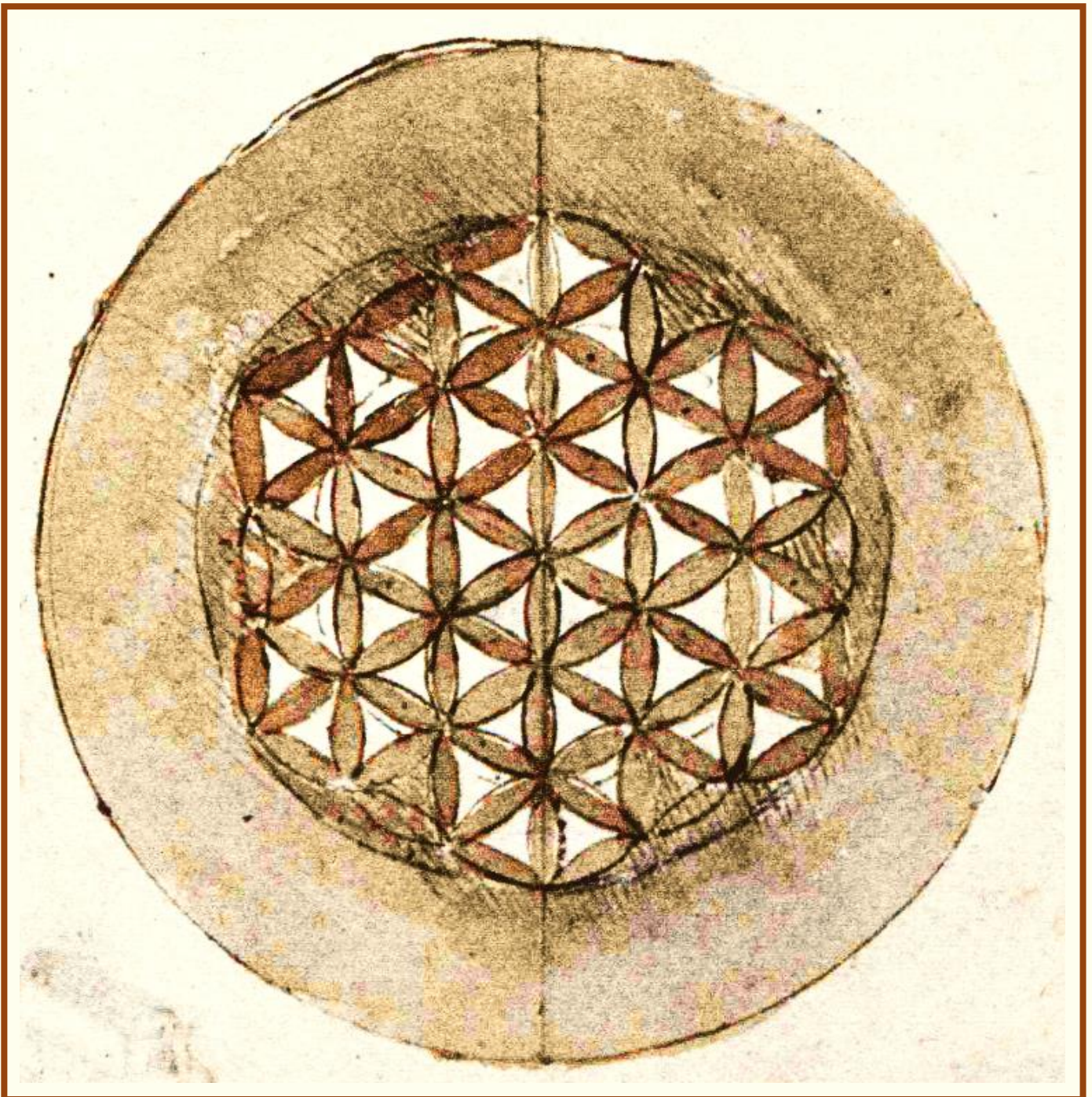




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THE WEB OF LIFE





The Web of Life

edited by Dr.ssa Alessandra Bracci*

«This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family.
All things are bound together. All things connect.
Whatever happens to the Earth happens to the children of the Earth.
Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it.
Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself»

