**A PEDAGOGY OF BLISS**

***History, Mystery and Tragic Beauty***

**Who would prefer the jingle of jade pendants**

**if he once has heard stone growing in a cliff?**

***Lao Tzu***

**If you can’t dig the sacred,**

**at least groove on the mystery.**

***Travis Dealion Cunningham***

**I am God in nature, I am a weed by the wall.**

**The heart in thee is the heart of all.**

***Emerson***

**I am the walrus.**

***John Lennon***

Now, to begin this discourse, let’s backtrack to King Arthur’s court, the pursuit of the Holy Grail, the healing of The Wasteland, and Arthur’s most noble knight: Parsifal.

Parsifal’s name – *Par – sifal* – means “through the veil”. It signifies penetrating the veil of illusion, and comprehending reality in such as way as to heal the Wasteland. *Par – sifal* also means: through the valley. A valley is the Middle Way between two hills or mountains. The middle way is the key to balance, health and wholeness, and – according to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, as well as Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Zen – the key to virtue.

As King Arthur’s most virtuous knight, Parsifal achieves the Grail Quest and heals the Wasteland, because he has mastered – after much effort and long suffering – the art of The Middle Way, which Pythagoras calls Harmonia, Plato calls Ratio, Aristotle calls “The Golden Mean”, Hinduism calls Sattva, Buddhism calls Madhyamaka, and Taoism calls Wu-wei, which means not interfering with The Way of Nature, the Tao, the natural harmony and healing wholeness of Balance: the S-curve, the river, the Middle Way between Yin and Yang.

Parsifal starts out as a Fool and untutored child of the forest. He enters King Arthur’s court, slays the red-armored warrior who insulted Queen Guinevere, then leaves the court to be tutored by a noble soul, who teaches Parsifal how to be an authentic knight and gentleman. After much success, and fame, Parsifal fails in his first encounter with the wounded Fisher-King. He then wanders five years in what C. G. Jung calls the *nekyia*: “the night sea journey of despair”. This is Parsifal’s version of Odysseus on his raft, Prometheus chained to his rock, Jesus on the cross, Osiris and Dionysus dismembered, Prospero in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*.

Finally enlightened by a hermit monk deep in the woods, Parsifal does the impossible. He returns to the magic castle, heals the Fisher-King, achieves the Grail quest, and transforms the Wasteland back into green pastures, fruit bearing fecundity, and honeyed delight.

Joseph Campbell agrees with Jung: humanity now faces its own industrial, financial, military, ecological, and, indeed, educational *nekyia.* We could learn so much, heal the planet, change the institutions of culture, if only we would heed Ecclesiastes: “It doth not profit a man to gain all the riches in the world, and yet lose his soul.”

Alas, the Western world as a whole, along with democratic India and communist China, have embraced a capitalist model of economics which is nothing less than a tragic and global Faustian bargain. Like Faust, our financial, corporate, military and governmental overlords have sold their souls for profit and power. As a result, we are now, collectively, careening toward Jeremiah’s biblical warning: “Ye shall reap the whirlwind.”

Recalling us to the continued importance of the Grail Quest and Parsifal’s healing nobility, T. S. Eliot, early in the twentieth century, penned his prophetic poem: “The Waste Land.” Eliot ends with “shanti, shanti, shanti” – a Buddhist term meaning “peace”. Peace can only be achieved when humans are educated into the realization that we are, by nature and karmic necessity, on a philosophic journey: the journey from the love of wisdom to the wisdom of love.

“Philosophy begins with wonder.” Thus spoke Aristotle, quoting Plato, quoting Socrates, quoting Pythagoras. Pythagorean numbers are cosmic forces: a “music of the spheres” to remind us of our karmic, co-creative, soulful, universal brother-sisterhood. Alas, all too many philosophers forget that wonder is not only the first word of philosophy, it is also the last. Consciousness of ignorance is the glowing halo of Socratic wisdom. Humans are, in their naked essence, walking question marks. Sustaining humility before the mystery is the mark of our humanity. Emerson reminds us: There are no enclosing walls. On the horizon of every circle we draw, a larger is circle is being drawn; endlessly.

