

The New Story: Why We Need One and How to Create It

by **Michael Nagler**

“The deepest crises experienced by any society are those moments of change when the story becomes inadequate for meeting the survival demands of a present situation.” ~ Thomas Berry¹

1. A Crisis of Meaning

We stand at a point in history when it seems to be possible—and necessary—to recast the “story” of who we are and what we are doing on Earth. Three factors contribute to this remarkable possibility:

1. The “old story”—that we are separate, physical beings doomed to compete for ever scarcer resources—has always been demoralizing and is now, more and more obviously, a dangerous fiction. (We’ll see that this “old” story is in fact relatively new.)
2. Starting with the incredible breakthroughs of quantum physics a century ago, modern science has been sketching an entirely different picture: We are primarily conscious beings, deeply interconnected, gifted with both tremendous internal resources that are as yet largely untapped and—if we care to seize it—an inspiring destiny.
3. This new science (as it’s called) confirms, from its own angle, the story that the greatest traditions of human wisdom have upheld from time immemorial. In this view, there is no longer a conflict between “religion” and “science;” the best science and the deepest wisdom complement each other impressively in their depiction of a much higher human image than at present prevails.

I’ll add a fourth element to the mix, one that is crucial for precipitating the paradigm shift from the prevailing story of alienation to a “new” story of belonging: nonviolence. But first a framework.

Every social movement needs two resources to succeed: unity—a sense of *shared purpose*—and a long-term *strategy*. That is acutely true of the movements swirling around the globe today in response to first one and then another crisis unleashed by the failing institutions of the prevailing order. Paul Hawken has convincingly shown that, while there are literally a million or more worthy projects being carried out in “the largest social movement in history,” they are working in isolation, thus forfeiting their potential effectiveness.² And nonviolence scholars (yes, there are some) have realized for some time that spontaneous popular uprisings, hopeful and dramatic as they may be, soon lose momentum for want of long term strategy, thus unintentionally giving rise to elements as destructive as the regimes they dislodged, when those elements rush into the vacuum created by those popular uprisings.

Inspired by Gandhi's iconic campaign for India's freedom, which was conspicuously endowed with both unity and strategy, we at the Metta Center have created a platform called Roadmap that provides a framework for both shared purpose and long term strategy.

Nonviolence is the Roadmap's operative principle. By emphasizing nonviolence, we provide an alternative to the established culture, which sees coercive force as the fundamental basis of both change and order.

But nonviolence is more than a method; it is itself a New Story of reality and human significance. The Roadmap reflects this understanding by placing the power of the individual at its center, in direct contradiction to the old story of our passivity, powerlessness and, indeed, insignificance. The individual is not just the beneficiary of this new model, but its source. The energy of change arises, as it did in Gandhi's scenario, from personal empowerment and moves outward through "constructive programme" to confrontational nonviolent resistance when the latter is still necessary.³

In parallel, among the five additional areas of essential change and regeneration, we give pride of place to the creation of a new story. As George Gerbner said when he was dean of the Annenberg School of Communication, "Show me who tells the stories of a society and I don't need to know who writes the laws."⁴ The powerful resonance of a person-centered movement armed, as it were, with a new story that makes clear *why* the person is the center of global meaning and power, has an incredible potential for change. Why care about other people's healthcare if they are not you, and there might be more to go around if they weren't there? Why look for an alternative to brute force, even if it's destructive side effects outweigh any possible gains, if we live in a regime of competing interests and there's no other way?

What, after all, do human trafficking, high rates of murder and suicide, weak gun safety laws, election fraud, banksterism, and war have in common? They all rest upon a flawed vision of the human being. In fact, "flawed" is an understatement. The prevailing image of a human being today, an image that is consistent across the mainstream of our art forms, education, policymaking, the news media, and a majority of scientists (though their number is shrinking somewhat), is that of a material body separate from other creatures and the environment, doomed to compete for ever scarcer resources in a universe that has come about by chance. "What liberals and progressives don't seem to understand," wrote Lynn Passamore, "is that you don't counter a myth with a pile of facts and statistics. You have to counter it with a more powerful story."⁵ That more powerful story is beginning to take shape.

2. The New Story

What we have lost in the modern desacralization of nature and degradation of the human image— and what we stand to gain by reversing it—can be thrown into relief by this passage, for example, from a fourteenth century text, the *Cloud of Unknowing*:⁶

Beneath you and external to you lies the entire created universe. Yes, even the sun, the moon, and the stars. They are fixed above you, splendid in the firmament, yet they cannot compare to your exalted dignity as a human being.

