

SEED PAPERS on the Collective Wisdom Initiative (CWI) Website
www.collectivewisdominitiative.org (as of 2.9.05)

Titles in bold are SEED PAPERS contained in this sample box. All other titles are SEED PAPERS that can be downloaded or read at CWI website.

CWI Doorways, Organizing Questions, and Seed Papers

ROOTS: *What are the roots & seeds of this emerging field of Collective Wisdom?*

**Group As Art Form of the Future:
Origin Points of the Collective Wisdom
Initiative** by Alan Briskin

AESTHETICS: *How is collective wisdom accessed and expressed through art, images, symbols, and aesthetic practice?*

Inner Image & the Collective Experience
by Carol Hegedus

CONCEPTS: *What theories and models are informing the field?*

Investigating the Space of the Invisible, a
Conversation with Arthur Zajonc
by Otto Scharmer

The Dark Ecstatic and Collective Wisdom
by Arthur Colman

What Supports the Emergence of
Collective Wisdom by David LaChapelle

**Dawning of Free Communities for
Collective Wisdom** by Arthur Zajonc

Quadrants and Circles: A Map of the Inner
and Outer Worlds of the Individual and
the Collective by Chris Strutt

CULTIVATION TOOLS: *How do we cultivate capacities for collective wisdom?*

Theory and Practice for the Generation of
Group Wisdom by David La Chapelle

Engaging the Imaginal Realm: Doorway
to Collective Wisdom by Carol Frenier
and Lois Hogan

PRACTICES: *What practices enable the emergence of collective wisdom?*

**Archetypal Practices for Collective
Wisdom: Timeless Ways of Evolving
Personal and Collective Capacity**
by Thomas J. Hurley

Entering a Different Level of Dialogue
with the World, a Conversation with
Susan Lanier by Otto Scharmer

The Circle as Sacred Container, a
Conversation with FireHawk, Pele Rouge
and Bill & Marilyn Veltrop

RESEARCH: GROUP MIND: *How can we study the phenomenon and experience of collective wisdom scientifically?*

**What Scientific Research can Teach Us
About Collective Consciousness and
Collective Wisdom** by Robert Kenny

SKILLS & CAPACITIES: *What skills and capacities manifest themselves in this field?*

Nurturing the Emergence of Collective
Wisdom by Pele Rouge

**The Presence of the Circle Being,
a Conversation with the Circle of Seven:
Anne Doshier, Barbara Coffman-Cecil,
Glennifer Gillespie, Beth Jandernoa,
Leslie Lanes, and Serena Newby**
by Otto Scharmer

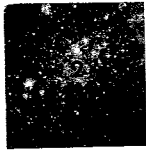
Courage to Convene by Vicki Robin

SOCIAL APPLICATION: *What impact can collective wisdom have on existing social environments and institutions? What new configurations are possible?*

Beyond Innocence: Creating a Space for
Wisdom in Organizations by Kate Regan

Deepening Democracy: Awakening the
Spirit of Our Shared Life Together
by Rosa Zubizarreta

**Co-Creative Power: Engaging Stakeholder
Networks for Learning and Innovation**
by Myriam Loberge & Ann Svendsen



We often presume that the love which governs human relations is of a single type, but this is not the case. Awareness of these differences in our loves will prove helpful to our understanding of the different types of collectives and their development through history."

Come out of the circle of time

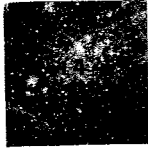
2 And into the circle of love.

– Rumi

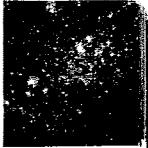
4 **T**hirty armed conflicts are currently active around
the world. In them peoples, frequently from the
6 same country, are pitted against one another,
destroying villages, taking lives and committing the
8 atrocities of war. The groups involved in such conflicts
are often formed on the basis of motives such as greed,
10 power, ethnic hatred or religious intolerance. Over and
against these groups, however, are communities that have
12 been formed for high ideals and that practice love in their
relationships to others. In what follows I wish to inquire
14 into the nature of the various types of collectives of which
we are a part, and the relatively recent emergence of
16 groups especially well-suited to contemporary humanity.

