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## 1/. Introduction

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Recently I was a passenger in a car. The car was travelling along an uninterrupted stretch of highway. I sat quietly. The outer landscape seemed to flit past the windows of the car. My inner landscape was at rest. Into that restful moment, a phrase floated into my mind's eye. The phrase was: *the path of self knowledge*. I continued to let the phrase float around my mind. After some time, a question emerged: "Where does the path of self knowledge lead?" Twenty years ago, I would have answered that question in a certain way. Twenty years ago, I lived within a particular world view. Now, my world view has shifted considerably. In turn, my response to the question will necessarily alter. Why? Because the path of self knowledge weaves its way through each person's world view. Therefore, the world view in which the pathway sits, determines where the pathway leads. Whilst the car trip came to an end, I continued to reflect on the question. This article conveys something of where my reflections took me.

We do not pose our questions within a vacuum. We pose them within a particular framework of understanding. My engagement with the question was orientated around three particular reference points; each of which sat within a western cultural mindset. The first was the discipline of spiritual practice education, or spiritual formation. The second was a world view of conscious evolution. The third was my personal belief system.

My personal belief system was formerly orientated around a Christian religious tradition. Now it is orientated around the emerging tradition of evolutionary spirituality. Within the

*the path of self knowledge guides us on an inner adventure of self discovery, towards fully embracing our humanity-within-the-whole*

light of such a framework, my reflections on the question gave rise to the following response: the path of self knowledge guides us on an inner adventure of self discovery, towards fully embracing our humanity-within-the-whole. *Embracing our humanity-within-the-whole* here means that we experience meaning and belonging in the trifold form of: 1. joyful humility and reverence for the mystery of belonging within the greater Story of Life, which is continually and forever in the making; 2. authentic communal belonging and responsibility; and 3. personal wholeness in the here-and-now. Consequently, the choice to fully embrace our humanity-within-the-whole draws from, and flows back into, daily life.

### 1.1 The role of sacred stories in relation to human meaning and belonging

In addition to the above framework of understanding, my reflections were also bordered by the hypothesis that western culture is experiencing a rupture within its Story of meaning making, or, sacred story. A cultural sacred story involves a unified narrative, or belief system, from which to source personal and collective meaning and belonging. *Meaning* here refers to a clear sense of identity, purpose, and values. *Belonging* is experienced within the following three realms of human consciousness: 1. the intrapersonal, i.e., belonging within our own skin; 2. the interpersonal, i.e., belonging within community; and 3. the transpersonal, i.e., belonging within a Story greater than personal identity. So, a sacred story is the means through which we give meaning to our living and our dying, and experience belonging in our world. At the same time, a sacred story is also like an anchor point which offers inner stability during times of duress in our lives.

Even though a sacred story is like an anchor point, sacred stories are not fixed for all time. They continue to change and evolve in response to an expanding

knowledge base and ongoing lived experience. One shift in the western knowledge base concerns the origins of the universe. Now, the 13.8 billion year evolutionary theory has become the dominant creation theory. Because creation theories are the center piece on which a sacred story *turns*, any shift in a culture's creation theory will necessarily disrupt their sacred story. So, the shift towards a creation theory based on the evolution of the universe, has contributed immensely to the rupture of the western cultural sacred story.

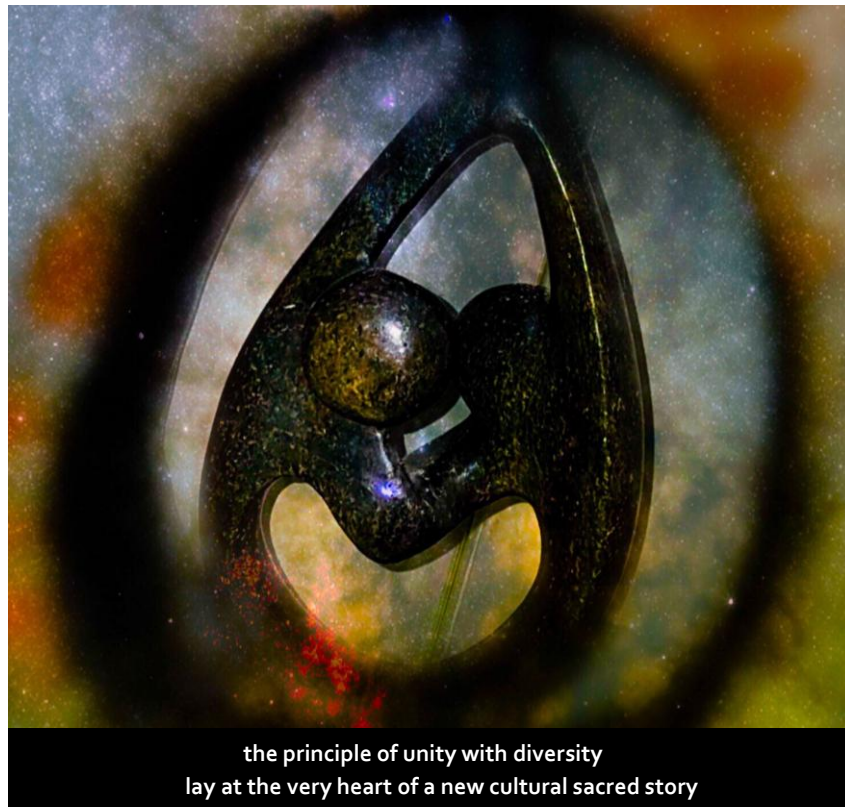
In light of the above paragraph, we do not passively receive a sacred story. Rather, we generate a sacred story by posing our spiritual questions, and discerning responses, within the light of a particular world view, i.e., current knowledge and beliefs regarding how the world came to be/continues to be, and the human place of belonging within it. Spiritual questions include: "Where did we come from?" "What becomes of us when we die?" "Why are we here?" "Is there a god/s?" "Are we enough?" "What is the nature of love?" "How do we experience belonging in an evolving universe?" When a cultural sacred story is congruent with a current world view, it offers a rational source for meaning and belonging. Conversely, when a cultural sacred story is no longer congruent with a current world view, it loses its ability to be a rational source for meaning and belonging.

So, the hypothesis maintains that the former western sacred story has run its course of usefulness, as it no longer resonates with the current world view. As such, it no longer offers meaning and belonging. Furthermore, the former Story gave rise to a values system geared towards the flourishing of the individual via the concepts of anthropocentrism, i.e., the primacy of the human species over all other species; individualism, i.e., the primacy of the individual over the collective; and consumerism, i.e., the more material goods, the better. Such a values system can no longer be sustained in the material world because it allows us to relentlessly deplete the Earth's resources. In this regard, public speaker, Charles Eisenstein argued:

"From what state of being do we extinguish other species, ruin the earth and sea, and treat nature as a collection of resources to be allocated for maximum short-term benefit? . . . No mere personal failing, this numbing is inseparable from the deep narratives that run our civilization, and the social systems that those narratives support."

Therefore, the former Story no longer sustains meaning and belonging, nor is it sustainable in the material world. As such, we are required to consciously reimagine a new cultural sacred story. We are required to begin again, and within the light of both our cultural history thus far and our current world view, we are to generate a new cultural sacred story beyond anthropocentrism, individualism, and consumerism.

Regarding a new cultural sacred story, it would seem that a new story will have shared themes and values to draw from, rather than particular storylines, or beliefs, to which all must agree. As a result, a new cultural sacred story will include multiple sacred stories; each sacred story orientated around shared themes. The emerging shared themes of a new sacred story include: participation with, rather than domination over; interrelatedness, i.e., being influenced by one another; and interconnectedness, i.e., all part of the wider web of Life itself. Each of the themes draws from the principle of unity with diversity; the principle which lay the very heart of the new cultural sacred story. Unity with diversity gives rise to the understanding that each sacred story is both unique in its own right and that it is intrinsically connected and response-able to the wider cultural sacred story. In turn, a new cultural sacred story will give rise to a shared values system which seeks the flourishing of all life.



