

When Being Blinks

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In January, 1991, my wife and I visited India – a country in which we had lived during the first half of the previous decade. She was completing the research for her Masters Degree in Human Ecology and we were both using our spare moments during the trip to sort out what to do with the second halves of our lives. I've always found India a helpful place for resolving big questions. Near the end of our trip, one of the younger, single, wealthy village leaders invited me over to his ancestral home to spend the night. Since the time I lived next door to him in Chikhale Village, Bandu Patankar and I have been good friends. Though his English is only slightly better than my Hindi, we nonetheless manage to communicate pretty well.

In the dark evening hours, in the stillness of Bandu's house {no telephone, no TV, no indoor plumbing, no car and no air-conditioning}, it became clear to me that I needed to return to the States. My Indian friends could understand and appreciate most of what I was doing in the name of social service but they could not understand how I could spend so long so far away from my aging parents. Bandu was sitting in a chair built by his grandfather in the living room of a house which had come down through generations – an act which I could only appreciate by sitting next to him for the evening. But more importantly, I realized that the suffering and poverty which I had set out 25 years previously to eliminate was rooted in issues which could only be resolved in the very community from which I had left to go and be among the world's poor and disenfranchised. The consumer mindset and the fast-paced lifestyle of the American middle class was enticing the rest of the world to follow a road which could never bring the peace and happiness purported by commercials and politicians.

We moved back to the United States in August, 1991. I had thought that the challenge here would involve helping people develop simpler and more sustainable patterns of daily existence. Relatively quickly, however, I discovered that the magnitude of change required could not come solely from changing people's actions. Rather, the fundamental assumptions by which people measured wisdom and responsibility were leading to false, or at least unhelpful, conclusions. The pages that follow sketch out four postulates (foundational assumptions) which, I personally contend, provide an alternative standing point on which to build a profound and sustainable life style for each individual, for society as a whole and for the larger environment in which we live. After each postulate, a brief summary of what it does not mean precedes examples of what common experiences tend to substantiate the particular postulate. These are followed by suggestions about the practical implications of using the postulate as a stepping stone for action and ways people might find to remind themselves of the veracity of such a non-standard manner of looking at things.

## The Oneness Postulate

The entire Universe is One. In all dimensions, the Universe is pervaded by oneness and unity. This wholeness is primordial and unchanging.

Over the past 500 years, Western Civilization has created an unhelpful dualistic mode of thinking. By contending that the realms of science and religion are governed by different rules and procedures, economists and industrialists have created social structures insensitive to traditional guidelines and, in the process have ignored or devalued much of the natural world. In a political system dominated by masculine principals, inclusive care was sacrificed for private gains. Furthermore, this dualistic way of thinking has promoted the idea that this place here, where we are now, is an option and that somewhere exists another place and time which somehow, sometime we may or may not inhabit. In an earlier era when human civilization had less than filled the planet and people could actually be banished from one tribal village and could go somewhere else, such a concept connected to everyday experience. Currently, such a proposition becomes increasingly untenable and unhelpful.

During the current phase of my life I am working for a systems integration company installing computer systems for non-profit associations. I spend most of my time in clients' offices and occasionally return to my own company's office to swap files (and pick up my pay check). One Saturday morning while thinking about the details of this paper, I went in to get some resource books. On the wall above the copier had appeared a large wall hanging which read "Everything is Connected @". Our small company employs some pretty clever people but I never thought of us as leading edge theoretical thinkers; this sign, however, struck me as quite revolutionary in its concept. As my eyes rose above the catchy phrase, I realized that this brilliant observation had, in fact, come from Novell – the network software people who offer the major viable alternative to Microsoft in the computer connectivity arena. On one hand I doubt that Novell really intended their slogan to imply its most universal implications; on the other hand maybe they really did use Everything to mean "absolutely everything". Nonetheless, when big business even gets an inkling that Everything is Connected@ and then decides to popularize the notion, major changes in thinking are beginning to fill the air. I was somewhat perplexed, however, that someone had been able to register the theme that I had intended to make a major postulate of my paper; but resolved to continue.