We often presume that the love which governs
18 human relations is of a single type, but this is not the
case. Awareness of these differences in our loves will
20 prove helpful to our understanding of the different types
of collectives and their development through history.
22 Nor should we presume that the Self has been similarly
developed or expressed in all historical periods and
24 societies. I am particularly struck by the emergence of
publicly powerful yet sensitive women in the south of
26 France during the twelfth century. I have come to see this
as a watershed period and of particular importance for our
28 own time, especially as it concerns the formation of what
John Fetzer termed “communities of freedom.”

30 In a world wrought by conflicts and seeking insights,
we can ask, what special contributions can a community of
32 freedom offer?



"As we take up the question of collective wisdom, it...is useful to consider...those natural factors, both in ourselves and in our world, that lead to the development of collectives or groups of individuals: kinship, vocation, geography, & shared interests."



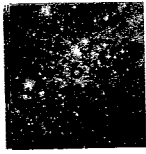
*It is only in our own time that a truly new basis
for community is both required and fully possible.*

6 **A**s we take up the question of collective
8 wisdom, it perhaps is useful to consider
10 briefly those natural factors, both in ourselves
12 and in our world, that lead to the development of
14 collectives or groups of individuals. Groups are often
16 formed on the basis of one or more identifiable factors.
18 The first of these is kinship, which can reach beyond
20 our immediate family circle to those who share our
22 ethnic and religious identity. A second factor is vocation;
24 we're put into groups through the kind of work we do
in the world. A third factor that governs the formation
of collectives is geography; inasmuch as we live in a
particular region or neighborhood, those around us
(including those unlike us vocationally or ethnically)
become known to us. Finally, we may come together
with others simply on the basis of a shared interest or
commitment. Each of these reasons for the formation
of collectives could be explored at some length. Here I
will only venture a few remarks before passing on to our
main theme.


Our first experience of selfless love is often the love
that can flourish within the family. Familial relationships
have offered powerful occasions for the expression and
development of the impulse of love between individuals
and for the formation of collectives. This can occur within
the immediate family or can extend to an entire tribe or
ethnic group. The archetype of maternal love has been
depicted countless times in the Madonna and Child. In his
book *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis terms this form of love
"affection," or in Greek "storge." He views it as the most
natural of the impulses to love. The Austrian philosopher
Rudolf Steiner viewed familial and tribal affections as
the schoolhouse for love. When, however, they persist
beyond their rightful time and place, familial or tribal
affection can become the basis for "ethnic cleansing" and
genocide. The intelligence of the collective can become
demonic, even if it was once benevolent. Indeed, the
infection of the collective by a malevolent ethos may well
be more common than its contrary.

The second factor in the development of collectives
is work. In traditional societies individuals have often

Natural Gatherings



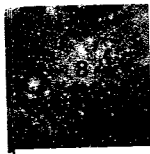
"A new basis for community... paradoxically requires people to be more fully themselves, and simultaneously to embrace their opposite. With this new basis for community arises also the possibility for a new kind of collective wisdom."



formed castes or guilds based on the type of work they
do. Vocational groups shared a schooling in the practice,
theory and mythic dimensions of their craft. In traditional
societies such schooling has always been a form of
initiation replete with accompanying ritual celebrated
within a rich mythic context. In the past, the trades were
tied closely to families or insular kinship communities,
and so the love of family or clan often carried over
to others of the same vocation. But even without this
factor, the education, craft secrets, and skills held in
common by a group of workers bound them together
in powerful ways. Still today the challenge of acting
through one's profession in a harmonious and concerted
manner towards some worthy goal is a high ideal of the
vocational community. One thinks, for example, of the
firemen of Manhattan.