Seven centuries later, UC Berkeley's quantum physicist Henry Stapp writes:⁷ Rational arguments lead to the conclusion that all aspects of nature, including our own mental aspects, must be interacting parts of one mental whole. This conclusion opposes, and therapeutically so, the materialist message that each of us is a separate and isolated collection of mechanical parts that, in

some incomprehensible (and useless) way, can think, know, and feel. Perceiving oneself to be an integral part of the mental whole can elicit a feeling of connectivity, community, and compassion with fellow sentient beings, whereas the materialist message of isolation and survival of the fittest tends to lead to selfish actions.

Present-day visionaries have tended to look at the new story through three lenses, or on three different scales: the *Universe Story* (which is also the title of Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry's excellent book⁸); the *Earth Story*, sometimes called Sacred Earth or the Gaia Hypothesis; and finally the *Person Story*. Although these stories overlap, it is the third story, about the new image of the human being, that is critical for significant social change. Unfortunately, it has been the least studied. But, to appreciate all fully, we must start with the biggest picture.

2a. The Universe Story

For our purposes, the post-classical, or quantum era story of the universe can be summed up in two propositions:

1. All reality is an interconnected whole. It is “non-local,” in the language of physics; but in the plain words of Swami Vivekananda, “The whole universe is one.”⁹ Nothing that we do, say, or even think is without effects, whether measurable or not, that extend everywhere. This interconnected perspective resonates with the observation of Martin Luther King, Jr. that “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly”¹⁰

2. All of evolution has been a steady unfolding of consciousness.

The two points are clearly related since unity, or ‘non-locality,’ is utterly impossible in the material realm but begins to be imaginable as a feature of consciousness. But two things must be added to the second point. First, ‘unfolding’ means just that.¹¹ Consciousness itself, the underlying reality in both quantum physicists and the Vedantic and other traditions, did not evolve: it always was and still is, unchanging and indivisible. “I regard consciousness as fundamental,” physicist Max Planck wrote in 1931; “I regard matter as derivative from consciousness...Everything that we talk about, everything that we regard as existing, postulates consciousness.”¹² Consciousness has been there, said Rabbi Michael Lerner at a recent conference, “Not from the emergence of brains but from the very, very beginning of everything... There never was a time when the universe wasn't equally conscious as it was physical.”¹³ Indeed, pursuing Lerner's line of inquiry, we may consider whether the universe is *more* conscious than physical.

What has evolved is not consciousness itself, then, but life forms with greater abilities to use this consciousness, climaxing, as far as life on this planet is concerned, with the uniquely human (though not often fully utilized) capacity for self-awareness. This long process has been beautifully brought out by the popular meditation teacher, Sri Eknath Easwaran: “If we take the Gita's view, that God has become the world and mind and matter belong to the same field, we get a much loftier view of evolution: the eons-long rise of consciousness from pure energy until the simplest of life-forms emerges and the struggle for increasing self-awareness begins.”¹⁴

Second, and even more significant: evolution *will continue to be* an unfolding of consciousness. As physiologists and sages alike say of our cognitive capacities, they have not begun to reach any known limitation. We nonetheless experience at least one serious limitation in our consciousness, which Einstein, in a famous passage, identifies and points up

how it is to be transcended.¹⁵

A human being is part of the whole called by us 'universe,' a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Here is the twentieth century's greatest scientific genius describing nothing less than the purpose of life, to "shatter the chains of egotism" that create the feeling of separateness between ourselves and others, as Gandhi put it.¹⁶ This would seem to be the great leap that humankind has taken beyond other animals.

Scientists have calculated that the likelihood that this universe and its most spectacular achievement, life, came about by chance is about that of a strong wind blowing through a junkyard and assembling a Boeing 707. Clearly, as Nobel biologist George Wald said at a recent conference, this universe has been "headed for life from the Big Bang."¹⁷ Heading for life and rising consciousness are two ways of looking at the same phenomenon. There is also a third.

Since higher consciousness means enhanced awareness of unity; since, as evolutionary biology has discovered, cooperation has played a more potent role in evolution than competition and, as neuroscience has discovered, we higher animals are "wired for empathy," then the universe exhibits what Buddhists call *mahākaruna* or "vast compassion." It exhibits what we might call, to paraphrase an expression from the sterile debate between creationism and science, "compassionate design," and we participate in that design when we carry out projects of social change through nonviolence. This would explain why solving problems with nonviolence leads to more lasting solutions than doing so in the 'traditional' way, with violence, which in this perspective begins to appear, if we may coin a term, counter-evolutionary.

