. He claimed that Earth's biosphere consists of so many interrelated and delicately balanced processes that it behaves more like an intelligently organized system—an organism—than a complex machine exhaustively described by physics, chemistry, biology, geology and meteorology. The implication was that the earth could be viewed as a living being, capable of self-regulating environmental variables to suit its own needs. Borrowing from Greek mythology, Lovelock named this living system "Gaia."

During the 1980s the Gaia hypothesis was widely criticized by mainstream scientists as being mystical and untestable. Lovelock and his colleague Lynn Margulis subsequently modified their position, proposing that Gaia was sustained by a complex array of interconnected, self-regulating processes. While the biosphere still functioned as an organized whole, the long-term constancy of certain parameters such as atmospheric composition or ocean salinity was governed by self-correcting homeostatic mechanisms, not purposive or teleological "manipulation" by Gaia. In short, homeostasis does not necessarily imply conscious control.

In more recent times, the Gaia hypothesis has helped shape the formation of *earth system science*, sometimes called geophysiology, which views the earth in its entirety as the ultimate object of ecological study. Perhaps most importantly the Gaia hypothesis has influenced ecological science to study the *biosphere*—including biomass, oceans, and atmosphere—as a complex, organized whole system.

If the biosphere is a complexly organized system, humanity is clearly introducing imbalance into this system through global warming, deforestation, and extensive

destruction of biological species and habitats. Earth system scientists , including Lovelock, are currently examining the possibility that earth system dynamics can reach critical thresholds and then undergo rapid change. It appears that the earth system has made sudden state changes in the past, with some dramatic transitions occurring in periods of a decade or less. Thus global warming, for example, may have the potential to shift the biosphere into a different mode of operation, one that is less habitable for humans, within a relatively short time. In his most recent book, *Revenge of Gaia* (2006), Lovelock offers a pessimistic outlook for Earth's future, proposing that widespread loss of forests and the ocean's photoplankton—the two main ways our planet reduces atmospheric CO2—is likely to create positive feedback loop that will make the earth uninhabitable within a hundred years.

While few scientists take such an extreme view, Lovelock and the Gaia hypothesis have influenced many scientists to focus on the earth as a whole system—and to recognize that the impacts of human energy consumption are far from negligible. A major challenge for all of us in the twenty-first century is to find ways to live in greater harmony with the matrix of life to which we are inextricably linked.

Appreciation of Indigenous Cultural Perspectives

The past few decades have seen interest in Native American spirituality and practices become widespread. Many people have been influenced by the Native American worldview described in popular books by Carlos Castaneda, Lynn Andrews, Mary Summerain, Black Elk, and Rolling Thunder. Traditional Native American beliefs closely parallel dominant themes of the emerging new paradigm: the earth is seen as fundamentally sacred; all beings, animate and inanimate (from rocks to organisms to plants to stars), are fundamentally interrelated; and a conscious intelligence underlies everything, including weather, crop cycles, the healing of disease, and the journey of the soul after death. Many people now engage in traditional Native American spiritual

practices, such as sweat lodges, vision quests, and praying to the four directions of the medicine wheel. Underlying all of these practices is an affirmation of humanity's essential connection with the earth and the radical interrelationship of all elements of nature. Both are profoundly needed counterpoints to the fragmentation and alienation endemic to our materialistic, technology-based society.

Increasing Acceptance of Paranormal Events

Paranormal phenomena such as telepathy (perceiving another's thoughts), clairvoyance (also known as remote viewing—"seeing" an object that is hidden or at a distance), precognition (foreseeing the future), and psychokinesis (moving or affecting an object without any causal interaction with it) cannot be explained in terms of the known laws of physics. On the basis of the materialist worldview of conventional science, they should not even be possible. Yet such events are part of the experience of many, if not most, people. As long ago as 1978, a poll found that two-thirds of college professors accepted extrasensory forms of perception, and more than 25 percent of "elite scientists" believed in them. Given the growth of public interest in the subject in the last thirty years, one would expect these percentages to be even higher today.

An abundance of carefully conducted experimental studies has verified the occurrence of the best-known forms of psychic phenomena (telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis). These experiments—first conducted by J. B. Rhine at Duke University in the fifties—have been replicated by investigators at many different universities, and bear statistical results that are far beyond what would be expected by chance. In the words of respected British psychologist H. J. Eysenck, "Unless there is a gigantic conspiracy involving thirty university departments all over the world and several hundred highly respected scientists in various fields, many of them originally hostile to the claims of the psychic researchers, the only conclusion the unbiased observer can come to must be that there are people who obtain knowledge existing in other people's

minds, or in the [remote] outer world, by means yet unknown to science" (Radin 1997, 96-97).