Of course until relatively recently, ethnically
homogeneous groups lived together. That is, geography
and ethnicity were highly correlated. Woodrow Wilson's
doctrine of ethnic self-determination of nations was
predicated on distinct homogeneous populations
located within a geographical region. It was disastrous
because we have entered a time when populations
are increasingly heterogeneous, and thankfully so.
Where we live today is likely to throw us together with
individuals of diverse social backgrounds, creeds and
racial identities. Our circle of acquaintances is extended
by this fact, a wider range of friends is found.

In considering these natural factors that gather us,
we sense their insufficiency in characterizing the modern
situation. Whatever the wisdom and dangers associated
with family, vocational and geographical groups, the real
question we must address today concerns groups formed
through no outer factors, but rather out of the freedom
of the individual. There has been an evolution of the
individual and so also an evolution of the forces that
bind people together into communities. In my opinion
this development is foreshadowed in the achievements
of the twelfth century, but it is only in our own time that
a truly new basis for community is both required and
fully possible. It will be a form of loving relationship that
honors the specificity of individuals yet lifts them out
of the contingencies of time and space, that is, beyond
kinship, vocation, and geography. Paradoxically it
requires people to be more fully themselves, and



simultaneously to embrace their opposite. With this new basis for community arises also the possibility for a new kind of collective wisdom.

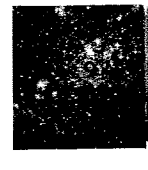
Free association is a factor that will become increasingly important to collective life in the near-term future.

The Free Association of Individuals

As the formulae for traditional associations become increasingly problematic, we require another basis for the formation of community. Free association is a factor that will become increasingly important to collective life in the near-term future. Imagine the difference it would make to North Ireland or Palestine if race, religion and ethnicity were not factors supporting violent conflict. What does the Palestinian "see" in the Israeli? Is it a person or the projection of an ideology? We could ask the same about an Israeli seeing a Palestinian youth. Reflect on the power the collective has over the very way we view each other. How could the collective work in support of the clear view of the unique human spirit that abides in each? It would require, in my mind, the community of freedom that John Fetzer and others have celebrated.

This element of freedom is already affecting the formation of traditional groups. In the choice of a vocation, for example, increasingly a young adult makes his or her own decision, even over the objections of family. That is, we are no longer born or "bred" into a trade. We regard the choice to be the individual's own. We witness here, as so frequently in modern life, the strengthening of the Self against the traditional forces that shape collectives, and the emergence of a new principle of association. In this way vocational groups have become not only a place of shared professional capacities, vision and ideals, but a collective of individuals, rather than a predetermined group based on lineage or the traditional values of the collective into which one happened to be born.

Likewise, in joining together with others for some cause independent of vocation, religion or other common background, we create a community of common concern. We burn with an inner ardor to rectify an injustice or to redress a failing in society, and we do



so together with other individuals. Through our personal social commitments we find friends with whom we share aspirations and intimacies.

It seems to me that the basis for all community formation ^ traditional as well as modern -- must be love in its various forms. Yet when we speak of love, we must reckon with its multiple meanings. As C.S. Lewis points out, love manifests in a variety of forms. These loves have had different words associated with them in the past: storge, philia, eros, agape. We have mentioned already the love of mother for child (storge). To it we can add friendship (philia), romantic love (eros) and charity (agape).

The basis for all community formation—traditional as well as modern - must be love in its various forms.

For our purposes, an essential issue in considering the collective is the place of freedom in its formation. What had been mandated by custom can today only properly arise through individual choice. When did this capacity first assert itself as regards human relations? The fealty sworn by vassals to their liege lord was a political act of great consequence, but when did we learn how to pledge our pure hearts to another? To answer this question we must turn to the twelfth century and the south of France, to the region called Languedoc. In this remarkable period a connected pair of developments are foreshadowed: namely, the emergence of the modern individual, and a novel form of love suited to the new experience of personhood. The twelfth century expressed imperfectly but forcefully the reconfigured nature of human relationships in its exploration of "courtly love" between women and men.