While animals exhibit many behaviors of appeasement and conflict transformation—far more than were recognized before the birth of today's "positive science"¹⁸—it would seem to be a human prerogative to consciously choose suffering as a way of opening the heart of the opponent, for his or her own welfare. In Gandhian, or "principled" nonviolence we are never against the true well-being of the other even when we're compelled to resist their attitude, behavior, or institutions: in Christian terms, "We hate the sin, but not the sinner." Gandhi stated very simply: "nonviolence is the law of our species," a spirit that "lies dormant in the brute."¹⁹ Without a framing narrative to rationalize this law, nonviolent activists have nonetheless discovered it in their own experiences.

Christian Peacemaker Teams is one of some twenty non-governmental organizations that are now actively applying nonviolence across borders in situations of impending or open conflict—a development of Gandhi's *Shanti Sena* or "peace army" idea that has been expanding throughout the world beneath the radar of the mass media. Recently a CPT field team member was conversing with an activist in Iraqi Kurdistan who announced his intention to use nonviolence in their struggle. The CPT member, perhaps to test his friend's resolve, pointed out that nonviolence can be dangerous (which is true, though not nearly as dangerous as violence), that sometimes non-violence doesn't yield the hoped-for results right away (which may also be true but again is even more true of violence).²⁰ The activist replied, "Sometimes you are happy in nonviolence because you are not losing your soul. You might lose hope, or get tired, but you are not losing your soul." He does well to repeat the phrase; "I lost my soul in Iraq/Afghanistan" is frequently on the lips of veterans who, in hundreds of thousands (actually, 1.7 million from

Vietnam alone) are suffering PTSD that drives increasing numbers of veterans to the point of suicide.²¹ A retired U.S. Army psychiatrist recently said that the response of the army and the VA to this tragedy is not to talk about it, because to acknowledge the existence of this widespread phenomenon would be “to pathologize an absolutely necessary experience,”²² namely war. But there is another reason the military doesn’t talk about it: it lies beyond the vision of the prevailing paradigm, with its assumption of alienation and separateness.

More positively, Aram Jamal Sabir, the executive director of the Kurdish Institute of Elections reports: “I can’t tell you exactly when I started to believe in nonviolence—sometime during all the wars and violence here...I saw that violence didn’t change the situation. In any person there is some humanity. Nonviolence tries to develop that part of a person.”²³

In other words, nonviolence, being perfectly in sync with human destiny, not only conveys a deep sense of fulfillment on the activist but also helps to awaken the opponent and the broader public.

The explosive quantitative and qualitative growth of nonviolence in the few decades since Gandhi and King²⁴ thus takes its place beside the birth of new science and the recovery of ancient wisdom as a potent factor in the change that David Korten, Joanna Macy and others have referred to as the Great Turning.²⁵ Now that political science has begun looking at this phenomenon, we already have some impressive studies of its efficacy to dislodge oppressive regimes. But the growth of nonviolence, and knowledge about it, has not only political but also cultural and even evolutionary significance.

2b. The Earth Story

Of the three intersecting stories that comprise this new narrative, the ecological has been the most recognized and thus requires less review here. Not that solving the problem of global climate disruption is not urgent! It’s the most urgent task in the category Joanna Macy identifies as “stopping the worst of the damage.” But its primary urgency is to preserve the nourishing capacity of the earth so as to cradle the continuation of the great experiment called life. Indeed, as Vandana Shiva said at a recent conference in Oakland, “Stop the pollution in human beings (i.e., in our minds) and you will stop the pollution of the planet.”²⁶ While we must stop mountaintop removal, the Keystone XL pipeline, etc., and quickly, the “worst of the damage” has been industrial civilization’s damage to the human image.²⁷

The desacralization of Earth that Carolyn Merchant calls the “death of nature,” which began at the dawn of the industrial revolution, meant that the ancient myth of a living earth was deliberately, if not always consciously deconstructed. This process must be reversed, even if the modern mind cannot re-imagine earth as actually living, we can at least regain a *respect* for life, and by extension for our planet’s exquisite life-support system. Along with that reimagining must come a change in the collective psyche that creates our vulnerability to greed by propagating a misleading image of ourselves as empty physical beings in need of fulfillment from outside objects. As a great modern Indian sage, Ramana Maharshi, replied to a questioner when he (the sage) was only twenty-two years of age: “Happiness is the very nature of the Self. There is no happiness in any object of the world.”²⁸ Fuller awareness of this fundamental fact of our nature, which at present rigorously obscured by advertising and other cultural forms, would point us to the end to our extractive economy and the way we’re despoiling the earth to service it.²⁹

2c. The Person Story

We now begin to see through the critical lens: our human image. As Huston Smith said some years ago, “For our culture as a whole, nothing major is going to happen until we figure out who

we are. The truth of the matter is...we haven't a clue who we are today."³⁰ Or rather, we have imposed on ourselves a theory that violates our deepest intuitions and is ultimately a travesty of what science, wisdom traditions, and our own best judgment are saying. Ancient Indian tradition offers a set of potent formulas called *mahāvākyas* ("core statements") that encapsulate the vision of reality that the Vedānta had created; for example *prajñānām brahmaḥ*, "All reality is consciousness."³¹ We might try to set out a few core statements for our present age even though we may not be able to match the *mahāvākyas*' brevity; that takes time, and genius. Supported as they are by science and wisdom, and offered here with confidence, we nonetheless treat them as hypotheses to be lived and tested in the living.