In line with the above, a new cultural sacred story will enable those with differing belief systems to continue to engage in the reStorying process. In terms of personal engagement with the reStorying process, each one of us will be required to choose which of the sacred stories resonates more particularly with our personal knowledge, beliefs, and lived experience. The way we discern which of the sacred stories offers personal meaning and belonging is through engaging with the path of self knowledge. So, in this time in our cultural historical era, engaging with the path of self knowledge is, and will continue to be, a significant spiritual practice

Even though a new sacred story is emerging, our current lived experience is one of being in-between sacred stories. Living in-between sacred stories can give rise to an experience of disorientation in terms of meaning making and displacement in terms of belonging. For those so affected, engagement with the path of self knowledge will enable them to discern their own internal source for living meaningfully in their world. Engaging with the path allows them to repose their personal spiritual questions, and discern personal responses within the light of their personal current knowledge, beliefs, and lived experience. So once again, the path of self knowledge is a significant spiritual practice for our time and place in history.

### **1.2 The reason for writing**

One way that I engage with the path is through writing. Therefore, I write as a personal spiritual practice. Through the act of writing I discern a language which enables me to integrate insights into understandings, and understandings into daily living. Even though this article offers a personal reflection on the question of the path of self knowledge, I choose to offer my thoughts within the wider public arena, by way of participating in the wider cultural conversation regarding our meaning making and belonging. As such, this article is offered as an entry point, or springboard, for others to engage with and reflect upon within the light of their particular world view. Perhaps together we may consciously reimagine a new congruent cultural sacred story.

The article will progress in the following manner: Next, it will outline something of the general nature of the path of self knowledge. Then, the world view in which the pathway sits also determines where the pathway leads. Therefore, the article will briefly outline my understanding of the three orienting reference points which shaped my response to the question. From there, the article will outline something of the nature of fully embracing our humanity-within-the-whole, within a world view of conscious evolution and a framework of evolutionary spirituality. Finally, the article will offer some concluding remarks and encouragement for the venture that we are personally and collectively called to undertake at this time in our history.

### Summary ~ Introduction

In response to a western mindset orientated around spiritual practice education, a world view of conscious evolution, and evolutionary spirituality, my response to the question of where the path of self knowledge leads is: the path of self knowledge guides us on an inner journey of self discovery, towards fully embracing our humanity-within-the-whole.

It was hypothesized that the western cultural sacred story of meaning and belonging has ruptured because it was no longer congruent with current knowledge, beliefs and lived experience. Also the former story was detrimental to the material world. Therefore, we are required to do the work of consciously reimagining a new sacred story around the principle of unity with diversity. Such a new cultural sacred story will include multiple sacred stories; each one drawing from shared themes, giving rise to shared values around the flourishing of all life.

What is the role of the path of self knowledge at this time in our history? Firstly, engagement with the path of self knowledge as an ongoing spiritual practice will enable each one of us to discern which of the sacred stories resonates most particularly with our current world view. Secondly, for those who are experiencing a personal crisis of meaning due to the loss of a functional cultural sacred story, engagement with the path will enable them to generate their own internal source for giving meaning and experiencing belonging in their world.

## 2/. The general nature of the path of self knowledge

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The path of self knowledge guides each traveler on an exploration of their inner landscape, towards an ever deepening experience of connection and belonging within their own self and within their world. The term *path*, however, is somewhat of a misnomer, in that there is no predetermined pathway to follow. Therefore, even though each traveler consciously undertakes the journey, the path ahead cannot be seen. Each traveler creates their own pathway through the spiritual practice of contemplative self enquiry. One metaphor for such a venture is offered by author and professor, David E. Quinn: "we build the bridge as we walk upon it." As such, the bridge can be seen in the rear view. In a similar manner, the path of self knowledge can be seen in the rear view, if travelers take the time to reflect on where the path has led.

The term *knowledge* could easily be mistaken to mean an intellectual/theoretical appreciation of the pathway, giving rise to an intellectual theory regarding meaning and belonging. Yet intellectual theories are like maps of the terrain. Unless engagement with the path is actually undertaken, transformative shifts will not emerge within in a traveler's inner landscape. Therefore, a theoretical appreciation of the pathway is important, but that alone is not enough for transformation. In this regard, Quinn argued that transformation requires "deep change," rather than "a tinkering at the edges." *Deep change* refers to a transformative shift within each person's basic assumptions regarding their place of belonging. A new set of assumptions gives rise to a new *ground of being*. In turn, a new *ground of being* gives rise to a new belief system; a new belief system reshapes the experience of meaning and belonging in the world; a new experience of meaning and belonging reshapes how each person will now live within, and act upon, their world. Therefore, the *deep inner change* experienced through engaging with the path enables travelers to experience transformative shifts in their being and their living. In line with such an understanding of *deep change*, the term *knowledge* includes both the intellectual theories of the path of self knowledge, and the deeper experiential knowings gained through actually *living* the path into conscious reality.

*Transformation requires deep change, i.e. - a transformative shift in beliefs and assumptions*

The following points reveal something of the general nature of the pathway:

### **2.1 The path of self knowledge . . . is known to be a universal pathway**

The path of self knowledge is known to be a universal pathway, in that it can weave its way through any open belief system, but is not restricted to any one belief system. In terms of open and closed belief systems, philosopher and professor, Karl Popper, argued that a closed belief system: "claims to have a monopoly on truth accepting no criticism or opportunity for development." In contrast, Popper argued that an open belief system remains: "open to criticism and testing and constantly seeks to discover new knowledge." So, travelers who view themselves through an open belief system will naturally be drawn to engage with the path. At the same time, there may be those who have lived within a closed belief system, yet find that their ongoing lived experience has either disrupted and/or broken it open. In turn, they may experience a sense of disorientation in their meaning making and dislocation in their experience of belonging. Such a rupture of their closed belief system may lead them to engage with the path of self knowledge. Although, for them, the path may commence with consciously grieving the loss of their former world view and sacred story.

Whatever the reason for engaging in the path of self knowledge, the universal nature of the path is that it continues to engage each traveler in their own inner adventure of self discovery, in the form of an ongoing transformative dance of being and becoming. *Being* involves living daily life with a clear sense of identity, purpose, values, and the experience of belonging. *Becoming* involves transformative shifts in their view of selfhood, which break through and transcend the limitations of their current view. Therefore, while the pathway remains constant, by way of guiding each traveler on their inner adventure of self discovery, each traveler's engagement with the pathway will be unique to them. Consequently, the responses gained to the questions posed, will vary between people and between cultures. The responses may even vary within the one person during their lifetime!

What does varying responses mean for the notion of truth? In terms of human meaning making and belonging, truth involves a perspective, or intellectual theory, which has been personally tried and tested within life and found to hold true, for now. Therefore, truth differs

from a perspective, in that a perspective involves theoretical knowledge. Truth, on the other hand, involves both a theoretical knowledge and an

*Truth: a perspective which has been personally tried and tested within life and found to hold true, for now*

experiential knowing. The late Vimala Thakar, Indian social activist and spiritual teacher, wrote of this experiential knowing as a: "choiceless acceptance out of understanding." Therefore, both a theoretical knowledge and an experiential knowing give rise to the experience of personal truth. In response to personal truth, each traveler of the path is able to live with the experience of personal wholeness and personal authority. Such an experience of personal truth gives rise to a clear sense of personal identity, purpose, and values, which is metaphorically: *held lightly*.

When a traveler of the path is living with personal truth which is held lightly, they are able to converse with others - even when personal truths clash - without the need to defend and/or relinquish their own personal truth.. At the same time, each traveler can also remain open to where such conversations may be inviting them to transformative shifts in their own view. In this way, conversation becomes a spiritual practice in its own right, where each traveler is metaphorically: *standing in their own ground, openheartedly*.

## 2.2 The path *of* self knowledge . . . rather than *to* self knowledge

The use of the preposition *of*, rather than *to*, is intentional. Why? Because the preposition *to* would suggest an end point, or goal, to be pursued and achieved. Such an end point could be envisaged as a privatized experience of some spiritual state beyond the sorrows, confusions, fears, and frustrations of daily life. When such a state was reached, the traveler could finally relax; the journey would be complete. And yet, the path *of* self knowledge is known to be an ongoing life adventure of continuing to engage in the dynamic process of our human being and becoming. Therefore, the path of self knowledge does not seek to deny any part of the human experience. Rather, the path includes the whole range of human experience including: knowledge about the material world and how the human/body works; familial and societal norms and beliefs; ongoing lived experience; as well as: questions, doubts, sorrows, joys, loves, losses, confusions, fears, and new insights. As a result, rather than the path leading to a privatized spiritual plane beyond daily life, the path involves an ongoing inner adventure of contemplative self discovery which continues to draw from, and flow back into, daily life.