Awe ignites the quest for knowledge in the child. A child-like sense of awe should inform the conclusions of even the most aged sage. In Socratic terms: Virtue is the quest for virtue. In Plato’s *Symposium*, Eleusinian priestess Diotema teaching Socrates the “stairway to heaven” becomes the inspiration for Led Zeppelin.

If the saints and sages of the ages have it right, then despite their difference there is a shared experience of bliss. Plato’s Good is Beautiful; and communion with Beauty embodies the ecstasy of sex.

The pilgrim on Plato’s path of knowledge is thrown back into the world pregnant with virtue, giving birth to beauty in time.

Buddha says we are made of bliss energy.

Socrates, Buddha and Vedanta all say suffering is: being unaware of, and out of touch with, the bliss energy that grew us in the womb, having lost our sense of mystery, our experiential sensitivity to the infinite in the finite, the universal in the particular, the eternal in the momentary.

“See the lily of the field, how it grows.”

The great seventeenth century Polish poet Angelus Silesius captures the existential dimension of the *Ubermenschean*:

Of what use, Gabriel,

your message to Marie

unless your bugle blows

also for me?

Though Christ a thousand times

in Bethlehem be born,

if He’s not born in thee

thy soul is still forlorn.

The cross on Golgotha

will never save thy soul;

the cross in thine own heart

alone can make thee whole.

Rumi, the 13th century Persian Sufi, composes Dionysian hymns to his Beloved, the incandescent divine. Rumi writes:

He exploded me.

In the sea of love, I melt like salt.

Cosmic comedian!

I hear your river

running over every stone.

Socrates hears a voice. William Blake has a vision. Gandhi makes the honey of peace from pollen collected from the flowers of the world’s religions.

Love, beauty, peace, the Good: are these names for Bliss? Do they signify the cosmic fire of the holographic whole, and the river running through it?

Is it any wonder sages say our normal, one dimensional experience is dream within a dream? Or that Plato wrote the allegory of the cave?

Is waking up blissful? Or is it a burning, shedding, crucifixional, shattering, self-transcending cleansing?

Is a broken heart an open heart? If “emptiness is not nothingness,” do Buddha and quantum physics agree? Is bliss another name for being free?

Meister Eckhart said: “If I spend enough time with this caterpillar, I’ll never have to write another sermon.”

Orgasm is taste of bliss. A permeating, tingling, vibrating, shattering, shuddering, self-transcending melting into oceanic womb-like void of peace and release. For Woman – as Hera tried to keep secret from Zeus, blinding Tireseus for telling truth, while Hemingway bowed to the women of Spain – “the earth moved.”

With love, luck, art, patience and perseverance, orgasm is the experiential flood, however fleeting, of the blissful untangling of the knots of ignorance.

Perfection is a dance of *exquisite disequilibrium*. This slight imbalance, the rhythmic friction, keeps the multiverse moving.

The Fibonacci series – the mathematical formula for *slightly-off-balance* – keeps the heart beating, whirlpools whirling, planets orbiting and galaxies spinning. It is present in the works of Da Vinci and Bach. Life is the play of its endless variations. The subtle, circumambulating movement of a great painting – the eye guided around the canvas in Monet’s “Apples” or Raphael’s “The School of Athens” – mirrors the play of Miles Davis finding the silence *between* the notes to break the heart and soar the soul.

James Joyce calls the experience “aesthetic arrest.” For Plato and Buddha: truth, beauty and joy go together. The Vedantic term for bliss is *Ananda*.

Vedanta means “end of *The Vedas*.” *The Vedas* are the hymns sung by the Aryan invaders who migrated out of central Asia, south and west into India and Greece, in successive waves between 2500 and 800 BC. Aryans transformed Indian and Greek culture, perhaps mainly from matriarchal to patriarchal societies.

Apollo, for example, conquers the guardian of the Delphic oracle to claim the pythian priestess as his own, while Dionysus quietly takes the place of Hestia the hearth goddess in the Olympic pantheon. In India, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva become the patriarchal divine trinity, with Agni as god of fire parallel to Zeus with his lightening bolts.

At the end of *The Vedas* are *The Upanishads*. *The Upanishads* are a philosophic summing of *The Vedas*.  *The Upanishads, w*ith *The Bhagavad Gita*, constitute the core of Vedantic philosophy; an organic, holistic vision at the heart of Hinduism.