The idea of romantic love as the basis for relationships between men and women is relatively recent. Many, including Joseph Campbell and C.S. Lewis, would date it to the appearance of *fin amor* or courtly love in the twelfth century. Prior to this time, the most powerful human affections were often between man and man, woman and woman. Recall that for the ancient Athenians corporeal beauty was to be found in the young boys wrestling at the gymnasium. We can

Cherishing the Beloved



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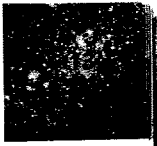
witness the development of romantic love in the twelfth century in the songs and poetry of the troubadours, and in the medieval romances such as Tristan and Iseult. In his book *The Allegory of Love*, C.S. Lewis credits these first romantic poets with changing our ethics, imagination and daily life in a way that separates us forever from the classical past or Oriental present. "Compared with this revolution the Renaissance is a mere ripple on the surface of literature," writes Lewis. Dante's late-thirteenth century account of his immortal love for Beatrice in *La Vita Nuova* [The New Life] refers specifically to the model of the poetry of Languedoc as his inspiration. In his book *Love in the Western World*, Denis des Rougemont explores the theme of love through the myth of Tristan and Iseult and the troubadours, connecting them both to the Cathars, that remarkable religious sect that flourished in the south of France until they were ruthlessly oppressed by the Church in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

I agree with these authors and believe that the birth of courtly or romantic love marks a new phase in the development of human relationships. The nature of this new phase is revealed by the free choice of one individual for the other. The details need not concern us here, but suffice it to say that aristocratic women became for the first time more than pawns in a political game of power played by men or a means of insuring succession. Courteous and chivalrous suitors (not husbands) courted their beloved. Rather quickly this grew to an idealization of the feminine that would reflect itself in religious devotion to the Virgin Mary. Over a longer period of time it would fundamentally change the mores of male behavior and of marriage in the West. Today rather than entering an arranged marriage, two adults, mature to the point of determining their own lives, select one another. It would take time for this breach with tradition to be widely adopted, and there are many parts of the world where it still is not common practice. Yet the rise of the individual, and especially of the individual woman appears in history at this time.

In the twelfth century and in the south of France, we encounter for the first time an issue that is central to our contemporary concerns. At this time and place, a relative handful of women and men explore their full and unique identities, and do so through intense and



*"We learn love's true nature first
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of Love itself."*



romantic relationships recounted in verse and song.
 2 As the consciousness of self develops from out of the
 ancient forms of the collective, we need to explore the
 4 ways in which that strong self may bind itself once again
 into the collective.

*If we live in the world from the space of meditative
 awareness, we live out of Love.*

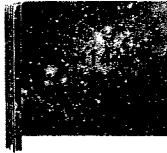
12 *I hold this to be the highest task of*
a bond between two people: that each
 14 *should stand guard over the solitude of*
the other.

– Rainer Maria Rilke

Love and the Solitary Self

18 **I**n his “Letters on Love” Rilke rejects the easy
 notion that love merges the lover and the
 20 beloved. He writes, “A togetherness between two
 people is an impossibility...even between the closest
 22 human beings infinite distances continue to exist.”
 In writing these words Rilke is speaking as a modern
 24 soul who knows the reality of loneliness even in love,
 even within the intimate embrace of the beloved.
 26 Rudolf Steiner wrote likewise of the change in human
 experience of the self that dawns in the late Middle Ages
 28 and is fully formed by the late eighteenth century. He
 termed it the dawning of the “consciousness soul,” one
 30 of whose hallmarks is loneliness. Even the troubadours
 knew the ennui of what they termed “distant love.” In
 32 the face of the new reality of isolation and solitude, what
 is the nature of love? Rilke declares that “the highest task
 34 of a bond between two people is that each should stand
 guard over the solitude of the other.” We are not called
 36 upon to mitigate or dispel the solitude of the beloved,
 but rather to honor and protect it, for only within it can
 38 the full potential of our unique humanness develop.