- We are not merely material beings. To use a popular formula, we are body, mind, and spirit, but spirit (consciousness) is our first and fundamental identity.
- We are not separate, despite appearances. All of us, for that matter all of life, is one, and this oneness can be discovered in the depths of our consciousness.
- We are not violent by nature; we have a *capacity* for violence inherited from our evolutionary past, but just as cooperation is a more potent driver of evolution than competition, compassion in us leads to more long-lasting change than hatred. Injustice and cruelty are not absent from our world, but they are not fundamental to it. Life doesn't punish; it teaches.³²
- We are not determined by our DNA, our hormones, or our neurotransmitters any more than we are by the position of the stars or anything outside us: we make our own destiny primarily with our *will*.
- We are not a finished product. The miraculous human body that has taken five billion years to evolve (counting from the emergence of life forms on this planet) may have reached a plateau—it may not be possible to run a three-minute mile—but we are far from realizing the full potential of our *consciousness*. Except that some of us have: Jesus, the Buddha, and in our own age, many feel, Mahatma Gandhi, and a relative handful of other women and men of realization who represent what each of us can become.

3. What's keeping the old story alive?

It's interesting to observe how the New Story is struggling to be told 'in the shell of the old.' For example, Barbara Frederickson, developing an important aspect of positive psychology, has written an important book called *Love 2.0: How Our Supreme Emotion Affects Everything We Feel, Think, Do, and Become*, but the headline of a review in *Alternet* tells exactly the opposite (and depressingly familiar) story: "Your Brain on Love: The Fascinating *Biochemical Reactions That Make Sparks Fly*" (emphasis added).³³ Even in this otherwise quite progressive blog, the categories used to frame this scientific finding are taken from the materialistic narrative long since discarded by many scientists and never even taken seriously by mystics.

While it is virtually ubiquitous in public discourse, the most effective medium imposing this inhibiting and demoralizing narrative is modern advertising. Examples abound—an old advertisement touts a brand of cigarettes as "alive with pleasure" or a more recent picture of some diamond rings with the label, "This is what extraordinary love looks like." Bear in mind that according to recent studies, we are exposed to between 3,000-5,000 of these commercial messages a day; their cumulative impact, including their underlying 'story' or message of a self that is empty (needing fulfillment from the outside world) and separate from others and the environment, cannot be ignored.

The six-part BBC documentary, *Century of the Self* demonstrates the power of advertising, including, for example, how the Nazis enthusiastically adopted advertising techniques in their propaganda, with devastating clarity that we needn't elaborate here. Those who have become alarmed by Citizens United, the Supreme Court-approved doctrine that corporations have the same rights as natural persons, have mainly been roused by its baleful consequences for democracy, as well they should; but even if no corporation took advantage of the Court's ruling in order to sway political decisions, the decision still does serious harm by its propagating a shallow, inert image of personhood, which has come to dominate our collective sense of self.

An earlier version of *Century of the Self* was called *Happiness Machines*, borrowing from a quote by President Herbert Hoover, who fell all over himself to offer this fulsome praise to a group of advertisers: "You have taken over the job of creating desire, and have *transformed people into* constantly moving happiness *machines*—machines which have become the key to economic progress" (emphasis added).³⁴

Since Hoover's time, as audiences have become more and more desensitized and indoctrinated to this message of their own dehumanization, advertisers have become increasingly forthright about transferring humanity to inanimate objects. "Meet Gwen" invites a billboard on the way into town from our office. Gwen likes music and good restaurants. But there's a problem: "Gwen" is a smartphone. This is not a joke. Recall that the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were given the cute, euphemistic and equally pseudo-personal names "Little Boy and "Fat Man" while the cities they destroyed were referred to not as cities but "targets."