Vedanta is mono-polytheistic. This notion requires dialectical thinking. It is tethered to the root insight: “Atman is Brahman.” Atman is “true self.” Brahman is the One God of which all the many gods are faces and forces.

Mono-polytheism is no more contradictory than the colors of a rainbow.

Atman is your soul, and, as Socrates said, virtue resides in “care and perfection of the soul.” Because Atman is Brahman, and Brahman is all, you are also other. In the bliss of interbeing, wisdom is a force for compassion.

Siddhartha Gautama was a Hindu prince who became the Buddha, the Awakened One. He famously announces a doctrine of *Anata*, or An-atman: no-self.

Yet from Theravada through Mahayana to Vajrayana and Zen, there is nothing more Buddhist than Shakespeare’s Socratic dictum: “To thine own self be true.” The oracle at Delphi reads: *Gnothi seauton*, “know thyself.” Buddha’s last words were: “Do your best, be detached, and be a lamp unto yourself.”

Buddha simply reminds the Hindu socio-theological power structure that the essence of its own teaching is that each self is a flower emerging from and opening into interbeing.

To emphasize this quantum fact, Buddha changes the notion of *Atman* from self as *thing* to energetic, heart-mind, holographic *pulsation*. He thus brings Hinduism back to its Vedantic root, just as Jesus tried to being the Jews back to the universal, humanistic, pacifist and poetic core of Hebrew scripture.

Buddha does for India what Jesus does for the West. He lets the spirit shine through the word, instead of being bound and chained by the word. Up and down Plato’s ladder of Beauty, enlightened self-interest is a life of service: what Buddhists call *Bodhisattva*.

Though we are still trying to live up to this revolutionary revelation, we can hear its echo resounding in Socrates, Lao Tzu, Eckhart and Emerson. We can take our children to a river called *the wisdom tradition*. From wisdom comes peace; and with peace, all things beautiful are possible.

Norman Mailer said it better than anyone in the last century: America’s deepest moral contradiction is that we call ourselves a Christian nation, yet worship at the altar of profit. We bow to the wisdom of turning swords into plowshares, yet have the largest empire and war machine in history.

Believing what we know to be false is schizophrenia. We are troubled, as Morpheus said, “like a splinter in the brain.”

Phillip Caputo’s experience in Vietnam draws the moral point, and foreshadows American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan:

There was nothing familiar out where we were, no churches, no police, no laws …. It was the dawn of creation in the Indochina bush, an ethical as well as a geographical wilderness. Out there, lacking restraints, sanctioned to kill, confronted by a hostile country and relentless enemy, we sank into a brutish state. … Once I had seen pigs eating napalm-charred corpses – a memorable sight, pigs eating roast people.

(*A Rumor of War*; Ballantine; New York; 1970; p. xx & 4)

Today, we hurtle toward a trifecta from hell: environmental despoliation, nuclear proliferation, and global klepto-capitalism.

Leon Trotsky said: “You may not be interested in war; but war is interested in you.”

Behold, the forces of culture teach us to care too much about distractions – sports, advertising, beer, cars, fashion, celebrities, sit-coms, sex, scandals and pseudo-news – coping and compensating in flight from *the horror*.

Even when you’re out of Plato’s cave, you’re surrounded by it. How not to go mad?

Sorrow seeks to emerge as rage. How to transform the rage into emanations and force-fields of peace? – that is the question.

Buddha, Eckhart, Gandhi, Emerson, Martin Buber, Martin Luther King – they all suggest there is something deeper than sorrow; that a broken heart really is an open heart.

They suggest the heart opens, at its deepest level, into oceans of *nirvana, ananda*, *grace*.

*Om Mani Padme Hum*. Tibetan Jewel in the Lotus. When *mani*, the jewel of mind, roots and blossoms in the wisdom of the heart, *padme*, you, *om*, integrate with all, *hum*.

Through the enlightenment Gestalt runs a river of exquisite disequilibrium between self and other.

Panentheistic bliss, here now, the cup of grace overflows, let us drink the nectar of the gods, music be the food of love, play on, we say, to the lily of the field; then crouch to commune with Eckhart’s caterpillar, soon to be a butterfly.