Thomas Merton, a deep student of Rilke’s writings,
 40 writes movingly of the profound relationship between
 love and solitude in his essay by that name. “The
 42 paradox of solitude is that its true ground is universal
 love—and true solitude is the undivided unity of love for
 44 which there is no number.” In other words, the powerful
 experience of solitude can lead love beyond obsession



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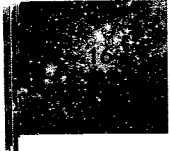
with the individual partner to become a larger, more inclusive love, "a love for which there is no number." We learn love's true nature first with a single person, but as Merton and Plato describe, we can and should move beyond the particular to the universal reality of Love itself. Then, rather than experiencing love as an action we undertake by the individual towards another, we participate in Love. In meditation we are called upon to shift our consciousness from the Self to the No-Self, from what Merton calls the Hearer to the No-Hearer. So too we can change from being the Lover to the No-Lover. Yet in making the shift we all the more fully participate in the Love that is the ground of all things. Now it is not the product of our longing but of our heightened awareness. Love, writes Merton, is the true ground of solitude, that is, of the contemplative life, and so if we live in the world from the space of meditative awareness we live out of Love.

What emerges in the twelfth century is the first experience of our true solitude, in which we feel ourselves cut off from all others and even from God. A form of love is required that does not resolve that separation but can sustain it, contain it so that the soul's hard labors can be performed each day and the fruits of that important work, which often emerge in suffering, can appear. It is a period of growth and transformation in the fire of loneliness and longing. And yet as Thoreau said, "There is no remedy for love but to love more."

Transcendent love can retain its purity and universality as we learn to seek & love the beauty also in our enemy.

Extending Love

What is practiced first between two solitudes must in the end extend beyond the pair to encompass others, indeed many others. The Israeli Jew must come to honor and protect the distinctive solitude of the Muslim Palestinian. Here we touch on the greatest and most difficult goal of all, one spoken of by Christ in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:43-48. Although dating back to the start of our Common Era, these words really concern our distant



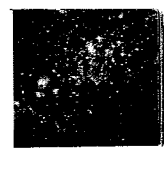
future. They are meant as an admonition to reconfigure radically the geometry of love.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Here, the Christ raises the expectation: Do not even the tax-collectors and Gentiles, those who were considered morally retrograde at the time of Jesus, do not they love their neighbor and hate their enemy? Do not they love those who love them, love their brethren, their family? More is being asked by Christ, far more, namely that we reach beyond family, reach beyond neighbor, reach beyond those who have affection for us to include in our love, ultimately, all human beings, from whatever race, creed, color, family background, etc. This is an extraordinary and paradoxical challenge, an expectation that addresses us in our solitudes, in our complete individuality, but which reaches far beyond the conventions of past affections to the highest of loves, to charity or agape.

In Plato's dialogue on love, *The Symposium*, the temple priestess Diotima instructs Socrates concerning the path "the candidate for initiation" into love must follow. It is the path of beauty, and begins with the concrete beauty around him or her. Yet before long the beauty of one beloved partner is compared to the beauty of others, and the candidate realizes that his or her passion is not for the individual but for the many instances of beauty. Continuing, the candidate goes on to understand that his or her longing is not even for the beauties of the body but actually for the beauties of the soul and spirit. In this way, working from the specific and concrete to the general and more abstract, Socrates arrives at "beauty's very self."

Whereas Socrates would have us love the high ideal and eternal Form of Beauty, Jesus would have us see beauty in neighbor and enemy alike. The transcendent love of Socrates, if handled well, can retain its purity and universality even as we learn to see beauty in the finite and



and love the beautiful also in our enemy. As a pupil traveling
the path that connects Plato's two worlds with one another,
love refines and ennobles the human soul, guiding it to the
heights of heaven and back again. Most important, however,
is discovering heaven in everyday life, for only in this
manner does love enter into the world. This practice, which
depends on us, roots love in the world.


We have seen how ethnic groups based on exclusion
and superiority can breed a distorted vision of those around
them, and precipitate acts of unspeakable cruelty and
violence. Instead of true seeing, the fears and hatred of the
collective are projected on every neighbor of a different
belief or race. True seeing, deep and intimate knowing, is
of a completely other character. It can only fully flourish in
the light arising from solitude, freedom and charity (agape).