Reviewing Nick Turse's Vietnam War book, *Kill Anything That Moves*, Chris Hedges describes how "the god-like power that comes with the ability to destroy...along with the intoxicating firepower of industrial weapons, rapidly turns those who wield these weapons into beasts. *Human beings are reduced to objects*" (emphasis added).³⁵ The degradation inflicted by these messages is double-edged, injuring first of all oneself and then the intended victim.³⁶ Conflict scientists have long recognized that dehumanization is a fundamental precondition of violence; indeed to deny the humanity of another (and/or one's own) is a kind of spiritual violence in itself. From dehumanization to inhumanity is a short step.

Dehumanization begins long before an army recruit shouts in unison for his drill sergeant that the purpose of a bayonet is to "Kill, kill, kill without mercy." As is well known, before becoming California's governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger starred in a particular type of action film. According to a *New Yorker* profile of Stan Winston, whose special effects studio designed monsters and robots for these movies, Winston found it exciting to "scare the crap out of people." This sounds uncomfortably similar, does it not, to the way governments try to keep us cowed and in line? For instance, in 1947, when the American people *were* turning from militarism in disgust, Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg told President Harry S. Truman that if he wanted to rearm he would have to 'scare the hell out of the American people.')(?³⁷ But the Winston studio team was convinced that their projects were humanitarian. The *New Yorker* account also quoted Donald Norman, a professor of computer science and psychology and "an influential writer on technological design." According to Norman, "Robots need to display their emotions so that humans will be able to tell at a glance what's going on inside them." *Emotions? Inside* them? And, according to Cynthia Breazeal, an MIT computer scientist who collaborated with Winston But there's more: in countries like the U.S. and Japan, there will soon be too many old people and not enough caretakers. "The solution could be a sociable robot, something that lives with you and that you can have a *meaningful emotional* relationship with" (*ibid*, emphasis added).

To seriously believe that you can have a meaningful relationship with a machine epitomizes our

civilization's pathology. It is perhaps the worst possible delusion, for it becomes all too easy to dehumanize persons in a culture that dehumanizes *personhood*.

4. From The Cultural to the Political

Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) is a remarkable organization that places trained, unarmed field team members in select regions of conflict. It's now a seven million dollar worldwide organization with teams in five countries. One day when NP was just getting underway, I had lunch with a colleague, a distinguished political scientist with a special interest in peace (not commonplace in that discipline). I explained to Ernie what NP and other nonviolent intervention groups were doing (the field is now known as Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping): how they had rescued child soldiers, offered "protective accompaniment" to hundreds of threatened human rights workers in Latin America and elsewhere, stood ready to interpose themselves, if necessary, in outbreaks of fighting—all without losing a single member. "Fascinating, Mike," he said, with genuine interest. So I said, let's put together a seminar and I can share this with some of your colleagues.

"No," he said.

No? Wouldn't his colleagues want to know about an earthshaking development in their own field? After a few days I got over my shock and pressed Ernie to tell me why he thought they would not, and after thinking for a moment he put very simply: "That's not their culture." Two decades on, it still isn't. Nor is it the culture of policymakers, funders, or the millions of ordinary men and women who go into military "service" for a variety of personal reasons and one cultural one—in their worldview there is no alternative to coercive force.

The debate between Democrats and Republicans is not taking place on a level playing field: politically conservative perspectives are premised on the old story, which is still the default notion of reality for a large majority in the industrialized world. Why not torture people if their suffering benefits you and hurts only them (a belief that has now been disproven even by neuroscience)³⁸? The prevailing story came into existence, after all, for political reasons: as my colleague Carolyn Merchant has shown in her critical study, *The Death of Nature*, the rationalism (not the same as rationality) of the 'Enlightenment' was seized upon to supplant the image of "sacred earth," of "Gaia:" the sense that nature was alive and should not be violated.³⁹ The replacement notion of Earth as an inert block of matter made the industrial revolution possible, unleashing much despoliation of the earth, then by mines, now by poisoning, climate disruption, mountaintop removal, and so on. David Korten, Joanna Macy, and other brilliant visionaries are now in effect trying to reverse that narrative shift, to restore the image of a living or sacred Earth. They are quite correct in pointing out that repressive forces are strongly invested in keeping the prevailing story of a lifeless Earth inhabited by human beings with no agency, who are radically dissociated from one another and the planet and thus fit victims of elite control and exploitation. This is why, when we come down to an 'inexplicable' catastrophe like Iraq, as Tom Hayden reported one member of Congress declaring, "Republicans can declare victory and leave, but the Democrats can only declare failure and be blamed."⁴⁰