If the infinite is in the finite, the universal in the particular, the eternal in the momentary as Blake believed, then enlightened self-interest suggests drinking from the cup of bliss every day.

Each day a rhythmic transporting into the transpersonal; cultivating the art of being in the world but not of it; making one’s life a work of art.

A splash of color; birds chirping in the trees. Dappled sunlight through the leaves. Beauty is ever-present.

The dance of Apollo and Dionysus – challenge and response, freedom and form, tension and release – can be horrific or blissful.

For those who know, it is the exquisite disequilibrium of the heartbeat of interbeing; ceaseless spiritual orgasm. For others, it is a tangled web of fear and desire. And for many, it is a combination of both.

A pedagogy of bliss could revolutionize our schools, and transform our culture into one worth giving to our children.

Erich Fromm, a refugee from Nazi Germany, was an existential psychotherapist present in the White House during the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962.

Dr. Fromm was advising John and Robert Kennedy on how to understand Castro and Krushchev, in order to prevent a Soviet-American nuclear war.

Fromm’s phrase “chains of illusion” evokes what William Blake calls “our mind-forged manacles.” “Chains of illusion”, “mind-forged manacles” – both refer to prisoners in Plato’s cave, entangled in what Freud names: neurotic rapture.

The *ethical* point is best expressed by Karl Marx: “The demand to abandon illusions about our condition is a demand to abandon the conditions which require illusion.”

The phrase “chains of illusion” identifies a theme running like a golden thread through Freud, Marx and Plato.

The prisoners in Plato’s allegory of the cave are, as Marx would say, “alienated” from their humanity because, as Freud would say, their libido has been neurotically displaced.

Freud’s topography of the psyche overlaps with Plato’s portrait in *The Phaedrus* of the soul as charioteer. The charioteer, channeling Eros, the life force, is the ego on the battlefield of id and superego, mediating the pull of the horses of appetite and nobility.

Freud, Marx and Plato challenge us to a Socratic, Promethean liberation, comparable to the struggles of Parsifal, Oedipus and Odysseus.

This existential theme – this archetypal hero’s journey – is also present in the work of Martin Heidegger. In Heidegger’s early work, it is found in the death-enlightened journey from “forgetfulness” to “authenticity.” In his later work, it is present in the Zen pilgrimage from techno-consumer-nihilistic “enframing” to space-is-grace, voluntary simplicity, *Gelassenheit:* being-in-the-world *as* “poetic dwelling” and “thanks-giving”.

In both his early and later work, Heidegger is a social critic comparable to Freud, Marx and Plato. There is a Zen thrust to his philosophic sword, and with it we can cut the chains of illusion.

It is well to remember that the word “Buddha” means “awake.”

“Boring teachers should be brought to trial for the murder of young souls.”

Thus speaks Alfred North Whitehead in *The Aims of Education*, his 1912 to 1928 collection of essays.

Whitehead was a British mathematician and logician, co-creating symbolic logic with Bertrand Russell from about 1900 to 1910. Between the world wars, Whitehead moved to Harvard and became a metaphysician. Russell stayed in England, becoming one of the century’s greatest peace activists.

Whitehead makes Peace a cosmic attribute. Peace and Adventure are the Yin and Yang of *Eros*.

Beauty is tragic insofar as its birth in time is perpetually perishing, like the rise and falling of a wave. Life is a rhythm of challenge and response; Toynbee’s key to the rise and fall of civilizations, inscribed on the Emerald Jewel of alchemy: the microcosm mirrors the macrocosm.

Russell tutors Wittgenstein. Whitehead forges a movement called “process philosophy”, still at work bridging science and spirit. Whitehead, like Plato, provides a pedagogy for social change; and, like Russell, his plea is urgent.

We cannot expect a just society if we do not do justice to the concept and practice of education. We are obliged to be clear about our aims. Hence the title of Whitehead’s book, *The Aims of Education*.

Whitehead says teachers are insufficiently romantic and students are insufficiently creative.

Romance and creativity go together. They are the emotion and the harvest which connect education to life. “Romance” is Whitehead’s word for “interest”. The first task of a teacher is to romance the students: to ignite their interest, provoke their curiosity, stir the emotions of awe and wonder.