*That process of collective exploration knits the group
together, forms it into a single organ,
to come to joint perception.*

For help in understanding the nature of true
seeing, and its application to collective wisdom,
we may turn to the work of Goethe. In a letter to a
friend, Goethe once remarked that everything depends
on the aperçu. What Goethe meant by this remark is
that our view of intelligence or understanding is far too
narrow, too circumscribed. Logic, or pure deduction,
does no real work for us. It may clarify, make more lucid
a line of argumentation, but ultimately the conclusions
that follow by the application of logic are implicit at
the origins. What then is the basis for real insight that
leads beyond mere logic or calculation? It is to this that
Goethe was pointing in his use of the word aperçu.
Aperçu is from the French *apercevoir*, meaning to see,
to gain a perception of something that may have been
difficult initially to make out. The gaining of insight, the
making of a discovery, relies on this profound human
capacity, the capacity to see coherence, to penetrate
with our inner vision that which may not have been
immediately transparent to our understanding.

This activity, the formation of insight, is well-known
to each of us as individuals. We know when we are
confused; we also sense when we have finally

Insight and the Collective



*"It seems to me that in this way
collective wisdom emerges through,
first, the forming of genuine
human relationships and, second,
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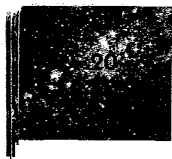


penetrated a problem with which we struggled for
a long time. But when we concern ourselves with
collective wisdom, the question arises, how does insight
arise through a group? Is something like Goethe's
aperçu possible—not only for an individual, but for a
community, a collective formed out of many individuals?
How is it that we come to or can hope to come to a
collective insight, the formation of collective wisdom?

In certain work with groups that is being done today,
very often the real goal is to lead, through a carefully
organized and yet open process of dialogue, a group
of individuals to a shared aperçu. It may even be an
insight that was relatively clear to group members at
the outset. The point is not the production of an expert
viewpoint that is then communicated in a cold, lifeless
way to the group, but rather the collective exploration of
a field of inquiry. That process of collective exploration
knits the group together, forms it into a single organ that
allows that community or collective to come to a joint
perception. Experiencing the aperçu in community can
be a profoundly transformative moment for the group.

Goethe's famous line "every object well-
contemplated creates a new organ within us" is just
as true for a group as for the individual. Having come
together through our loving relationship to one another,
we form an organism. One could speak of a psychic or
psychological organism that, through the development of
collective inquiry, attends to a new object, to an object
at first not understood. As we engage that object, an
organ is formed within the organism of the community,
an organ suited to the understanding, in the high sense
of the word, of that to which we attend. Once that organ
is formed, each individual within the collective has the
opportunity to make use of it.

It seems to me that in this way collective wisdom
emerges through, first, the forming of genuine human
relationships and, second, a kind of collective
contemplative practice or engagement, leading to the
formation of an organ of perception not only within
the individual, but within the group. Just as a profound
insight can be transformative in our own lives, so also
an insight within the collective can have deep ethical
or moral consequences that can go far beyond what
accompanies a simple, abstract deduction. Genuine
collective insight gains special impact because through



*"It is only this high, indeed
highest form of love that can
create the vessel capable of
embracing the full self of each
member of the group. We do not
bring our egotism, but all our
capacities, indeed our very being,
as gift to the community, and
receive the same from others."*

it we experience what Michael Polanyi would call
"personal knowledge," but now one shared by a
group. We could also say we have together had a
contemplative encounter that carries a force that logical
inference cannot possess. In the Buddhist tradition the
insight experience is termed "direct perception" and is
considered the surest and fullest form of knowing.

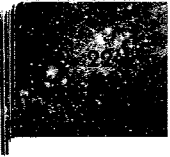
*The success of such communities [of freedom]
depends on the dynamic relationship between our own
individuality and the collective.*

For genuine insights to arise within the collective
requires the same kind of clarity and freedom
in collective inquiry as that required of the
individual. These characteristics are not always present
in groups, as I have emphasized. For this reason
communities based on free association are of special
importance today. In them the required freedom of
thought and feeling can flourish.