Even though the inner journey is ongoing, it is important to note that the purpose is one of living authentically in daily life, rather than pursuing transformation, or, pursuing *becoming*. As each traveler seeks to live authentically, transformative shifts will emerge within their view, as and when required. *Authentically* here means: the experience of personal wholeness, giving rise to the personal authority. Through personal authority each traveler is able to live daily life in accord with their values system. Within the context of living authentically, transformative shifts in a traveler's view can be likened to: *an expanding horizon of meaning making*. As well as the ongoing expansion of a horizon, there can be pivotal moments along the way which restructure a traveler's experience of selfhood; where they undergo *deep change* in their *ground of being*. When such a restructuring occurs, it is as if they were now: *seeing through new eyes*, or,



seeing a completely new view. So, engaging in the path of self knowledge focuses on a traveler's experience of *being*, i.e., living authentically in daily life, whilst remaining open to transformative shifts in their view, i.e., their *becoming*. Such is the nature of the path of self knowledge.

### 2.3 The path of self knowledge is . . . contemplative in orientation

The path of self knowledge is a contemplative spiritual practice. The term *contemplative* here relates to the notion that within the very nature of Life itself is a Call to belong. Anne Hillman, spiritual mentor and educator, described the Call in the following manner: "Our call takes place underground, far beneath our awareness. Like a soundless song, it sings to us all our lives, whispering in a wordless way, "Follow!" Therefore, our human longing to belong does not sit within a vacuum. Our human longing to belong sits within a Call to belong within the deeper rhythms of Life itself. Drawing from such an understanding of the Call, and paraphrasing words of poet David Whyte, a contemplative orientation involves: remaining open to the deeper rhythms of Life itself and letting that affect us in its own terms.

We remain open through the following four elements:

**2.3.1** The first element involves: relinquishing the desire to control the process of self discovery. When a traveler surrenders the desire to control the process of self discovery, they allow themselves to be vulnerable to where the Call may be drawing them. In so doing, they undertake the venture without knowing the outcome. Remaining vulnerable to the process requires that they pose their spiritual questions in an open ended way, with an attitude of nonjudgmental curiosity, patience, self compassion, and being comfortable with the unknown, until it is known. Remaining vulnerable to the process also involves trust. How may they learn to trust the process? They take tentative steps initially, and test the soundness of where those steps have led.

**2.3.2** The second element involves: listening; listening for inner wisdom to emerge. How might inner wisdom be described? According to Hillman, inner wisdom is like an inner "primordial whisper." Such a primordial whisper is experienced within each person in the form of: inner stirrings, inklings, waves of impressions, and insights which seem to emerge from a person's inner depths. It is important to note that inner wisdom's function is not to draw each traveler to the same conclusions regarding meaning and belonging. Rather inner wisdom's function is to guide each traveler towards discerning their own congruent meaning making and experience of belonging.

**2.3.3** The third element involves: discernment. *Discernment* here involves each traveler naming and claiming their sacred story, in response to inner wisdom's stirrings. When it comes to discernment, each traveler is required to make decisions regarding which beliefs hold true for them at this moment of time and which beliefs do not. Consequently, discernment requires forming judgments in terms of personal truth. The entry point for the discernment process is a traveler's present moment affective experience. *Affective experience* involves the present moment emotions, bodily sensations, and thought patterns which emerge within each traveler as they pose their spiritual questions, and seek to discern congruent responses. In this regard, Anne Hillman and Joan Blackman argued that discernment:

"uses the powers of the whole body's wisdom to bear on a concern and the body as a whole resolves it. Discernment . . . is quiet, reflective. You allow whatever it is you are questioning to work itself through you. You wait and

listen and at some point you feel a sense of completion."  
So, the process of discernment commences with a traveler's present moment affective experience.

Why does discernment commence with affective experience, rather than a belief system? A traveler's affective experience is involuntary and therefore, a direct response. As a direct response, their affective experience reveals that which is stirring within them in the present moment. Consequently their affective experience is a true response which involves their whole mind/body. Therefore, a traveler poses their open ended spiritual questions and discerns their responses by first noticing and exploring their present moment affective experience. Even so, whilst affective experience is a true response, it is important to note that affective experience is not always accurate, for it can emerge from a faulty belief system, or from woundedness within the traveler's view of selfhood. Nonetheless transformational shifts can only take place when a traveler is aware of what is actually going on within them. As such, their present moment affective experience is the entry point for contemplative self discovery.

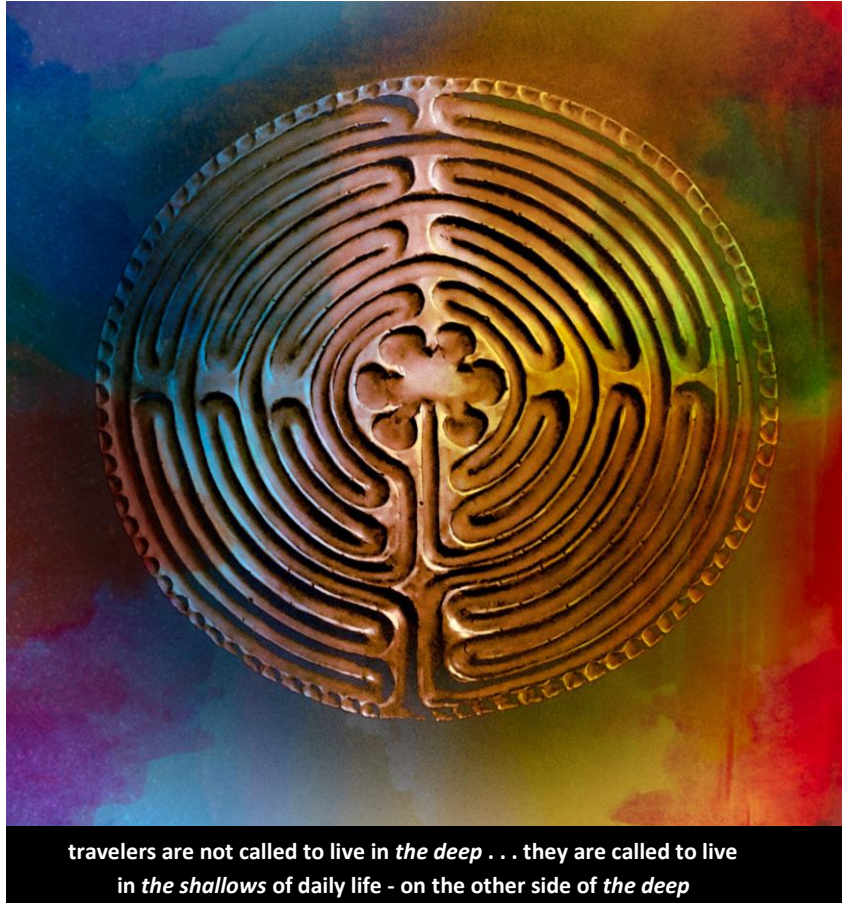
**2.3.4** The fourth element involves: the gentling light of lovingkindness. The path of self knowledge involves the inner adventure of contemplative self discovery. It is an inner adventure in which the traveler is required to choose to take the first step. As mentioned previously, they take such a step in response to their human longing to belong, and a Calling forth within the deeper rhythms of Life itself. Poet T.S.Eliot, in *Little Gidding*, described the calling forth nature of life in the following manner: "With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling." So, the Call to belong is permeated with lovingkindness. As such, lovingkindness is not simply a human emotion. Rather, as Hillman argued: "love is an evolutionary imperative," now pulsating within the very heart of Life itself. So, even though a traveler chooses to take their first step into the unknown, they need not fear the process. They are taking their first step in response to the drawing of lovingkindness towards personal wholeness and authentic living.