Day by day, people are becoming clearer that, in fact, everything is interrelated, that the Universe is pervaded by oneness and unity, and that someplace else isn't. Major news magazines carry photographs from the Hubble space telescope showing galaxies being born billions of years ago in the farthest reaches of the universe. Astronauts have circled the moon and probes have visited the outer planets. In just this century, the common understanding of the magnitude of space and the pathways of the stars has given people a new sense of the size of their home. Within the global village, concerns over air and water quality and changing weather patterns have heightened the public awareness of the side affects of industrialization. New guidelines and expectations regarding disposal of by-products emerge as unused space disappears and the ability of the global commons to absorb discarded materials diminishes under the extreme loads being placed upon it. The Oneness of the Universe is moving from an intellectual proposition to a daily experience.

In a divided, two-story universe a natural hierarchy emerged as a fitting way to describe the universe. The gods sat above the stars, the priests stood on the mountain tops, the political leaders served the priests, the people (men) followed their leaders, the women kept the men's houses, then came the animals, individuals' properties and then the undeveloped spaces. Everything had a place and a time. In an interrelated universe, trickle-down economics and top down decision-making seem out of place and usually prove ineffective. My computer business involves installing networks of computers to allow associations to more effectively manage their organizations. The practice of talking exclusively to the CEO of the organization to find out how everything should be done would prove disastrous in every case. Rather, people at all levels of the association staff need to be contacted to describe their particular part of the process and ways devised of insuring a smooth cooperation among them. Methods of worker participation in organizational planning and consensus building skills lie on the creative edge of many groups but *Technologies of Participation* are emerging to provide the necessary management tools.

On the personal level, the artificial compartmentalization of work and family is becoming blurred for many people as the number of in-home offices rises. People are realizing, again, that stress, lifestyle, and diet can not be dealt with on a one-by-one basis. Rather, all aspects of an individual's life, as well as the elements of the external world, fit together in a seamless fabric and affect each other in dramatic and subtle ways. In more agrarian times, common wisdom and village social structures provided ways to care for all members of the community. With the rise of urban environments and factory work situations, much of the common sense disappeared. Previous understandings are now informing future lifestyles.

Possibly the most significant outcome of the Cold War, which no one really won and whose waging consumed inordinate valuable resources and left toxins which will plague generations, will be recorded in the photographs of the Planet Earth taken from deep space. The Blue Marble provides a modern symbol of the oneness of life. No boundaries or social divisions appear in these pictures. Clouds, land and water swirl together like partners on a dance floor. As the 21<sup>st</sup> Century unfolds, other symbols of the wholeness

of reality must be discovered, developed and promoted. Wonder and mystery can be found in every element of the universe and in the Universe itself. People who see this and who find ways to constantly remind themselves of this will, through their actions, enhance and embody this wonder and mystery.

The second of the four postulates for understanding the world in which we live I have called the "Bifurcation Postulate". While it may be the least clearly stated of the four, it is presented here in the manner in which it was worded in my self-published book *Exploring the Crystal Mountain Foothills*. Comments which follow do describe the phenomenon to which the postulate was intended to point.

## **The Bifurcation Postulate**

When, in the Universe any particular point assumes a specific manifestation, a set of polar opposites emerges. Each member of this pair takes on a unique and separate reality of its own but remains inescapably linked to the other.

Some contemporary understandings of life assume that separation can be treated as an avoidable problem. From this perspective, when a person feels alone or isolated one should seek to discover bad habits, unacceptable behaviors or personal shortcomings. On the macro scale, social inequities and communal unrest are blamed on historical conditions or pre-historic actions of human ancestors. A myriad of panaceas are offered to patch up separation in the modern world. Psychologically oriented professionals and amateurs provide consultation and advice. Western religious practices describe various pathways to salvation requiring specific beliefs, activities or financial contributions. Corporate advertisers suggest, either overtly or obliquely, that any number of purchases, products or pills will overcome either the problem or the perception of separation of the wise consumer. However the proposition gets stated, these hopes and longings for a non-separated state of existence presume or promise that some mode of unindividuated being can be discovered, recovered or attained.