John Fetzer often spoke of communities of freedom.
When we come together not out of tribal or family
affections, but through the high principle of love spoken
about in the Sermon on the Mount, then we honor the
full and distinctive humanity of the other, and bring our
full individuality into the group as well. We relate to one
another in the fullest and freest manner possible. The
success of such communities depends on the dynamic
relationship between our own individuality, more and
more strongly developed, and the collective. We are
bound together no longer by romantic love or traditional
forms, but by the true spiritual love of which the Christ
was speaking. It is only this high, indeed highest form of
love that can create the vessel capable of embracing the
full self of each member of the group. We do not bring our
egotism, but all our capacities, indeed our very being, as
gift to the community, and receive the same from others.

At this moment the high principle of invitation is
essential. Rather than being concerned that our voice is
heard, and that it wins in the contest for importance, we
are required to become quiet and listen into others. We
listen for the gift of the other and invite it into the

Communities of Freedom



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we can bring the full array
of gifts to expression within
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this living constellation of
human relationships we gain a
power to perform deeds of great
intelligence, compassion and
importance, deeds far beyond our
individual capacities or even the
simple sum of our capacities."*

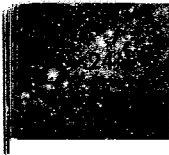
circle. In performing this practice with each other, all
2 egoism vanishes and the joy of being truly seen, of being
3 recognized, becomes the fundamental mood of the group.

4 Just as the strength of an ecosystem is in proportion
5 to the diversity of species that comprise it, so also is the
6 resourcefulness of a human ecology enhanced by the
7 diversity of its members. Through exactly this variety
8 we learn to see with the eyes of the other and to act in
9 concert with them by sounding our own voice, making
10 our own distinctive contribution. This enables us to bring
11 about together what alone would have been impossible.
12 In Goethe's fairy tale "The Lily and the Green Snake,"
13 the death of the prince is averted only because all
14 characters in the story respond properly when the wise
15 man with the lantern says, "let each assume his role and
16 do his duty, and a universal good fortune will subsume
17 individual sorrows, as a universal misfortune consumes
18 individual joys."

19 Rudolf Steiner's four plays written from 1911-1914
20 owed much to Goethe's fairy tale. In them, Benedictus,
21 who is like the wise man with the lamp, helps each
22 aspiring individual along his or her distinct path. At one
23 point Benedictus says of them,

24 They have unlocked their souls, each in his own
25 way, in order to receive the spirit light according to his
26 or her destiny. What they have conquered for themselves
27 each one shall render fruitful for the others. But this can
28 only happen if their powers, in harmony of measure and
29 number, form willingly a higher unity. This unity alone
30 can waken to true life what otherwise could merely stay
31 as single bare existences— So may their separate souls
32 now join themselves to sound in unison, attesting to the
33 principle that harmony of spirits may achieve what each
34 alone could never bring about.

35 By practicing deep listening we can bring the full
36 array of gifts to expression within the collective "in
37 harmony of measure and number." That is, a special
38 human geometry is established, "a harmony of spirits."
39 All this occurs in free and generous association, as
40 we participate in an inclusive love that honors every
41 difference. From this living constellation of human
42 relationships we gain a power to perform deeds of great
43 intelligence, compassion and importance, deeds far
44 beyond our individual capacities or even the simple sum
of our capacities.



"I therefore ask the question: As we form communities of freedom, how can we come together inwardly through spiritual practice, a practice not imposed by a rule, but undertaken because of a shared aspiration? How do we contribute to the life of the collective, not only outwardly, but also inwardly, even when separated by distance from other members of that community?"

The community is more than a mere assembly of people. Through common ritual and practice a "harmony of spirits" is achieved and Higher Spirit evoked.

Spiritual Practice and the Invocation of Powers

In order to form communities of compassion and intelligence, not only socially and psychologically, but also spiritually, requires one further ingredient.