How? Any way that’s legal. And since everything is ultimately inter-connected, start anywhere; then follow the thread to your topic, and go from there.

Observe how a child learns. First there is wonder; then there is precision; then there is skilled application. Plato and Whitehead call us to *enthusiasmos*. A rhythm of curiosity, effort, and creative craft.

Whitehead names Romance, Precision, Generalization as the three natural phases of organic education.

First there is wonder, interest, awe; this provides the enthusiasm for effort: the study, practice and precision which, thirdly, find fulfillment in creative expression: the application of newly acquired knowledge.

Creativity is the test of mastery. Creativity is the fruit of mastery; the taste of bliss; the satisfaction which stimulates romance for greater satisfactions.

These three phases – Romance, Precision, Generalization – exhibit, says Whitehead, an organic pulse. They embody “the rhythmic claims of freedom and discipline.” Romance is free. Precision is disciplined. Generalization is free again, but with disciplined application of limits.

In *The Poetics of Music*, Stravinsky says the greater the limits, the greater the freedom. Imagine that. Yin as the secret force of Yang, as any good martial artist knows.

Stravinsky borrows from Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* to portray creativity as a dance of Apollonian form and Dionysian spontaneity. The rhythm of their dance – tension and release – is the pulse of life, great art, and true education.

Creativity *is* romantic. The satisfaction of playing a simple tune stimulates desire for the higher satisfactions of mastering more complexity.

Because creativity is romantic, the pedagogical process – starting out as trinity: Romance, Precision, Generalization – soon becomes a simple, pulsating, Taoist dyad: the yin of precision and the yang of romantic-generalization.

Education is an art. It is the most challenging of all the arts, and the most important. In the culture to come, schools will be gardens of learning and theaters of creativity.

A romantic teacher – igniting awe and wonder in students, stimulating them to a romance with ideas – is necessarily daring. The maestro enters the class to stir the students into drama, discourse, Shiva’s dance, the Pythagorean *symphony of the spheres*.

Alas, today, because of institutional inertia, teachers and students are stuck in precision and test-taking: the memorization and regurgitation of a mass of mostly irrelevant detail. Imitation is the lowest rung on Plato’s ladder of learning.

Two points need to be noted here. The first is this: Whitehead rightly observes that the hardest task of a teacher is sustaining the romance during the disciplined efforts of precision. There is no simple formula for doing so. Each teacher must find their way, attuned to the various abilities and needs of the students. I suggest asking provocative questions, encouraging discourse and debate, and relating the topic-lessons to contemporary events in the global village. Whitehead provides his own suggestion when he notes that Romance, Precision and Generalization are not a single cycle; not a simple over-arching frame for the course as whole It is of course also that, but not only that. Romance, Precision and Generalization can occur, and should occur, rhythmically, throughout the course, in repeated cycles: in an ever expanding spiral of breadth, depth and creativity.

The second point, noted but insufficiently emphasized by Whitehead, and absolutely crucial to a pedagogy of bliss, is this: Students need to be active, participating citizens of their democracy, and thus ever more poignantly *historically literate*. Alas, in The United States, most students and most adults – including parents, teachers, journalists, artists, theologians, businessmen, service workers, educational and corporate executives, politicians, philosophers and even historians – are in fact historically illiterate. They are products of the American system of compulsory miseducation, intentionally *ignorated* by corporate, political, mainstream media and educational Weapons of Mass Dysfunction. To illustrate: The United States has the largest military empire in human history, yet most American citizens do not know that America *has* an empire, even though they’re *paying* for it. This is mind-control on a massive scale; an awesome, unprecedented, ferocious, fearsome and dangerous collective delusion.

To paraphrase George Santayana’s most famous maxim: Those who don’t learn from history are condemned to repeat it.

For example: America’s 21st century wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are – tragically and predictably – a repeat of the lies, contradictions and genocide of America’s Indochina Holocaust, euphemistically called The Vietnam War.