Paul Tillich, a renowned Twentieth Century theologian, affirmed that separation is foundational to existence, that everyone experiences separation from themselves, from others and from the Ground of Being. We experience separation from ourselves when we feel despair over unfulfilled goals or over the inability to discern a direction for living. The separation from others may be experienced in a crowded room when no familiar faces can be found or when a person becomes self-conscious of the negative or harmful affects of their actions on another individual or group. The reality of our separation from the Ground of Being may become apparent when our own insignificance gets juxtaposed with the magnanimity of the sweep of cosmic history or when unexpected calamity strikes a loved one. These experiences of separation are not limited to individuals but affect entire populations as exemplified by class divisions and hatreds and incompatibilities among races and nations. The pervasive nature of separation has never been questioned, its primordial, inescapable aspect has, however, been a subject of considerable debate.

The Bifurcation Postulate states that separation is neither temporary nor accidental, rather separation is primordial. Existence, at all levels of the creation, involves separation. The Chinese called this phenomenon the Yin-Yang quality of life – within each element of the world, lies a bit of its opposite. When individuals or societies cease striving to eliminate or avoid separation, new patterns of behavior become prevalent. Competitive actions are based on the desire to win, overcome or dominate, to eliminate separation by subduing or removing the opposite reality. Teamwork styles affirm the worth of all the parties involved and seek modes of behavior which elicit the unique contributions to create a whole greater than the sum of the parts. Over the long haul, in individuals, societies and the natural world, teamwork and cooperation out-last terror and strife.

I've observed while walking down countless village streets that, by and large, big dogs make less noise than small ones when I pass by. It's as though small dogs have to strive to make me afraid to approach

them knowing that if I did I might cause them harm. Big dogs, however, take the attitude “one false move and I’ll break your leg”. Selves seem to manifest similar properties. Small, fearful selves make loud noises and attempt outlandish schemes to avoid the awareness of their inescapable separation. Strong, lucid selves affirm the primordial nature of the separation which pervades all aspects of their life. Manifesting a confidence beyond fear, they move through life with a quiet calm manner seeing difficulties as challenges and affirming differences as opportunities for learning about other perspectives.

The rainbow, in which the sunlight and the rain interact to paint an arch of color across a clouded sky, provides a natural symbol of bridged separation. Neither sun nor rain alone can create a rainbow, together they provide a magnificent demonstration of interactive cooperation whose individual colors blend to create a spectrum of diversity symbolic of society and the universe itself. Other natural occurrences or designed logos, too, could become popular reminders of the power which comes from affirming diversity and separation rather than wasting physical and psychic energy trying to hide, mask or eliminate it.

The Christian Gospel of John recounts the story of Jesus’ encounter with the man by the pool. The indigent man has been laying by the pool for 38 years ostensibly waiting for someone to put him into the water when the waves appear. Jesus’ advice is simple, “Pick up your bed and walk.” He does not suggest hiring a health care provider or seeking volunteer assistance; he does not suggest purchasing the latest consumer device or over-the-counter elixir; nor does he suggest some pattern of beliefs to be subscribed to. Rather, Jesus’ advice involves only a simple decision – affirm your life as it is with all its pain and separation and move into the future which awaits you. What a dramatic change would occur in our evening TV programming if the commercials conveyed this profound message instead of false promises of happiness from shiny new cars, richly colored hair, or specially contrived pills and potions. Awareness of separation is not a problem to be avoided but rather an honest and insightful portal into the real and lasting state of the Universe.

The third of the four postulates describes a quality of the Universe about which I am becoming increasingly confident.

### **The Creativity Postulate**

Within the unchanging wholeness of reality, each separate member possesses self-generating creativity. Each unique element of the whole utilizes particular devices for self-transformation. The effects of these transformations reverberate throughout the whole.

The Creativity Postulate describes a world in direct juxtaposition to the reality in which some externally defined and/or prescribed goal exists either as an attractor or as an evaluator of contemporary actions. The “moving towards the goal” understanding of the Universe can take various forms – sometimes a wise old man is pictured as residing somewhere with a plan in his mind which earthlings somehow come to know and then make their plans accordingly. In the hierarchical view of the Universe the role of discerning the master plan most often lies with the priest and politicians. Other formulations of the attractor model of history rely on more esoteric and philosophical factors including eternal goods and primal values which can be known through rational or intuitive deductions. A similar, yet distinct, model of the Universe involves some supernatural power which, finally, guides and directs the course of history. This power, by whatever name it may go, exists outside the realm of history and operates by rules different from those of other creatures. Any of these formulations of the operating principles of the Universe have the net affect of removing final responsibility for the shape of the future from the inhabitants of the present.