In terms of continued engagement with the path, Buddhist nun, Pema Chòdròn, taught that unless the spiritual practice of seeking self knowledge is based in lovingkindness, it can be experienced as personal warfare. *Warfare* here means the practice of metaphorically *beating the will into submission* by way of either denying, or breaking down, inner defense mechanisms which have been raised in response to lived experience. In contrast to warfare, Love's powerful energy dissolves present moment defense mechanisms, thus enabling each traveler to recognize and transform their present moment hard edges. *Hard edges* here refers to characteristics like: their natural self-serving survival/predatory instincts; their fears; their greediness; their experience of disconnection with self/others/Life due to hurtful circumstances and relationships; and their desire for power and control over self/others/Life. Because it is the hard edges of their human conditioning which stifles genuine relationship with their own self and others, it is lovingkindness rather than a disciplined will, which enables true self knowledge.

#### **2.4 The path of self knowledge . . . commences and concludes at the outer edges. i.e., *the shallows* of daily life.**

The path of self knowledge is not linear in intent. Rather, as Hillman argued: the path is a "deepening." In the context of this article, *deepening* relates to the way the path twists and turns its way from the outer edges - to the centre, or, *the deep* - then back out again. The outer edges refers to *the shallows* of daily life. *The deep* refers to *deep change* within the traveler's *ground of being*. In this regard, the path of self knowledge is well portrayed by the symbol of a labyrinth.

A labyrinth is not to be confused with a maze. A maze is designed to challenge the intellect and dead ends are part of the plan. In contrast, a labyrinth has but one path which leads into the centre, then back out again. Even though the twisting and turning of the path can sometimes leave the traveler feeling momentarily disorientated, if the path is followed, it will safely return the traveler back home again. In like manner to a labyrinth path, the path of self knowledge starts and ends with the outer edges. Why? Even though the pathway guides travelers on their inner journey of *deep change* in the *ground of their being*, they are not called to make their home in *the deep*. They are called to make their home in *the shallows* of daily life - on the other side of *the deep*.



travelers are not called to live in *the deep* . . . they are called to live in *the shallows* of daily life - on the other side of *the deep*

Living in *the shallows* of daily life is not to be misconstrued with living a superficial life. The process of walking the inward pathway is one of dissolving a traveler's attachment to ego identification, as well as assumptions and storylines which no longer offer meaning and belonging. Even though a traveler undertakes the inward path within the gentling light of lovingkindness, such a process can be disorientating and sometimes heartrending. Furthermore, at pivotal moments in a traveler's ongoing life journey, the process may even take the form of a *dark night spiritual experience*. According to psychiatrist and theologian, Gerald May, the *dark night* spiritual experience is nothing sinister, rather a: "deep and ongoing process of unknowing." As a result, the term *dark night* simply refers to darkness like "the dark of a real night" where it is impossible to "see clearly." So, whilst the *dark night* spiritual experience can initially feel like a loss of meaning and belonging, according to May, it offers an experience of: "liberation [which] takes place in a hidden way. . . beyond our conscious control." Such an understanding is in line with a contemplative orientation, which as mentioned earlier, involves each traveler relinquishing control over the process of self discovery and allowing the deeper rhythms of Life to affect them in its own terms.

After walking the inward path of dissolving attachments, the traveler then pauses at the centre, or, *the deep*. Such an interior *pause* is not a passive stance. Initially, the *pause* offers a time of inner rest . . . of breathing deeply in the stillness . . . of simply being. Then, when the traveler is ready, the *pause* offers a time for them to recognize and discern new insights emerging within their inner depths, which in turn gives rise to *deep change*, or, transformative shifts within their inner *ground of being*. Such *deep change* may be experienced in the form of an expansion of their view of selfhood, or, an entire restructuring of their view. Because of the transformative nature of the whole venture, the traveler may now be viewing their selfhood through a very different interpretive lens.

It is important to make one further note here regarding the *pause*. As mentioned in the paragraph above, the *interior pause* at *the deep* is an essential part of the overall process. At the same time, whenever a traveler hits a personal *crisis of meaning*, or senses some resistance, or impatience within them, they are invited to *pause*. Such crises of meaning, resistances, or impatience may occur at any point along the pathway. At such times, the *interior pause* involves the intention to surrender the desire to think their way through the moment. Rather, the invitation is to *pause . . . to wait . . . to allow* whatever it is they are questioning to work its way through them. So, the *interior pause* is an integral part of engaging with the ongoing adventure of traveling the path of self knowledge.

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*The interior pause: an integral part of the overall pathway*

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After the pause at the centre, the process of walking the outward path, of integrating the new *ground of being* into daily life, can be as laborious, as it is exhilarating. Why? Firstly, on the travelers return home to *the shallows* of daily life, it may feel like they are experiencing home as if for the first time. Such an experience can be unsettling. Secondly, the traveler's friends, family, and communities who have not undertaken such a venture, may unwittingly seek to change the traveler back to their *old self*; the self they once knew and felt comfortable with. So, living in *the shallows* - on the other side of *the deep* - takes courage to maintain, even as it is profound in its simplicity. Therefore, there is nothing superficial about the experience!

**Summary ~ the general nature of the path of self knowledge.**

The path of self knowledge is a universal pathway in the form of an ongoing contemplative spiritual practice which guides each traveler on their own inner adventure of self discovery towards an ever deepening experience of connection and belonging within their own self and within their world.

Travelers choose to engage with the pathway in the knowledge that their human longing to belong, sits within the Call to belong within the very nature of Life itself.

The symbol of the labyrinth grounds the understanding of the path, in that the pathway commences and concludes at the outer edge, i.e., *the shallows* of daily life. Even so, the path of self knowledge does not simply involve one labyrinthine walk to the centre and back. The path involves each traveler in their ongoing life adventure of gently meandering to the centre and back, each time allowing their spiritual questions to work their way through them and expanding, or deepening, their experience of selfhood. At the same time, a traveler may experience pivotal moments which heighten the intensity their journey, e.g., a *dark night* spiritual experience, which restructures their experience of selfhood.

### 3/. Three orientating reference points

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We each view our place in life through a particular world view. As mentioned previously, our world view comprises our current knowledge and beliefs regarding the origins of life, how the world and the human body/mind work, and current familial and societal norms. Our world view is both

the interpretive lens through which we view ourselves-in-life, and the boundary of what we can perceive. As such, our world view both informs, and limits, our interpretation of the facts as we currently understand them. Even though we are usually unaware of its operation within us, our world view is continually shaping our perception of selfhood. As a result, when we pose our spiritual questions, we do so within a particular world view. In turn, the responses we discover, are informed and limited by our world view. As mentioned in the Introduction, the three orientating reference points which informed, and limited, my exploration of the question of where the path of self knowledge leads, were: spiritual practice education, conscious evolution as a world view, and my personal belief system. The following briefly outlines elements within those three reference points.

#### 3.1 Spiritual practice education

Spiritual practice education, or spiritual formation, has been a personal lifelong commitment. Then, as a mature aged student I undertook formal studies through the Melbourne College of Divinity, including: a Bachelor of Theology - with a major in systematic theology, and a minor in practical theology; a Graduate Diploma in Spiritual Direction - including a one year, full time experiential training program in spiritual formation; and a Master of Arts - with a thesis entitled: *'The contribution of a spiritual director to the spiritual journey of a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder.'* I established Tree of Life Spiritual Wellbeing in 2007, and since that time have offered personal spiritual mentoring, contemplative small group programs, and many workshops and professional development sessions on the local, regional, national, and international stage.

Spiritual practice education centres on *both* the human longing to belong, *and* the Call to belong within the very nature of Life itself. We experience belonging through a congruent sacred story from which to source personal and collective identity, purpose, and values. Because the nature of Life is one of continued change and evolution, our sacred stories will continue to change and evolve. In terms of the Call to belong, spiritual practice education takes into account the immaterial reality of an enduring Life force which is experienced as a deeper rhythm of life, beyond personal identity.