When traditional Western religious orders were established, they formed around a so-called Rule. The Rule described the order's way of life and its spiritual, contemplative and ritual practices. For instance, wherever the Benedictines were, be it in Europe, the Americas or Asia, the same Rule of St. Benedict required five to six hours of liturgy and prayer, five hours of manual labor, and four hours of scriptural study. Each Benedictine monk knew the Rule and lived by it. The liturgical practices were performed at certain prescribed hours of the day. In other words, not only did the Benedictines share outer lifestyles, but they also shared religious practices, practices of the spirit, that were common to all of them. One can ask, What is the effect of such common practice? What does a common practice create by way of a spiritual substance that connects one individual to others? I believe that a common spiritual culture arises through such shared spiritual efforts, one whose importance should not be underestimated.

We are no longer in the Middle Ages. The specific rules and forms of the monasteries, while instructive, are no longer suitable for most of us. Nonetheless, I believe that the spiritual principles that underlay the development of these common practices are still pertinent. I therefore ask the question: As we form communities of freedom, how can we come together inwardly through spiritual practice, a practice not imposed by a rule, but undertaken because of a shared aspiration? How do we contribute to the life of the collective, not only outwardly, but also inwardly, even when separated by distance from other members of that community? In other words, there is an exoteric aspect to the formation of the collective, but there is also, shall we say, an esoteric, or spiritual set of considerations that are equally or perhaps even more significant.


For over twenty years the Protestant theologian Walter Wink has articulated a view of social life that recognizes not only visible structures and forces but invisible ones as well. In his recent book *The Powers That Be* he writes,

“Every business corporation, school, denomination, bureaucracy, sports team—indeed, social reality in all its forms—is a combination of both visible and invisible, outer and inner, physical and spiritual.” Wink uses the biblical language of “powers and dominions,” that is, of over-lighting spirits who inspire groups. One finds such language in all spiritual traditions, from Asian to the indigenous peoples of the Americas, from stories of the Grail community in Europe to stories of guidance experienced by the Hopi during their migrations. In all these traditions the community is more than a mere assembly of people. Through common ritual and practice a “harmony of spirits” is achieved, and a higher Spirit is invoked whose character reflects the intentions and qualities of the community.

If however the collective of today rejects the fullness of the individual then, in Wink’s language, a “domination system” arises that displays an oppressive intelligence all its own. Here we should pay special heed to Ken Wilber’s concept of the “pre-trans fallacy.” Namely, as we form collectives today, are we really transcending the previous traditional social form to create a new form better suited to our time and our experience of solitary consciousness? Or are we reverting to an old tribal group consciousness? If we find solace in reversion to the older form, then we can be assured that the threat of domination is nearby.

I think the treasuring of human freedom within the collective will be a guidepost in navigating our way to healthy collectives well-suited to our time. In those groups where individuals are required to sacrifice themselves for the collective we run the perennial risk of reverting to an old form, as opposed to discovering a new. To truly have a community of freedom we must sense the authenticity and individuality, the full scope of our neighbor in the community. It will only be in such communities of freedom that a true ethic for the future will be formed and that insights can be gained that are larger than those any one individual can bring forth.

To undertake an endeavor recognizing freely those with whom we are to work, to place ourselves fully within that collective, to treasure the diverse gifts within that community, and to work inwardly and outwardly to create a sheath, a body or organism that can become an organ for insight, and an invitation to a higher over-lighting spirit, is a powerful guiding imagination for me as we approach the question of collective wisdom.



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About the Author

Arthur Zajonc, PhD, is Professor of Physics at Amherst College in Massachusetts. He has been the General Secretary of the Anthroposophical Society in America. He is the author of *Catching the Light: The Entwined History of Light and Mind*, the co-author of *The Quantum Challenge: Modern Research on the Foundation of Quantum Mechanics*, co-editor of *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*, and editor of *The New Physics and Cosmology: Dialogues with the Dalai Lama*. Arthur has worked on several occasions with the Dalai Lama concerning the philosophical, ethical, and spiritual implications of modern science. He is currently the Director of the Academic Program at the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society.

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