5. The Opportunity Of Now

Despite appearances, we have reached a time of great possibility; on the one hand, the prevailing story is causing untold suffering and, consciously or not, millions of people yearn to discard it: No one takes joy in thinking of themselves as a mechanical thing in a random universe. On the other hand, two parallel and remarkable developments in the twentieth century have made it possible to reunite two great streams of human understanding and belief that have long been at odds in the West: religion and science. 'New science'— including the positively oriented social

sciences that walked through the door thrown open by the astounding breakthroughs of quantum theory – and the wisdom traditions of human spirituality which have become somewhat more available to the general public, have begun to reveal quite complementary models of reality. Science, the systematic exploration of the outer world, and spiritual awareness, the equally systematic exploration of the world within, while their findings do not always overlap, are telling the same story where they do. When you distinguish, as Rupert Sheldrake has done, between the *dogma* of science, i.e. the belief, sometimes called scientism, that only things that can be measured and weighed are real, and the scientific *method*, which relies on hypothesis and testing, these two great inquiring systems are again complementary, because spiritual investigation also relies on hypotheses and testing, though by other means. Gandhi seems to be at home in both realms. When challenged to substantiate his claim that the directive for his spectacularly successful fast against untouchability in 1932 came from “the voice of God” he said, “I have stated a *simple scientific truth*, thus to be tested by all who have the will and the patience to acquire the necessary qualifications.”⁴¹

The basic tenets of the wisdom tradition, with their powerful teachings of human interconnectedness and the norms that follow, are nowhere in conflict with the discoveries of new science, though each has developed its distinctive idiom. Where physicists speak of “non-locality,” sages call it the unity of life (or the whole of existence); where the latter speak of the primacy of consciousness or, in popular terms, ‘mind over matter,’ physicist Amit Goswami coins the term “downward causality.”⁴² And when both speak of the critical concept of unity in diversity, without which no resolution of social, economic, or other tensions is possible, Gandhi came up with a fundamental guiding principle he called “Heart Unity,”⁴³ the norm that there is no underlying, unresolvable competition in the universe, that differences convert from threats to challenges when we gain a feeling for the other’s welfare. Martin Luther King was very clear that when that happens we actually *need* diversity on the surface: “I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be; and you cannot be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.” Add to the fact that science and traditional wisdom converge around a “new” image of humanity the lesser-known fact that nonviolence, which arises from that image, is proving such a successful tool of social change and we have compelling support for the new story, or what we have taken to call in Metta documents the Story of Belonging.

6. How to Tell the New Story

Images of Gandhi and King have begun to appear in documentaries about the new story. This is a hopeful development. It speaks well of the filmmakers’ intuition. Tellers of the new story can build upon it by articulating the details—and they are rich indeed when one studies the subject in any depth—of nonviolence.⁴⁴ Just as the picture drawn by positive science of “mirror neurons,” for example, helps make the power of nonviolence more believable, the success of nonviolence gives validity to the new story. Nonviolence is central to the new story (as violence was to the old) and may be the place the new story will come home to the general public. Few people today can be reached by scientific abstractions, much less the tenets of traditional wisdom, but they find it hard to ignore when dictators are deposed and oppressive regimes are brought down by an unfamiliar form of resistance.

Whether they realize it or not, countless people are depressed by the old story, yearning to believe that they really are conscious agents whose choices are endowed with meaning, that they are not condemned to competition and violence. There is powerful motivation to accept the message on which the three developments in science, spirituality, and nonviolence now converge. And in embracing the new story they would find themselves relinquishing many kinds of injustice to which they might have continued to succumb, if they were confronted with those

injustices directly. When done in the wrong spirit, pointing out others' misbehaviors often serves only to alienate them further, thus perpetuating the depressing plotline of the old story.

The time is right, then, to avoid corporate media and to replace their toxic culture with the affirming study of nonviolence (which, as Gandhi said, is "not the inanity it has been taken for" but a rich science) as a personal practice, as we suggest in the inner circle of Roadmap, and to familiarize ourselves with the (other) scientific and wisdom teachings available to us.⁴⁵

Then, tell our new story: whatever work we're doing on the innumerable projects encircled by Roadmap, for example, let's not be shy about explaining where we're coming from, at a deeper level than usually figures into political discourse. This is very doable. Recently Nathan Schneider gives a great example:

The psychology of debt impels us to think at every level about who and what Palestinians owe. But *since we refuse to value fellow human beings by their relationship to capital*, we should be asking the opposite question. We owe to Palestinians at least what we demand for ourselves: freedom from occupation, freedom from new forms of colonization, freedom to return to, inhabit, and live in a territory which we or our parents and grandparents called home, without annexation, ... without the destruction of the common resources that nurture and sustain life.⁴⁶ (emphasis added)

Statements like this will multiply our effectiveness. They will build to a tipping point the long-awaited and now essential shift of culture toward belonging instead of alienation, toward agency and responsibility instead of an imagined passivity. We'll be building a future—not far distant, perhaps—when we can tell political scientists, policymakers, journalists and the general public about a newly discovered nonviolent practice, and they will hear it with joy—because it's become their culture.