Current scientific understandings in such arenas as chaos theory and systems thinking are shedding new light on how present actions determine future events. As Thomas Berry, the renowned cultural historian, states: The Universe is better described as a communion of subjects than as a collection of objects. From

whatever framework, the fact remains that each element of the present plays a role in creating the future. This includes rocks, and rivers as well as cows, crows and people of all persuasions. This multi-sourced creativity perspective gives all of creation a powerful role in bringing about the future. That creativity abounds can be experienced in any number of ways. When my wife and I bought our house and 5 acres of land in 1993, we decided to leave some spaces unmowed. We're amazed at what has grown up in the space – several varieties of trees, flowers of various ilk and, of course, raspberries which we enjoy eating.

One major insight of Chaos Theory focuses on points of disequilibrium, times when a system has become unbalance or highly disturbed. At such junctures, the behavior of a system become unpredictable. Stable systems will demonstrate patterns typical of past behaviors. However, when conditions within a system exceed the limits which allow stability, observers of chaotic situations have discovered that the resulting behavior may be radically divergent from the previous mode and are practically unpredictable. Most high school science classes have taught traditional Newtonian mechanics – the Universe is portrayed as a sophisticated amalgamation of billiard balls which bounce off of each other at calculable angles and velocities. While this training prepares students for handling stable physical (and by extrapolation social) situations, times of real creativity are ignored as messy or abnormal. By shifting our attention to times of wild creativity in the natural and social worlds, a new sense of awe and wonder can be found at points where ingenuity and insight transform confusion and imbalance into power and possibility.

Participating in the creative processes of the Universe requires two kinds of prowess: 1) on the rational side, planning methods and strategic thinking skills and 2) on the wild side, activities like dancing and celebrating. In a world where the answer is printed in the back of the book or above the clouds, one must get good at following instructions. However, in a creative universe where the book is still in the process of being written, each author must develop problem solving skills and planning and monitoring techniques appropriate for their particular role in history. But life is more than a cognitive process. Since the most ancient of times, societies have known that often times insight and harmony emerge after long and wild dances or periods of frantic celebration. Recovering this ancient wisdom may be beneficial in this day and age also. Personally, I've frequently resolved tricky computer programming dilemmas by taking a break from the computer keyboard and going swimming or walking. As if from the ether, a key puzzle piece emerges allowing completion of the task upon my return.

Maybe one of the greatest contemporary shortcomings lies in our collective unpreparedness for creative role we actually play in shaping the future of the Universe. When only a few conscious creatures roamed the vast forests their cumulative impact remained minimal. This situation has dramatically changed as the human population passes the 5 billion mark. The business community has become a leading force in the practice of long-range planning. These skills can be disseminated among increasingly larger groups of people, in ways which effectively improve people's self-conscious creativity. When individuals begin to experience themselves as competent in making creative input into the stream of history, they tend to find an exhilaration which feeds on itself and encourages even greater participation.

The fourth postulate ties together the previous three and describes the process by which the individual elements of the Universe bridge the gap of separation and participate in the wholeness of the Universe.

### **The Reflectivity Postulate**

Sometimes by seeming chance, other times through self-conscious resolve, individuals participate in the oneness of the Universe. In this way, their actual situation is revealed to them. Human beings can experience this oneness directly and this phenomenon may also occur in other species.

Some understandings of life presume that everybody is doomed to wander through this life forever alone. That peace, wholeness and fulfillment lie outside the bounds of the material world. This conception fits

well with a two-story universe model in which the level of every-day living has become somehow tainted and the higher plain is filled with beauties and riches only imagined here. Still other formulations require some intermediary powers to improve the quality of every-day existence. Many of these belief systems prescribe modes of behavior or ritual acts which will improve the chances of the intermediary powers looking with favor on particular individuals. Still others leave such infringement to complete chance or good will of the powers. While these articulations certainly have their adherents and in spite of their well developed systems of consistent internal logic, the fact remains people do experience wholeness in this life.