To illustrate further: Unlike in Europe and South America, most U.S. citizens have no clue that the first 9/11 occurred in Chile, when Nixon and Kissinger overthrew the longest running democracy in South America on September 11, 1973, with a CIA-sponsored coup resulting in a brutal, sixteen-year, U.S.-supported, military dictatorship. Even before that, President Eisenhower did the same in Iran and Guatemala. President Johnson did the same in Brazil, Greece, Indonesia and the Dominican Republic. Reagan did the same in Grenada, and tried to do the same in Nicaragua with an eight-year war of terror on that country’s new, social democratic liberation from forty years of Somoza dictatorship approved by successive U.S. presidents and their administrations.

President Bush the first in 1991 introduced a bill, passed by congress, to do for Yugoslavia what Kissinger and Nixon did to Chile: “make the economy scream”. Isolating Yugoslavia from the international banking system, Bush’s effort to promote poverty, misery, ethnic tension, scapegoating and civil war amongst the Yugoslavian people was successful. Yugoslavia – huge, productive, prosperous, peaceful and rich in natural resources – fractured into three U.S.-approved neo-fascist states.

Yugoslavia no longer exists. As President Bush the first planned: it has ceased to be an economic competitor and political alternative; and its vast natural resources – as in Indonesia and the Congo – are being plundered and polluted by multinational, largely American-based corporations.

In 1900, Mark Twain said: “America’s flag should be a skull and crossbones.” Traveling the world, Twain was a witness to American imperialism in the so-called Spanish-American war. But America never went to war with Spain. As the Spanish empire crumbled, America simply gobbled up the former Spanish colonies in Asia and the Caribbean for its own private profit and plunder, with, of course, as Dylan noted with tragic irony, “God on our side”, President McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt claiming it was America’s manifest destiny to “Christianize” the heathen barbarians.

Even some of our best presidents have unconscionable blood on their hands. Franklin Roosevelt’s dumping his Vice President, Henry Wallace, in of favor Harry Truman, led directly – with Truman’s sanctioning of the CIA in 1947 – to the abandonment of social democracy in America and the creation, instead, of a secret government within the government: a national “security” state unaccountable to the American citizens who pay for it. After the disastrous and failed invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961, President Kennedy hired the mafia to assassinate Fidel Castro, and put Edward Lansdale in charge of Operation Mongoose: an illegal, immoral, covert, multi-year plan to poison Cuban crops, blow up their factories, and utterly undermine and disrupt the Cuban economy.

President Carter refused to close The School of the Americas nestled into the sprawling army base at Fort Benning, Georgia, infamous for its training of legions of death-squads imported back into Central and South America, leading to the rape and slaughter of nuns, the mass murder of educators, human rights activists, progressive politicians and labor leaders, and the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero. The Carter administration also launched a terror campaign against the newly elected social democratic government of Afghanistan in 1979 and 1980, leading to a Soviet counter-intervention, which led in turn to America’s creation, financing, arming and training of Al Qaeda: an army of 100,000 Islamic jihadists to defeat “the godless communists”. Throughout the following eight years, President Reagan and Vice President George H. W. Bush supported Al Qaeda, and trained its officers and army in terrorist techniques. In short, the United States was financing a future war against itself; and, of course, we are still paying the price.

President Obama is hardly any better. Instead of using the most powerful pulpit in the world to thunder against America’s banking, corporate and war crimes, he continues the policies of the Reagan, Bush, Clinton and Bush Jr. administrations, allowing, for example, the use of “depleted” uranium in American weapons. Result? Nuclear radiation now sinking into soil and rivers throughout the Near East and Central Asia, poisoning humans, animals and water and food-supplies for the next thousand years. Obama refuses to close the Guantanamo torture prison. He refuses to dismantle the American empire, drastically cut the obscenely bloated Pentagon budget, and use the combined savings to repair our devastated economy and infrastructure and pay-off and eliminate more than a trillion dollars in student debt, now totaling more than the sum total of American credit card debt. Instead, Obama punishes truth-tellers and whistle-blowers; finances the building of yet more American military bases in Africa and Central Asia; perpetuates America’s repressive and militaristic so-called “drug” war in South America; and refuses even to consider a social democratic universal health care plan, already more than abundantly paid for by our taxes. Obama compromised with congress to perpetuate the insane Bush-Cheney tax-breaks for the multi-billionaire mega-rich. He continues the drone warfare that kills the innocents whose relatives are even now planning the next 9/11 and worse, which the CIA itself predicted when, in the 1950s, it coined the karmic term “blowback”.