Notes

¹ Wendell Berry, *Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), xi. Quoted in David Korten, "Religion, Science and Spirit: A Sacred Story for Our Time," *YES! Magazine*, January 17, 2013 . <http://cms.yesmagazine.org/happiness/religion-science-and-spirit-a-sacred-story-for-our-time/>

² Paul Hawken, *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History Is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

³ More on each of these steps in the Roadmap section of our website, www.mettacenter.org.

⁴ Heard at a conference, 1995. Gerbner was paraphrasing the Marquise of Montrose in 1704, "If I were permitted to write all the ballads I need not care who makes the laws of the nation." Also see, George Gerbner, "The Stories We Tell," <http://www.waccglobal.org/en/19964-communication-and-conflict/954-The-Stories-We-Tell.html>

⁵ Lynn Stuart Parramore, "What if Liberals and Progressives Could Learn to Talk to White Southern Men?" *Alternet*, November 2, 2012. <http://www.alternet.org/election-2012/what-if-liberals-and-progressives-could-learn-talk-white-southern-men>

⁶ Tr. of William Johnston (New York, Doubleday, 1973) p. 129.

⁷ *On The Nature of Things: Thoughts, Actions, And The Fundamentally Mental Character of Nature*, p. 26.

- ⁸ Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era--A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).
- ⁹ Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta : Advaita Ashrama, 1978-1987), vol. 2, 461.
- ¹⁰ Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963.
- ¹¹ See David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate order* (London: Ark, 1988)
- ¹² C.E.M. Joad, *The Philosophical Aspects of Modern Science* (London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1932), p. 12.
- ¹³ Cf. also George Wald, "What we recognise as the material universe, the universe of space and time and elementary particles and energies, is ... the materialisation of primal mind. In that sense there is no waiting for consciousness to arise. It is there always. What we wait for in the evolution of life is only the culminating event, the emergence of creatures that in their self- awareness can articulate consciousness, can give it a voice and ... embody it in culture, in technology, art and science." Paper, "Life and Mind in the Universe," delivered NCERT seminar, New Delhi, Feb. 1987, quoted in Sw. Jitatmananda, *Holistic Science and Vedanta* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1991), p. 74.
- ¹⁴ Sri Eknath Easwaran, *Essence of the Bhagavad Gita: A Contemporary Guide to Yoga, Meditation, and Indian Philosophy Gita* (Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 2011) p. 51.
- ¹⁵ Letter reprinted in the *New York Times*, March 29, 1972.
- ¹⁶ Mahatma Gandhi, *Selected Writings* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005), p. 52.
- ¹⁷ This was at the Bhaktivedanta Institute's First Conference on Consciousness Within Science, San Francisco, 1998. Since then the science of astrobiology has added a great deal of evidence.
- ¹⁸ Cf., for example, the works of Frans deWaal, e.g. *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society* (New York: Random House, 2009).
- ¹⁹ Cf. Eknath Easwaran, *Gandhi the Man: the Story of his Transformation* (Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, 1997) p. 150.
- ²⁰ Cf., for example, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University, 2011).
- ²¹ "More US Soldiers Committed Suicide than Died in Combat," *Censored 2012: The Top Stories and Media Analysis of 2010-2011*, ed. Mickey Huff and Project Censored (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011), 43-54. Cf. also the illuminating concept of Perpetration Induced Traumatic Stress (PITS) coined by psychologist Rachael MacNair.
- ²² Dan Baum, "'Coming Home in the 21st Century,'" *The New Yorker*, September 12, 2004.
- ²³ Christian Peacemaker Teams annual report, October 2010.
- ²⁴ Richard Deats, "The Global Spread of Active Nonviolence," in Walter Wink, Ed., *Peace is the Way* (Maryknoll, MD, Orbis, 2000) pp. 163-295. Note how much—including, for example, the Arab Spring--has happened since this publication.
- ²⁵ See, *inter alia*, David C. Korten, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community* (Bloomfield, CT and San Francisco: Kumarian Press and Barrett-Koehler, 2006) and Joanna Macy, "Three Dimensions of the Great Turning," <http://www.joannamacy.net/three-dimensions-of-the-great-turning.html>.
- ²⁶ Very similarly in a talk at the David Brauer Center online at <http://www.ecoliteracy.org/essays/bringing-people-back-economy>
- ²⁷ I am grateful to Stephanie Van Hook, Executive Director of the Metta Center, for this insight.
- ²⁸ *Who Am I? The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanashramam, 2007), 14.