Hillman argued that the nature of the Call entails: "an ongoing inquiry into life." Such an ongoing inquiry into life involves continued exploration in both the outer world - through scientific exploration, and the inner landscape, or sacred story - through spiritual principles and practices. Again, because Life

involves a dynamic process of being and becoming, spiritual principles and practices also continue to change and evolve. In line with such understandings, spiritual practice education involves principles and practices which enable us to:

1. attune to the Call to belong at any given time and place in history, and 2. in response to such a Call, generate a sacred story from which to source meaning and belonging in the world.

#### spiritual practice education

1. attuning ourselves to the Call to belong within the deeper rhythms of Life itself, beyond personal identity
2. in response to the Call, generating a sacred story from which to source meaning and belonging in the here-and-now

In line with continued scientific explorations of the outer world giving rise to an evolutionary creation theory and a world view centering on systems theories (see: 3.2 Clarifying the term *evolution*), the underlying principles of spiritual practice education now centre on: 1. The Call to belong taking form through once again reconnecting within the greater whole; discovering our place of belonging-within-the-whole. 2. Because we are living in-between cultural sacred stories, the Call to belong also involves reimagining our identity, purpose, and values, beyond a world view and sacred story centering on anthropocentrism, individualism, and consumerism. Such a reStorying process will commence by locating our personal and collective sacred stories within the greater Story of Life and will *turn* on the themes of participation, interconnectedness, and interrelatedness via the principle of unity with diversity.

Two specific genres of spiritual practice which enable us to personally engage with the above spiritual principles are: 1. meditative practices, and 2. contemplative self enquiry. Meditative practices enable us to experience that we have thoughts and feelings, yet do not need to be totally identified with them. As a result, meditative practices enable us to drop beneath our personal identity, and experience the deeper rhythms of Life. Meditative practices can take many forms. For example: silent meditation; walking meditation; the Buddhist sitting meditation; guided meditation; centering prayer/mantras; mindfulness practices; being in bush land; listening to music; yoga; tai chi; creating works of art . . . The second genre of spiritual practice - contemplative self enquiry - enables us to do the work of reposing our spiritual questions, discerning responses, and generating a relevant sacred story. Also, for those who are experiencing a *dark night* in their *ground of being*, personal spiritual mentoring can be an invaluable practice.



For more on the above mentioned spiritual practices, see: [www.treeoflife.org.au/Contemplative practices/Meditation & Spiritual Mentoring & Contemplative self enquiry](http://www.treeoflife.org.au/Contemplative%20practices/Meditation%20&%20Spiritual%20Mentoring%20&%20Contemplative%20self%20enquiry).

### 3.2 *Conscious evolution as a world view*

The second orientating reference point was a world view of conscious evolution. I first came across the term *conscious evolution* through the writings of futurist and author, Barbara Marx Hubbard. Hubbard wrote:

"Conscious evolution inspires in us a mysterious and humble awareness that we have been created by this awesome process of evolution and are now being transformed by it to take a more mature role as cocreators. In this view we do not stand apart from nature, but rather, we are nature evolving."

Within the recognition that we humans are part of nature itself, Hubbard argued that conscious evolution as a world view, goes beyond anthropocentrism. So in contrast to an anthropocentric view, conscious evolution could give rise to a new personal and collective identity based on conscious participation in the evolutionary process. For Hubbard, the shift is from being: "passive experiencers" to now being: "conscious participants of, and codesigners with, evolution." As conscious participants, we can contribute to the shape the evolutionary process in some way, even as we are being shaped by the process.

Hubbard's concept of conscious evolution as a world view caught my attention because I saw threads of connection between her understandings and my own.

Over the last few years I have been exploring human meaning and belonging within the context of a western cultural world view. My explorations gave rise to the theme *the sacred work of being human*. The sacred work of being human entails: in each new era of cultural and/or human history, we are required to discern the Call of that particular era to discover and take up our place of belonging as individuals, as cultures, and as one species within the wider Earth community. Responding to such a Call draws each one of us into an ever deepening experience of connection in the here-and-now, while at the same time continuing to participate in the ongoing evolution of Life itself. Could it be that our era is calling forth yet another sacred story, one drawing from a world view of conscious evolution? If so, such a sacred story could take its place alongside the multiplicity of sacred stories within a new cultural sacred story, including those of the first nations peoples and the existing world religious and spiritual traditions.

At this point, it may be helpful to clarify the meaning of the *term conscious evolution*, as it applies to this article. The term *conscious* involves: intentionality in the form of a considered and deliberate choice. It is important to realize that intentionality does not mean that we can plot out a linear course of action, and/or, control the process. Rather, intentionality means that we consciously explore our inner landscape within the awareness of the greater Story of Life itself. Then, we remain open and receptive to where our explorations take us.

*conscious: intentionality in the form of a considered and deliberate choice*

The term *evolution* refers to: the ongoing, dynamic Life process of being and becoming, which is commonly thought to be 13.8 billion years old, and still in the making. In terms of the evolutionary process, Hubbard argued: "we must remember that the nature of nature is to transform - especially when nature hits a crisis of limits." Hubbard also argued that evolution takes place in the form of: "complexity and freedom." She contended: "As a system becomes more complex - from nonlife to life, from single cell to animal, from animal to human - it jumps in consciousness and freedom. Each is a jump through greater complexity and interconnectivity." Drawing from such an understanding, the ongoing dynamic evolutionary process of being and becoming, both includes that which has gone before, and transcends the limitations of such, by way of creating something more complex.

*evolution: the ongoing dynamic Life process of being and becoming*

Within such an understanding of conscious evolution, it would seem that the western cultural sacred story has *hit its crisis of limits*. In response, are we willing to undergo a transformation in our *ground of being*? Only time will tell! Given current conditions, it would almost seem an impossible task. However, given that the nature of nature is to transform when it has hit a crisis of limits, and that we are part of nature, perhaps we do have it in us to begin again and generate a new, more complex cultural sacred story based on the principle of unity with diversity.

In terms of a new western cultural world view, which in turn will give rise to a new cultural sacred story, it is interesting to note that there is a shift taking place in some sections of the scientific community. Such a shift involves a change from the hypothesis of a dead universe, to the hypothesis of a living universe. (See: Duane Elgin, *The Living Universe*). Added to that shift in hypothesis, western culture is also undergoing a shift from a mechanistic world view, towards a systems world view. Within the mechanistic view: Life was regarded as a machine; things were reduced to their separate parts; then the parts were studied in isolation. The mechanistic model revealed much about the structure and composition of the world and the human body/mind. At the same time,

drawing from a mechanistic world view, the previous sacred story centred on the principle of either/or in the form of competitive dualistic opposites, e.g., mind vs. body, matter vs. spirit, us vs. them. The principle of either/or gave rise to the domination model of relating to one another, where we viewed ourselves in competition with each other, which in turn gave rise to judgment, fear, and prejudice.

In contrast to a mechanistic world view, Life is now also being explored through the interpretative framework of systems thinking. According to physicist, Fritjof Capra and chemistry professor, Luigi Luisi: "a systems theorist thinks in terms of the whole and how the parts relate to the whole." For example, the human respiratory system comprises a whole made up of its own parts, while also being part of many other bodily systems, which make up the greater whole of the human body. Therefore, "to understand things systematically means literally to put them into a context, to establish the nature of their relationship." Within such a view, the universe is a living system, made up of systems within systems; each system comprising a whole made of its own parts, while also being part of a larger whole. Furthermore, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts because "the way that its parts combine adds a different quality" (Collins Dictionary). The term given to such an understanding is *emergence*. Therefore, within a systems theory view, we live within a living, emergent universe.

Within a systems theory perspective, Capra and Luisi argued: "evolution is no longer seen as a competitive struggle for existence, but rather as a cooperative dance in which creativity and the constant emergence of novelty are the driving forces." The transformative shift from a predominantly mechanistic world view towards a systems world view, will in turn, shift our personal and collective sacred stories away from a competitive struggle world view, towards a cooperative dance world view, centering on the principle of unity with diversity. The shift is one of *deep change*, rather than *a tinkering at the edges*. And *deep change* cannot be sustained by the former sacred story. *Deep change* involves a shift in our *ground of being*, and therefore requires a cultural new sacred story.