At Salem State University, where I teach, in Salem, Massachusetts – the word “Salem” means “peace” – Obama’s picture now hangs next to that of Martin Luther King in the Martin Luther King seminar hall. This is tragic farce. If King were alive today, he would be thundering against Obama’s presidential policies, hypocrisy and cowardice. And King would be appalled at America’s current trumpeting of women in combat as another triumph in the long and agonizing march to civil rights. Female participation in male violence is not a step forward toward a truly civil society.

The list of American war crimes is almost unimaginably long, and far exceeds in brutality and global reach anything ever attempted or achieved by The Soviet Union or communist China. The United States is not, and hardly ever has been, a force for good in the world. The documentary record is clear and indisputable. Yet most American citizens remain utterly oblivious, due to the sugar-coated, Disneyfied mush that passes for American history in schools, movies, television, the mainstream news-media, and political discourse. It is a tragedy now likely beyond redemption as we hurtle toward a self-made trifecta from hell: environmental despoliation, nuclear proliferation, and global klepto-capitalism. To paraphrase John Le Carre: We have betrayed our most democratic and peace-loving friends, brutalized the people of the world, supported the most vicious tyrants, and scarcely paused to ask ourselves how much longer we could defend our nation by these means and remain a nation worth defending.

Therefore, it is necessary that our schools begin teaching what Michael Parenti calls “real history”. That is our only protection against the sophistry and criminality perpetrated by the lunatics who “lead” us, and our only hope for the just and equitable peace required by self-actualizing students and citizens.

*Real history* ought to be taught in every school, and required by every student every semester throughout their educational career, until we can, collectively and consistently, produce graduates who are what democracy requires: self-educating life-long learners, with the critical thinking skills and historical literacy which, in combination, is the single most important foundation of a functioning democracy.

We ignore this truth, this task, this challenge at our peril. And precisely because, as Tom Paine said, “these are the times that try men’s souls,” let us commit to doing what we can, while we can, to stitch the tattered shreds of our republic into something sustainable, equitable, virtuous, peace-loving and just.

It is not too late to embark upon an educational revolution. Indeed, it is our only hope.

George Bernard Shaw said, “The only time my education was interrupted was when I was in school.”

The Leave No Child Behind Act is in fact Leave Every Child Behind.

The Greening of America, the Spirit of the Sixties, has been subdued and overgrown with the sterilization of the American mind. “This nation has made itself stupid on purpose,” said Nietzsche of Prussia in 1880. Nietzsche’s observation is a distant mirror sketching the absurdity and danger of the times in which we live.

Fortunately, we also live in The Renaissance of The Renaissance. The web-connected, indigo youth of today are the brightest ever to walk the planet. The unleashing of their energy is changing civilization.

We live on the cusp of the one of the greatest transformations in history; only this time, the challenge is so great that our collective survival hinges on *enlightened response*.

Immanuel Kant says “enlightenment” is: *“liberation from our own self-imposed immaturity.”*

William Faulkner said: *“The past is not dead. In fact, it’s not even past.”*

The Spirit of the Sixties burns like a flame in today’s youth. A Dionysian resurrection is surging. Meanwhile, the power elite are trembling; you can tell by the increasing fever of their folly and speech. Let us, then, persevere with our *enthusiasmos*, and show that Martin Luther King and John Lennon did not die in vain.

Buckminster Fuller said: “There are no passengers on spaceship earth. We are all members of the crew.”

H. G. Wells said: “History is now a race between education and catastrophe.”

Martin Luther King said: “Wealth, poverty, racism and war – these four always go together.”

Justice Louis Brandeis said: “We can have democracy, or we can have great concentrations of wealth in the hands of a few. We cannot have both.”

Golden rule of crime detection? Follow the money trail.

Noam Chomsky says we have a simple choice: hegemony or survival. The United States can rule the world on behalf of banks, corporations and the Pentagon; or the human race can survive. The first option is leading ineluctably to financial and ecological apocalypse and nuclear Armageddon. The second option requires that we merely commit unconditionally to moral common sense.