I was in Egypt doing village development work when my father admitted himself to the hospital and asked that no further dialysis be done even though his kidneys had failed a decade earlier. After a long flight across 7 time zones I arrived in Knoxville on Sunday evening. I saw my father briefly that night and again on Monday morning. He died at noon. During the next three days my entire family gathered to celebrate his completed life and to conduct a memorial service in his honor. I didn't sleep well during the nights as thoughts of my father rattled through my consciousness. On Wednesday morning I arose early and sat alone in an easy-chair in the living room of the cluttered apartment which had graciously been made available to my wife and I. As the twilight filled the sky, I felt as though the same gentle warmth was also engulfing me. It seemed as if my father and grandfather (with whom I share a common given name) were in that morning light and were including me in the same brilliant power of which they were still a part. Any problems I might of thought I had evaporated as the morning dew and the life which lay ahead of me seemed enticing. I felt affirmed by the Universe.

Various labels can be given to my personal experience. That evening I was admitted to Charter Hospital where the psychiatrists gave me sleeping medication which knocked me out for 36 hours. When I awoke, I knew that most of what happened to me could not be discussed in their offices (voices in the night don't go over big in such conversations). I got out of Charter Hospital as soon as possible and was joined by my wife and friends with whom I had worked for decades and who understood my perspectives and persuasions. I recovered my strength and moved on with my life; but the events, insights and reality of those days have remained with me. While not everyone may have such extreme experiences, nonetheless, the feeling of oneness with all of life is not an uncommon occurrence. Sometimes such moments come when watching a sunset over the ocean or when smelling a fragrant rose, others occur in moments of joy shared with a loved one or when tragedy gets appropriated as inescapable reality.

In today's burgeoning economy, many people get moving so frantically that they miss all opportunities for such reflective experiences. I asked a group of college students how many minutes of silence they got each day - several said less than 5. One way to open the door to experiences of wholeness is to adopt a discipline of quiet reflection on a regular basis. Since the time when I visited my father in 1975 and realized that he got up early every day and just sat quietly drinking his morning coffee, I've instituted the same practice in my routines. I'm continually amazed at the creative insight, and lasting calm that emerges from this time. After hurricane Fran blew down the power lines in our area many people commented how nice it was to have time together as a family without the noise of TV and radio. Of course, one can turn these devices off at any time of any day, even when electrical power is available. Taking time to be still in the midst of daily life open the door to reflection and allows experiences to become filled with meaning. At these moments, it's like the clouds of mundanity part and the face of Being Itself appears and winks. just once, to let you know you know what you know and did what you did and that you're neither deceived or crazy; and then life goes on.

The other doorway to significance and reflection comes through service. Although many people get consumed with providing for their own well-being, numerous opportunities arise for serving the poor and disadvantaged. When feeding the hungry or providing shelter for the homeless, one often finds value, worth and purpose in one's own life that had been overlooked in the haste of completing the most recent "To Do" list. Some people say that the ultimate purpose of human beings in the overall scheme of the Universe is to provide the reflective mechanism for all of creation. If so, skills developed in being silent and in serving the suffering will enhance the reflective capacities of each individual and of the Universe as a whole.

One way which I have found helpful to enable people to discover the times in their own lives when these moments of deep reflection have occurred involves examination of the events surrounding major personal turning points. Either times of crisis or ecstasy often accompany major decisions and changes in lifestyle, vocation or family status. By focusing on these periods people often discover the profound wholeness that they experienced, if only briefly. Recovering these experiences enables people to gain fresh enthusiasm and confidence and to enhance similar occurrences in their future. From ancient times into the present sages and crones have understood how to assist people in tapping into the oneness of the Universe, these skills are being recovered in contemporary society.

By no means does this paper purport to offer a complete discussion or analysis of these four postulates. Nonetheless, it seeks to outline a standing point for constructing a sustainable individual lifestyle and a viable social order which include all elements of creation. Many people today are seeing through past understandings, realizing that they offer a reduced perspective of the richness of the emerging Universe. Much work remains – especially in the arenas of creating the songs, stories and symbols which maintain a culture – but a global consensus is emerging. People of all cultures and religious backgrounds are entering the same sphere of consciousness. I'm looking forward to working with all who enter in the task of giving practical form to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the first century of the Ecozoic Era.

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