An indication of the increasing acceptability of paranormal research to mainstream scientists is the appearance of favorable reviews in respected academic journals. One on telepathy research appeared in a 1994 issue of *Psychological Bulletin*, a prominent journal published by the American Psychological Association. Another article, presenting a theoretical model of precognition, appeared in a 1994 issue of *Physical Review*, a mainstream physics journal.

Perhaps more than any other individual, Dean Radin, a senior scientist affiliated with the Institute of Noetic Sciences, has done much to increase the credibility of research on paranormal phenomena through his books, *The Conscious Universe* (1997) and *Entangled Minds* (2006). In *The Conscious Universe*, Radin provides a detailed review of the history of paranormal research, showing how improvements in experimental and statistical methodology have gradually led to results that are difficult to contest on methodological grounds. One of the most intriguing areas of research described in that book is the study of *field consciousness*, or the ability of small or large groups of people to mentally impact the physical world, as measured by random number generators. For example, during events in which a large numbers of people are focusing on the same thing, such as televised coverage of the World Olympics or the Academy Awards Ceremony, random number generators positioned at multiple sites show significant departures from randomness. At other times, both preceding and following these key events, they exhibit randomness. This phenomenon has been replicated in multiple locales and suggests the possibility of a group—or even global—collective consciousness functioning as a unified field.

In *Entangled Minds*, Radin develops a coherent theoretical model for paranormal phenomena, for example, by demonstrating that telepathy can be understood as a form of entanglement of minds compatible with quantum-entangled particles in quantum physics.

In brain wave correlation studies, Radin presents evidence that shifts in one individual's brain activity are instantaneously correlated with identical shifts in another's brain activity, even when the two persons are separated by considerable distance and unaware of each other consciously (2006, 136).

The radical implication is that our minds are, at their foundation, connected with other minds, and that we can affect each other in subtle ways that remain largely unconscious. A subtle shift in mood or emotional tone that we experience may be intimately connected to a friend or loved one residing hundreds or thousands of miles away. Even more radical is the fact that such interactions don't appear to be constrained by time. We may experience anxiety, or even physical pain, *before* rather than after a loved one at a distance has an accident or injury. Such nonlocal connections seem to occur more frequently among close relatives or friends. To the extent that the data reported by Radin are further replicated, we have evidence for the paradigm-breaking possibility that our individual minds are all deeply embedded in an interconnected, seamless whole. "Entangled minds" thus becomes a metaphor for the deep structure of human consciousness—a unitary, collective consciousness of which we are all a part. What happens in our private experience may not be entirely self-generated; rather, it may be influenced from afar.

Holding onto the mainstream materialist worldview, many scientists continue to reject paranormal phenomena on the grounds that no plausible mechanism yet explains what is going on. There has been an increasing trend, though, to question the old paradigm and preserve the phenomena. Telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis are increasingly viewed as anomalies that radically challenge the prevailing paradigm. They imply a universe where events can be connected without (known) energy transmission—without even causality.

Popular Interest in Areas Once Considered Esoteric

In the first half of the twentieth century it was rare to find books on metaphysical topics. Fear of being ostracized or ridiculed kept the few individuals who explored esoteric areas from being very vocal. Those who studied theosophy or Rudolph Steiner were in a small minority.

Today, every major bookstore contains multiple books on topics such as communication with the dead, portrayals of the afterlife, reincarnation, past-life regression, angels and spirit guides, astrology and tarot, psychic healing, channeling, ghosts and poltergeists, and UFOs. In any major metropolitan area in North America, classes and workshops on these topics are not hard to find. While these phenomena have not been experimentally demonstrated in the lab (as telepathy, clairvoyance, and psychokinesis have) they have all been experienced by thousands of people throughout the world. The assumption that *all* reports of such phenomena are based on imagination, wishful thinking, random coincidence, or outright fraud is itself a conclusion that requires a great stretch of the imagination and contains an implicit bias. A careful, unbiased review of the extant literature on phenomena such as the afterlife, reincarnation, ghosts, communication with the dead, and UFOs reveals highly suggestive evidence for the existence of all of these things. Their purported existence also implies a universe much larger than the physical, space-time universe known to mainstream science.

The Emergence of Complementary Medicine

Physician authors such as Bernie Siegel, Larry Dossey, Deepak Chopra, and Andrew Weil have ushered in a whole new view of medicine: one that not only recognizes the importance of mind in the genesis and cure of disease but also acknowledges the profound role spirituality can play in health and healing. The terms “holistic medicine,” “alternative medicine,” “complementary medicine,” and “integrative medicine” suggest a new paradigm that recognizes the importance of all levels of the

human being—body, emotions, mental attitudes, and soul—in understanding and treating disease.