### 3.3 My personal belief system

The third orienting reference point was my personal belief system. One major characteristic of that belief system is that I continue to think and write within a middle class, suburban, western mindset. At one time, however, that mindset was orientated around a Protestant Christian religious tradition. Within that tradition, spiritual formation focused on the individual and in turn, the path of self knowledge led towards a personal experience with God/Jesus/Spirit and finding belonging within a Christian religious community. Now my middle class, suburban, western mindset is orientated around the emerging field of evolutionary spirituality. Evolutionary spirituality is the term employed for generating a sacred story which draws from, and sits naturally within, a world view of conscious evolution.

Before describing my understanding of evolutionary spirituality, it is important to make one clarification regarding the general nature of sacred stories. All sacred stories are *faith* stories. *Faith* here is known to be an intrinsic human quality which finds expression in the drive and ability to give meaning and experience belonging through a congruent sacred story. Therefore, we are all people of faith. Even though it has been a widely held assumption that *faith* and religion go hand in hand, such an assumption is incorrect. A sacred story may involve an existing world religious and spiritual tradition, however, it may also centre on a different orientating reference point. Consequently, all sacred stories are faith stories,

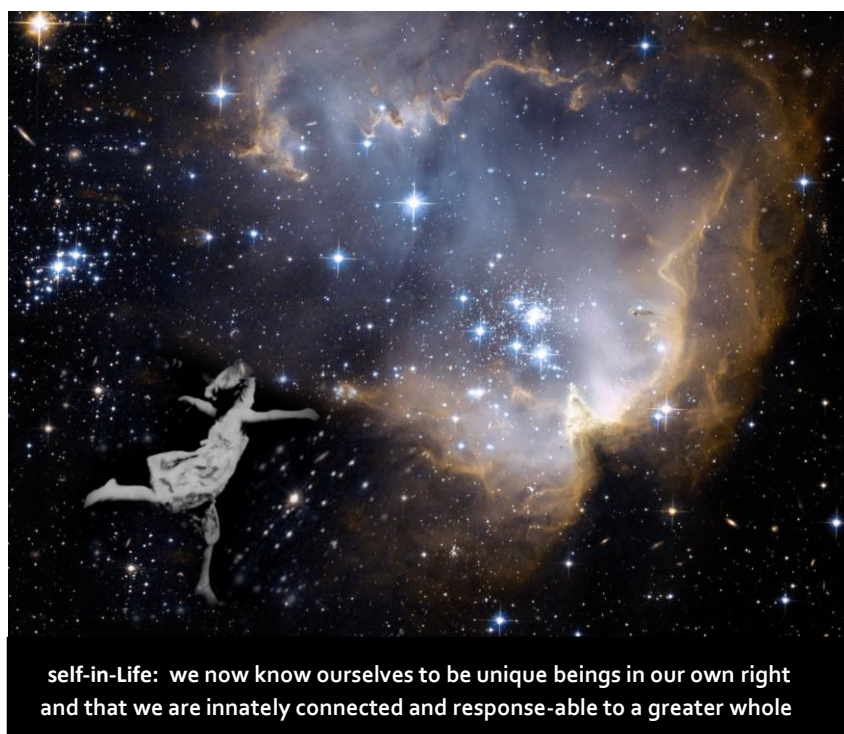


even one drawing from evolutionary spirituality.

**3.3.1** Within a framework of evolutionary spirituality, the sacred story is positioned within the greater Story of Life. Such a Story involves current understandings of the 13.8 billion years of evolution of the universe so far. Furthermore, evolutionary spirituality draws predominantly from systems thinking, as mentioned above. As such, evolutionary spirituality has been described as: "an integral way of thinking and being in the world, grounded in a personal, meaningful experience of the epic of evolution as one's own creation myth, or cosmological sacred story" (Wikia.com). *Integral* here means that each part, or system, is necessary and important to the whole. An integral way of thinking and being in-and-of-itself gives rise to the principle of unity with diversity. In addition to what has already been written about unity with diversity, Nora Bateson, author, educator and filmmaker, argued: "unity is not about oneness, it requires the process of uniting, which requires relationality." Uniting through relationship can best be understood through the aforementioned cooperative dance world view.

*evolutionary spirituality  
an integral way of thinking  
and being, giving rise to the  
principle of unity with diversity*

In light of the above, the principle of unity with diversity via an integral way of thinking and being in the world, does not negate personal uniqueness. Neither does it negate the seeking of personal wholeness in the here-and-now. Rather, the principle of unity with diversity enables each one of us to seek personal wholeness, in the knowledge that our very being participates within Life's creative dance of being and becoming. As a consequence, there is a transformative shift in personal and collective identity beyond anthropocentrism and individualism. Now our identity involves: knowing ourselves to be unique beings in our own right and that we are innately connected and response-able to a greater whole. So, we no longer view ourselves as separate, individual beings. The new view is one of self-in-Life.



When we situate our sacred story within the theme of the greater Story of Life, we begin to comprehend that we belong. Why? Simply because conditions were

sufficient to bring us into being. In this regard Capra and Luisi argued: "Indeed, we belong to the universe and this experience of belonging can make our lives profoundly meaningful." Furthermore, according to qualitative grounded theory researcher and author, Brené Brown: "True belonging doesn't require [us] to change who [we] are; it requires [us] to be who [we] are!" We are human beings, therefore Life does not require us to be anything more or less; Life requires us to embrace who we are. When we can embrace such an understanding, we will be able to experience belonging in the form of: unique manifestations of Life itself, which are not the centre piece of the evolutionary process, but at the same time are necessary and important to the whole. Therefore, we are one species (system) within the wider Earth community (network of systems within systems), each uniting through relationship to make a complex whole.

What's more, because we know ourselves to be necessary and important, we can recognize that we are enough . . . for our time. The understanding that *we are enough* breaks through what Buddhist nun, Sharon Salzberg, named as: "the myth of not being enough." Such a myth characterized the former cultural sacred story, which focused on the need for a savior figure. However, when we know ourselves to be enough, we no longer seek salvation from some divine source. Rather, we take responsibility for our own beliefs and actions in the world. In turn, the recognition that we belong to the greater Story of Life and that we are enough, naturally gives rise to a moral responsibility in the form of a values system which seeks the flourishing of all.

In addition to a shift in personal identity, an integral way of thinking and being in the world takes into account human history as a whole, including religious and spiritual traditions. In turn, evolutionary spirituality has given rise to the concept of the human tradition. The human tradition draws from the rich tapestry of wisdom, beliefs, knowledge, values, and myths which have accumulated within the human experience from ancient times until the present. As well as taking into account previous understandings, the human tradition also transcends that which no longer resounds in the present context. In this way, the human tradition offers a new lens for viewing ourselves in our world. Such a lens enables us to locate our cultural place of belonging within the wider human venture so far. In turn, we are able to integrate the wisdom of bygone eras, beyond either wholly accepting, or wholly rejecting the sacred stories in which the wisdom teachings originated.

So, the sacred story emerging in response to a world view of conscious evolution and a framework of evolutionary spirituality does not seek to transcend the human condition. Neither does it seek salvation in a world beyond this one, nor through the intervention of a divine character. Rather, the sacred story includes: the Earth is the place we call home; we belong because we are here; we each experience ourselves as unique self systems in our own right, who are also intrinsically interrelated and response-able to a greater whole; and within the understanding that as a species we continue to change, evolve, and adapt - we are enough.

#### **Summary ~ three orientating reference points**

We do not pose our spiritual questions into a vacuum. We pose our questions, and discover responses, within a particular world view. The world view which informed and limited the response to the question of where the path of self knowledge leads, was that of a western cultural mindset orientated by:

1. spiritual practice education which enables each one of us to attune to the Call to belong within the deeper rhythms of Life itself and, in response, generate a congruent sacred story;
2. a world view of conscious evolution enabling us to consciously locate our place of belonging within the greater Story of Life; a Story which involves the ongoing dynamic process of being and becoming, now viewed predominantly through a living systems view of life. A systems view of life reveals a practical understanding of how to live the principle of unity with diversity, i.e. uniting through relationship. Also, there is a shift towards viewing ourselves as cocreators in the evolutionary process, which requires a new sacred story;
3. evolutionary spirituality, which draws from a world view of conscious evolution. Evolutionary spirituality offers an integral framework for understanding ourselves in our world. Within such a framework, we now know ourselves to be self-in-Life in the form of unique beings in our own right, who are innately connected and response-able to the wider human tradition and the greater Story of Life itself.