²⁹ In addition to Bhutan's Gross National Happiness index, there is rich new literature on human happiness; for one review, see Stacey Kennely, "Happiness Comes From Respect, Not Riches," *YES! Magazine*, August 3, 2012, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/happiness/happiness-comes-from-respect-not-riches>. On Bhutan, see Andrew C. Revkin, "A New Measure of Well-Being from a Happy Little Kingdom," *New York Times*, October 4, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/04/science/04happ.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

³⁰ Quoted in Steven Glazer, *The Heart of Learning*. (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1999), 218.

³¹ Aitareya Upanishad 3.3. The other three are *ayam ātmā brahma* - "This Self (Atman) is Brahman" (Mandukya Upanishad 1.2), most famously *tat tvam asi* - "Thou art That" (Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7) and finally *aham brahmāsmi* - "I am Brahman" (Brhadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10).

³² A forthcoming book by physicist Henry Stapp is called *Benevolent Universe?* Gandhi and King drop the question mark. See Henry P. Stapp, *Benevolent Universe?* Accessible online, <http://www-physics.lbl.gov/~stapp/BUFin2.pdf>

³³ "Your Brain on Love: The Fascinating Biochemical Reactions That Make Sparks Fly," Alternet, March 5, 2013, <http://www.alternet.org/books/your-brain-love-fascinating-biochemical-reactions-make-sparks-fly>

³⁴ See, e.g., Marc Pilisuk and Michael N. Nagler, "A Final Word," in *Peace Movements Worldwide: Volume 2, History and Vitality of Peace Movements*, ed. Marc Pilisuk and Michael N. Nagler (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 370.

³⁵ Chris Hedges, "Don't Look Away: We Must Confront the Horrific Industrial Violence the American Military Is Capable of," Alternet, March 17, 2013, <http://www.alternet.org/world/dont-look-away-we-must-confront-horrific-industrial-violence-american-military-capable>

³⁶ "Our humanity is affirmed in struggles to achieve freedom and social justice. Dehumanization marks and defines the oppressor as much as it torments the oppressed. For Freire, the struggle to recover humanity is a struggle of the oppressed 'to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well.'" Joe R. Feagin and Hernán Vera, *Liberation Sociology* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 17.

³⁷ John Saybrook, "It Came From Hollywood," *The New Yorker* 54-63 (December 1, 2003): p. 62. in 1947, as people were turning from militarism in disgust, Senator Arthur Vandenburg famously advised President Truman to "scare the hell out of the American people." See, e.g., Gore Vidal, *Imperial America: Reflections on the United States of America* (New York: Avalon, 2004), 97.

³⁸ Marco Iacoboni, *Mirroring People: The New Science of How We Connect With Others* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2008), 124: "Although we commonly think of pain as a fundamentally private experience, our brain actually treats it as an experience shared with others."

³⁹ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990[1980]).

⁴⁰ Tom Hayden, "Calls for Withdrawal from Iraq Echoing in Washington," Alternet, September 19, 2005, http://www.alternet.org/story/25686/calls_for_withdrawal_from_iraq_echoing_in_washington

⁴¹ *The Bombay Chronicle*, Nov. 18, 1932.

⁴² See, e.g., Amit Goswami, *God Is Not Dead: What Quantum Physics Tells Us about Our Origins and How We Should Live* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Co., 2012[2008]).

⁴³ See the glossary on our website, www.mettacenter.org, sv.

⁴⁴ By stark contrast, the US military also attempts to use the image and words of Martin Luther

King, Jr. to legitimize its military mission. In January 2013, the US Air Force's Global Strike Command published a promotional piece, titled "Dr. King's Dream for the Global Strike Team." Independent media have been quick to point out the travesty, but this shows that King and his legacy *have* a moral cachet that the military feels a need to appropriate. See, e.g., Glenn Greenwald, "US military Says Martin Luther King Would Be Proud of Its Weapons," *The Guardian* (UK), January 22, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/jan/22/martin-luther-king-military-weapons>; and David Sirota, "Martin Luther King Jr., Champion of Military Defense?," Salon, February 1, 2013, http://www.salon.com/2013/02/01/martin_luther_king_jr_champion_of_military_defense/

⁴⁵ For a good example of how independent media can provide more 'New Story' insights see Sarah Van Gelder's Foreword to this volume.

⁴⁶ Nathan Schneider, "A new kind of Palestine solidarity—the Strike Debt analysis," *Waging Nonviolence*, March 4, 2013. <http://wagingnonviolence.org/2013/03/a-new-kind-of-palestine-solidarity-the-strike-debt-analysis/>