Conventional medicine is underwritten by a metaphysics of materialism and mechanism: disease is defined in terms of symptoms and underlying pathology. The body is an anatomical-physiological system curable through mechanical and biochemical manipulation—primarily surgery and drugs. The patient is assumed to be ignorant and passive relative to the doctor, either compliant or noncompliant with "doctor's orders."

Holistic medicine turns most of this on its head. Disease is not just a breakdown of bodily functions but an indication of imbalance in an individual's attitudes, values, and spiritual outlook, as well as important lifestyle factors such as nutrition, interpersonal relationships, and physical environment. Treatment is multimodal and may include conventional allopathic approaches such as medication as well as alternative approaches such as chiropractic, acupuncture, herbs, massage, yoga and meditation, counseling, and homeopathy. Patients are held responsible for their own health; doctors are collaborators—rather than authorities—who assist patients in determining what combination of interventions may best support optimal well-being. The metaphysical paradigm behind holistic medicine goes far beyond a materialistic universe, stressing fields, subtle energies, and the importance of consciousness in both disease and health.

There are many indications that complementary approaches to health care are entering mainstream medicine. Integrative medical clinics have appeared throughout the U.S., and many medical schools now offer courses—if not entire programs—in complementary medicine. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) program on complementary and alternative medicine has grown from an office with a $2 million budget to a national center with a budget of $123 million in 2006. Medical institutions are even beginning to take a look at the role of prayer and contemplative practices. A decade ago only a couple of medical schools offered courses on the role of spirituality in medicine; today, more than a hundred such courses exist. Many medical centers currently

offer courses in meditation and yoga to their patients. The mindfulness-based approach to stress and disease developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn in the early nineties is now available at hospitals and clinics throughout the country. Research on the efficacy of meditation for controlling pain and reducing stress, anxiety, and depression is now accepted and reviewed by mainstream professional journals. Both theoretical conceptions and research pertinent to the new paradigm in medicine are explored in depth in *Consciousness and Healing: Integral Approaches to Mind-Body Medicine* (2004), written by Marilyn Schlitz and Tina Amorok and sponsored by the Institute of Noetic Sciences.

The Rise of Feminism and Feminist Spirituality

The emergence of the feminine archetype socially, politically, and in reconceiving our relationship to the earth's environment is a vital—some would argue central—force in the global shift to a new paradigm. Since the advent of feminism in the 1960s, values of cooperation, inclusiveness, interrelationship, receptivity, and intuition have increasingly permeated areas as diverse as medicine, education, corporate management, environmental politics, and economics—not to mention personal relationships and daily interactions. The ascendance of the feminine is evident in the widespread interest in—and enormous amount of literature about—women's rights, feminist spirituality, and the ecofeminist movement. Initially many women wanted to replace three thousand years of male dominance and patriarchy with a society based on feminist values, where women would hold dominant positions of political power. As time has passed, the challenge for many feminists has shifted to finding the right balance and integration between male and female values. Both are seen as necessary to guide and preserve our world in these difficult times.

The Global Rise of Citizen-Based Organizations

One of the clearest indications of a shift in consciousness is the almost explosive growth of charitable and nonprofit organizations worldwide. Environmentalist and social entrepreneur Paul Hawkin describes this as a global movement without ideological boundaries or leaders, but self-organizing and dedicated to making the world a better place (2007). He also describes it as humanity's "immune response" that has assumed the task of saving and protecting itself from "toxins" such as political corruption, social injustice, and environmental degradation. Thousands of organizations and millions of people appear to be ready to actively contribute time, money, or skills to make a difference, either in their local community or by contributing to causes with global reach. If this movement toward taking responsibility for the planet and humanity's condition continues to grow, there is some hope for our collective future. There are many who believe, like Hawkin, that we are in the midst of one of the largest social transformations in human history. The recent movie, *The Shift*, directed by Rochelle Marmorstein, vividly documents this rise of humanitarian activism.

Conclusion

These ten trends, among many others, point to the emergence of a far-reaching shift in humanity's perception of the world and of itself. Together they represent a movement away from ideas and institutions that embrace material values, reductionism, hierarchical control, and the supremacy of the personal ego and toward those that embrace spiritual values, wholeness, integration, cooperation, and the interrelationship of all human beings, regardless of their differences—indeed the interrelationship of all elements of the universe itself.