#### 4/. Fully embracing our humanity-within-the-whole



The shape of our belonging within a new sacred story - which draws from a world view of conscious evolution and a framework of evolutionary spirituality - is one of fully embracing our humanity-within-the-whole. Such an undertaking involves an unqualified yes to being human with all the attendant strengths and limitations involved, rather than seeking to transcend the human condition. The choice to fully embrace our humanity commences with consciously locating our place of belonging within the context of the greater Story of Life and the ongoing human tradition. When we do so, we recognize that we belong to Life's creative dance of being and becoming. From such a *ground of being*, we are ready to undertake the personal inner journey towards personal wholeness and authentic living.

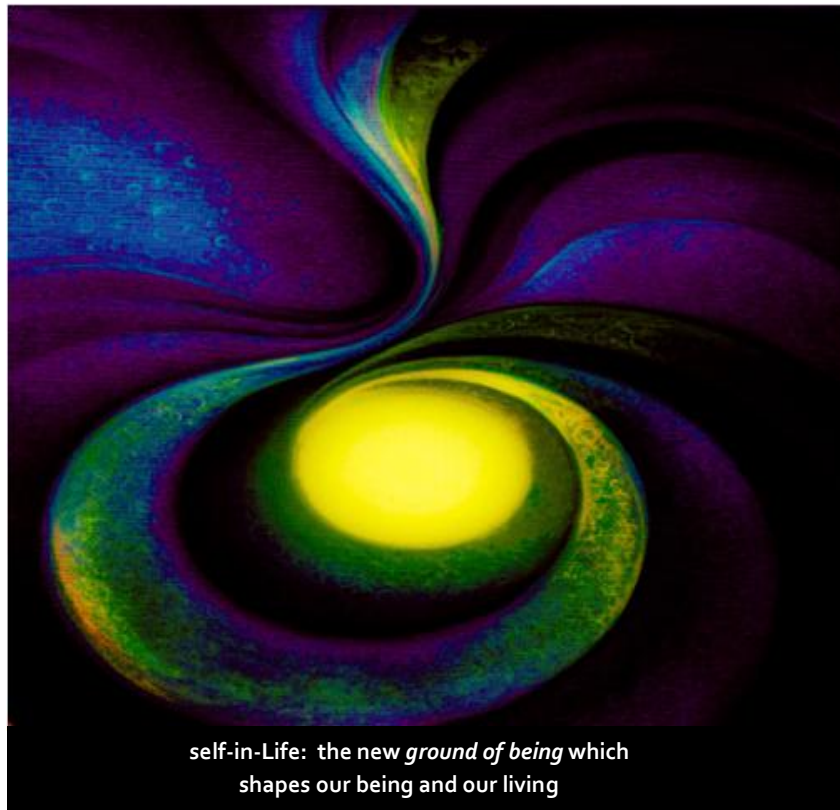
We undertake our personal inner journey through engaging with our personal spiritual questions via the path of self knowledge. The responses we discern shape our experience of fully embracing our humanity-within-the-whole in the following trifold form: 1. self-in-Life: joyful humility and reverence for the mystery of belonging to Life's creative dance of being and becoming; 2. self-in-community: authentic communal belonging and response-ability; and 3. self-in-lovingkindness: personal wholeness in the form of inner freedom to live authentically. Each of the three experiences corresponds with the intrinsic human longing to belong at the transpersonal, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels of human consciousness. As a result, fully embracing our humanity-within-the-whole enables each one of us to metaphorically: *come home to ourselves in our world*.

##### 4.1 Self-in-Life: joyful humility and reverence for the mystery of belonging to Life's creative dance of being and becoming

A sacred story which draws from a world view of conscious evolution and evolutionary spirituality gives rise to a new sense of identity at the transpersonal

level of human consciousness, i.e., belonging to the greater Story of Life, which is forever and continually in the making. We recognize that we come from and belong to Life's ongoing creative dance of being and becoming. Such a new identity is one of experiencing ourselves to be self-in-Life, rather than self and life. In this regard Hubbard argued: "We now begin to cultivate a new sense of identity, not as isolated individuals in a meaningless universe, but rather vehicles through which the universe is evolving." Therefore, not only do we humans intrinsically belong, we also have a purpose beyond consumerism. Now, our identity becomes one of: distinctive manifestations of Life itself, with a role to fulfill. Our task then becomes one of discerning and taking up our role at this point in our cultural history. Such a shift in identity and purpose towards self-in-Life, becomes our new *ground of being*, or *anchor point*, from which to live daily life with meaning and belonging.

A new sacred story emerging from the above *ground of being*, enables us to continue to seek personal inner wholeness. However, our experience of personal wholeness is grounded within our intrinsic connection and response-ability to the whole. Such an understanding transcends the world view of anthropocentrism. Why? Because the new sacred story centres on the primacy of Life itself. In turn, we humans now know ourselves to be significant, yet support characters within the greater whole. The new sacred story also breaks through and transcends the limitations of individualism, without diminishing the significance of each unique being. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the new sacred story gives rise to a purpose beyond consumerism. Therefore, the new sacred story breaks through and transcends the limitations of the former cultural story based on anthropocentrism, individualism, and consumerism.



self-in-Life: the new *ground of being* which shapes our being and our living

In light of the above, the new *ground of being* of self-in-Life enables us to fully embrace our humanity-within-the-whole. In turn, such a shift in identity and purpose both enables and challenges us to take responsibility for our beliefs and actions. Therefore, the shift in our *ground of being* naturally gives rise to a moral responsibility around a shared values system which seeks the flourishing of all life.

Also, because of the interconnectedness of all life - in the form of systems within systems - we know that the actions we take in daily life do matter; like pebbles dropped into a still pond, the ripples of the actions we take do have wider ramifications. So the shift in identity towards self-in-Life relates to both our being and our living.

#### **4.2 Self-in-community: authentic communal belonging and response-ability**

In terms of authentic communal belonging, the knowledge that we are each part of the wider human tradition, which in turn is part of the greater Story of Life, enables us to gather together on common ground. We are, first and foremost, all human beings. Furthermore, engaging in the path of self knowledge is not simply a privatized experience of inner freedom. Yes, engagement with the path enables each one of us to continue to grow and change in response to personal ongoing lived experience. At the same time, the knowledge that our current view is liable to change over our lifetime, dislodges the belief there is only one viewpoint. As a result, when we are in conversation with one another, even with those who hold disparate views, we can remain open to one another's convictions without rushing to either defend, or, relinquish our own. Conversation then, can become a spiritual practice.

Furthermore, drawing from what has already be written regarding personal truth in section 2.1, engaging in conversation as a spiritual practice enables us to listen and respond to one another in such a way that each one in the conversation experiences a kind of resonance, or what clinical professor of psychiatry, Daniel Siegel named as: "feeling felt." Such an experience of resonance, in turn generates an environment of trust. And trust, rather than similar belief structures, is at the very heart of interpersonal belonging. Therefore, fully embracing our humanity-within-the-whole allows us to embrace our individual uniqueness, remain receptive to differing viewpoints, and generate relationships built on trust.

In terms of response-ability, as mentioned in section 4.1, when we consciously locate our place of belonging within the greater Story of Life, we can no longer view ourselves as separate, individual beings. In turn, we can no longer live from a values system geared towards flourishing of the individual alone. Rather, the view that we are each unique beings in our own right, who intrinsically participate within the greater Story of Life, gives rise to a shared values system geared towards the flourishing of all life. Therefore, fully embracing our humanity-within-the-whole naturally calls forth personal and collective communal response-ability.