Kierkegaard’s Either/Or has never been more poignant.

Martin Luther King said: “We must choose between non-violence and non-existence.”

Asked the secret to remaining so calm, centered, and sane in such a crazy world, Krishnamurti replied: “Fortunately, I have a cosmic sense of the ridiculous.”

Mark Twain said some evidence is not to be denied; for example: “a trout in the milk.”

Allow me, then, to conclude with the opening lines of T. S. Eliot’s 1922 “The Waste Land”:

April is the cruelest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing

Memory and desire, stirring

Dull roots with spring rain.

Winter kept us warm, covering

Earth in forgetful snow, feeding

A little life with dried tubers.

Note Eliot’s ecological verbs: *breeding, mixing, stirring, feeding*. Revel in his colorful *lilacs*. Note his warning that the *land* may all too soon be all too *dead*. Observe his call for *memory*: recollection of our *roots*. Note Eliot’s caution that humans have become all too *forgetful*.

Like Plato, Eliot reminds us that we all have the same *desire* for beauty. Celebrate his revolving seasons, with the words : *spring, winter, warm, snow*. Observe how Eliot ends, gloriously: *feeding a little life with dried tubers*. Who is “the little life”? Children, of course, and the child in us all, upon which the future depends.

In that Spirit, allow me to share with you my new version of:

*The Pledge of Allegiance*

I pledge allegiance / to the planet / and to all the people

and creatures on her. / One ecosystem / universally sacred,

with nourishment / and beauty / for all.

Chief Seattle said: “What we do to the earth, we do to ourselves.” This message has always been a part of Native American wisdom. But America’s Founding Fathers, like Columbus and his genocidal conquistadores and today’s financial, military, and corporate overlords, refused to listen.

Despite the heroic efforts of Rachel Carson, Earth Day and the Spirit of the Sixties, we now face what Hopis call *Koyaniskatsi*: a time radically out of kilter; self-consuming, self-defeating, self-destroying. No wonder Pueblo Chief Ochway Biano, “Mountain Lake”, said, “White man crazy!” Or that Australian aborigines call us “mutants”.

Meanwhile, the healing cure, the answer, is, as always, at our feet. Navahos call it *Hozro*: Walking in Beauty and Balance. It partakes of Zen and Thoreau. It is: a Way of life; Socratic, Taoist, humble, reverential.

Says the Navaho:

Beauty before me / beauty behind me

beauty above / beauty below. / Beauty

all around. / I walk in Beauty.

Today, there is a revolution in consciousness, a global mind change, a voluntary simplicity, heart-centered, Gaia-loving movement which is our brightest hope for bequeathing to our children – *all* children – the future they deserve.

A question might be asked: Is bliss subjective or objective? As Kierkegaard reminds us, there is nothing more objective than subjectivity itself. Says Kierkegaard: “You’ll never find consciousness at the other end of a microscope.” And, as Kant, Einstein and Heisenberg have shown, consciousness is inextricably co-creative in, and of, its perceptions and experiences.

While the subjective/objective distinction is of course useful, it must always be qualified by the deeper truth that such a distinction is not absolute, and is in fact, ultimately, what philosophers call “a category mistake.” Whitehead’s metaphysics makes this clear; and the intuition sings in the Pragmatic stream running through Hume, Nietzsche, James, Dewey and Rorty.

Allow me now to make a final point, which makes explicit what has thusfar been implicit. Bliss, as I have used the term in this essay, has three primary characteristics. First, it the temporary melting of ego in the quantum, non-dual experience of infinite interbeing. Second, it confirms the preciousness of life itself; the virtue, value and beauty of being and becoming. Third, it results in the irrevocable intention to see I and Thou as the same; to dedicate one’s life to service; to treat all beings with unconditional compassion.

Gandhi said: “Be the change you want to see in the world.”

The Beatles sang: “I am you, you are me, and we are all together.”

In conclusion, then, I remind you that Shakespeare said: “The time is out of joint.”

But Dylan also said: “The times, they are a changin’.”

Joseph Campbell says: “Follow your bliss.”

I know you will.

Thank you.

Om Shanti.

**Stefan D. Schindler, Ph.D.**