#### **4.3 Self-in-lovingkindness: personal wholeness in the form of the inner freedom to live authentically**

The following understanding of self-in-lovingkindness draws from and extends that which was written in the section 2.3.4 *a contemplative orientation involves the gentling light of lovingkindness.*

Personal wholeness, in the form of the inner freedom to live authentically, is experienced when we recognize and befriend the whole of who we currently know ourselves to be; including our brilliance, our ordinariness, and our not so desirable aspects. So, rather than seeking inner freedom through denying, or ridding ourselves, of certain aspects which we have deemed as unacceptable,

we befriend the whole range of our present moment human experience, i.e., the joys, sorrows, loves, losses, beauties, fears, doubts, confusions, and angers that arise from our daily living. In turn, we no longer have to metaphorically *hide from* certain aspects of ourselves. Therefore, we can explore our messy, confusing, ordinary, brilliant human existence. In response, we experience true belonging within our own skin. So, we do not experience inner freedom through the negation of certain aspects of our selfhood, rather, we experience belonging when we explore whatever we notice stirring within us. We can only undertake such a venture, if we view ourselves through the lens of lovingkindness.

In line with the above, fully embracing our humanity-within-the-whole through lovingkindness, does not involve a narcissistic, or ego centred, attitude. The practice enables us to receive the whole of our present moment human experience within the light of lovingkindness, rather than seeking some idealistic core self beyond our humanity. In this regard, Brown argued: "true belonging is the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world." In line with Brown, when we experience personal wholeness we are then able to live daily life with the experience of: *the undefended self, offered freely*.

#### **Summary ~ fully embracing our humanity-within-the-whole**

Fully embracing our humanity involves an unqualified yes to being human-within-the-whole, with all the attendant strengths and limitations involved. We are required to first locate our place of belonging within the greater Story of Life. From such a vantage point, we are then able to explore our personal experience of meaning and belonging within the trifold form of self-in-Life, giving rise to joyful humility and reverence for the mystery of belonging to Life's creative dance of being and becoming; self-in-community, giving rise to relationships built on trust rather than similar belief systems, and response-ability from a shared values system; and self-in-lovingkindness, giving rise to personal wholeness in the form of the inner freedom to live authentically in daily life.

### 5/. *Concluding remarks*

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We humans long to belong to our world. We experience belonging through a congruent sacred story from which to source our experience of identity, purpose, and values. Our personal and collective human longing to belong to our world does not sit within a vacuum. Within the deeper rhythms of Life, there is a Call to belong. We experience such a Call in the form of an ongoing inquiry into both the outer world through the sciences, and the inner landscape through spiritual principles and practices. The shape of our belonging in Life continues to change in response to Life's ongoing dynamic process of being and becoming. Therefore, in each new era of cultural history, we are required to discern and take up our place of belonging. When we respond to the Call we experience belonging in the form of an ever deepening lived experience of interconnectedness with Life/others/self. At the same time, when we respond to the Call we are also participating in the greater Story of Life which is continually and forever in the making.

It would seem that the Call of the era for western societies is to reimagine a new sacred story. Why? Because the previous story no longer offers a rational source for meaning and belonging, and is now detrimental to the material world. Even

though themes of a new cultural sacred story are emerging, with no functional cultural sacred story to draw from at this time, we are each required to discern our own internal source for giving meaning to our living and experiencing belonging in our world. We discern our own internal source through posing our spiritual questions, and discovering responses, within the light of our current world view. One particular practice for such a venture is that of engaging in the path of self knowledge as an ongoing spiritual practice. Therefore, in a general sense, the path of self knowledge is an ongoing contemplative spiritual practice which guides each traveler on their inner adventure of self discovery, towards an ever deepening experience of connection and belonging within their own self and within their world.

Even though we are currently living in-between cultural sacred stories, a new cultural world view currently gaining prominence is that of conscious evolution. Conscious evolution has given rise to evolutionary spirituality. Such a context informed, and limited, the particularity of the response to my spiritual question: "Where does the path of self knowledge lead?" So, within a world view of conscious evolution and a framework of evolutionary spirituality, my personal response to the question was: the path of self knowledge leads towards fully embracing our humanity-within-the-whole. We can fully embrace our humanity-within-the-whole because we know that we belong as one species within the wider Earth community, and we are enough - because we are able to adapt and evolve. The shift towards embracing our humanity-within-the-whole involves *deep change* in our *ground of being* from self and life to self-in-Life. Within the framework of self-in-Life, we know ourselves to be unique beings in our own right, seeking personal wholeness in the here-and-now, and that we are intrinsically connected and response-able to a greater whole.

Hubbard argued that now is the time for a shift in our view of ourselves; a shift from passive experiencers, to cocreators of the evolutionary process. If this is the case and we are still operating from a framework of anthropocentrism, individualism, and consumerism, cocreation would take collective human self interest to a whole new level. In response, our actions would be even more destructive to one another and the material/natural world. Therefore, a new functional cultural sacred story is essential; a new sacred story which *turns* on the principle of unity with diversity via the themes of: participation with, inter-connectedness, and interrelatedness. Such a new cultural sacred story would encompass multiple sacred stories, each unique in their own right, yet also in relationship with one another. As a result, each sacred story would draw from the shared themes and values, but would have their own particular storylines, or open belief systems. The multiple sacred stories would include those of the indigenous, first nations peoples whose sacred stories already *turn* on the themes listed above, existing religious and spiritual traditions, and the emerging tradition of evolutionary spirituality drawing from a world view of conscious evolution. In response, our actions would focus on the flourishing of all life. Such a transformation of our cultural sacred story would certainly be one of complexity and freedom.

If the jump of evolution in our era is towards cocreation and generating a new cultural sacred story, what will sustain us through the *deep change* that we will be required to undergo? In response, I offer the following two quotations which sustain me when I feel daunted by the prospect. The first response is by Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles*. The second is from the late Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*.

Marianne Williamson (paraphrased):

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are each powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who are we to participate in the wondrous evolutionary venture of Life itself? Actually, who are we not to be? We are children of the universe, our playing small does not serve the world, there is nothing enlightening about shrinking. We are all meant to shine as children do. We were born to make manifest the wonder of Life itself that is within us. It's in everyone and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Thomas Berry:

Here we might observe that the basic mood of the future might well be one of confidence in the continuing revelation that takes place in and through the earth. If the dynamics of the universe from the beginning shaped the course of the heavens, lighted the sun, and formed the earth, if this same dynamism brought forth the continents and seas and atmosphere, if it awakened life in the primordial cell and then brought into being the unnumbered variety of living beings, and finally brought us into being and guided us safely through the turbulent centuries, there is reason to believe that this same guiding process is precisely what has awakened in us our present understanding of ourselves and our relation to this stupendous process. Sensitized to such guidance from the very structure and functioning of the universe, we can have confidence in the future that awaits the human venture.

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## Resources

**Nora Bateson**, *Smaller Arcs of Larger Circles: Framing through Other Patterns*

**Thomas Berry**, 'the New Story' in *The Dream of the Earth*

*The Great Work: our way into the future*

**Brené Brown**, *Braving the Wilderness: The quest for true belonging and the courage to stand alone*

**Fritjof Capra & Luigi Luisi**: *A Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision*

**Pema Chodron**, *The Wisdom of No Escape and the Path of Lovingkindness*

**Charles Eisenstein**, *Climate -- A New Story*

**Duane Elgin**, *The Living Universe: Where Are We? Who Are We?*

*Where Are We Going?*

**Anne Hillman**, *Awakening the Energies of Love: Discovering Fire for the Second Time*

**Jennifer Isaacs**, *Australian Dreaming: 40,000 Years of Aboriginal History*

**Gerald May**, *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection between Darkness and Spiritual Growth.*

Even though May writes within the framework of a Christian religious tradition, his insights regarding the *dark night* spiritual experience have broader implications.

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[www.universespirit.org/evolutionary-spirituality](http://www.universespirit.org/evolutionary-spirituality)

[www.treeoflife.org.au/The sacred work of being human/The art of transformative living & Contemplative practices/meditation & contemplative self enquiry & personal spiritual mentoring](http://www.treeoflife.org.au/The_sacred_work_of_being_human/The_art_of_transformative_living_&_Contemplative_practices/meditation_&_contemplative_self_enquiry_&_personal_spiritual_mentoring)