A legend whose setting is the amphitheater of Gavarnie in the Pyrenees, where six knights of the Temple lie at rest in a chapel, tells that every year, on March 18th «a knight of the Temple whose shroud is replaced by the famous white cloak with the four-triangled red cross, is seen to appear. He is in battle apparel and holds his lance in rest. He walks slowly towards the centre of the chapel and utters a piercing call, which re-echoes around the amphitheater in the mountains: 'Who will defend the Holy Temple? Who will deliver the tomb of Christ?' At his call, the six entombed Templars come alive and stand up, to answer three times: 'No one! No one! No one! The Temple is destroyed» (Corbin, 2010, p. 143). The echo of those voices resounds in the folds of time and places to recall of a catastrophe at the centre of the universal history: the destruction of the Temple, the destruction of that form in whose sacredness the divine world is reflected. But in the flow of time, another triumphal image occurs, an image that opposes to this apparent inevitable defeat. It is the image of the rebuilding of the Temple, an image that gets the dimension of a cosmic restoration: the human being, having lost his soul, is called for a journey to recover the meaning of the crypt and take part in the construction of a New Temple. A "heroic" search of a centre that being no place in itself, cannot be located, a temple travelers far away in time and space, have dedicated their own existence to, everyone at his own pace, demonstrating there is no division in the spiral of life that in its kaleidoscopic variety of forms, extends from its darkest depths with no solution of continuity towards the sharpest peaks. The path is not for everyone, but it is a perilous path worth walking along to get to that truth, that love that permits the human being to express the deepest and most creative dimension of his own existence, a recall of his own experience of totality looking for that ancient harmony with Nature, the vital premise of his own survival.

We are dealing with a hard process of transformation concerning the whole humanity both individually and collectively: «The decisive question for Man is: Is he related to something infinite or not?» That is the question of his life. Only if we realize that what truly matters is the infinite, we can avoid fixing our interests upon futilities, and upon all kinds of goals which are not of real importance. [...] If we understand and feel that here in this life we already have a link with the infinite, desires and attitudes change. [...] The greatest limitation for Man is the "self"; it is manifested in the experience: "I am only that!" Only the consciousness of our narrow confinement in the self, forms the link to the limitlessness of the unconscious» (Jung, 2007, pp. 382-383). But can Man orientate towards such an original nucleus and approach it getting his own totality? Can Man move through this labyrinth, through the darkest mazes of his own subjectivity to accomplish his own metamorphosis? Which psychological characteristics are needed for such a transformation? From this perspective, Man's questions above the meaning of birth, the value of death, the meaning of life and its project, of pain and pleasure have become today the most asked among the collective questions.

In the eternal flow of existence, the time coagulates in a form, in a clot of senses according to the continuous process of life and death, in that continuous process of making and unmaking of the matter. If we could film our own existence and the collective one, reproduce the moviola and speed up the sequence endlessly, our ephemeral life and that of the humanity would disappear!

And it is in a blink of an eye that the human being is called to go beyond the fragmentation and the "false

divisions” being able to recognize that tapestry finally woven that is the world he belongs to and wake up the awareness of living in an interconnected universe. In fact, the modern science demonstrates there is not separation between man and environment, mind and nature because both are part of a series of relations built on a network model, where each knot is related to the other knots of the system. The recent discoveries in the field of biology, epigenetics, physics, psychosomatics and so on, highlight the need of a methodology and theoretical criteria of reference able to evolve to have access to a trans-disciplinary and network vision of the phenomenon called Life.

A vision of the world that trying to entangle the personal, the social, the collective and the spiritual level in a coherent model, would imply a necessary search for order reactivating the universal archetypes and their individual becoming not only expressed in the human affairs, but also in the biological and psychological history of Man’s body and mind analogically repeating the laws of the Macrocosm, where the term ”cosmos” implies in its dynamics, two meanings that are strictly related: the order, that being present in the Universe is therefore also present in the Universe, and the harmony, that holds up its immutable laws that express in Man as a synthesis of the harmonized parts of a whole, as a biological, psychological and spiritual continuum that articulates in the infinite phylogenetic metamorphosis in a virtual project having its goal in his own individuate consciousness. The ecobiopsychology as a development of the sciences of complexity and in agreement with the modern evolutionary theories, proposes a model aiming to relate the semiotic codes of the forms of the human being and their specific languages (ecological aspect) with the analogous languages of the human body that sediment in themselves the phylogeny of the world (biological aspect) to then find this relation between the “world” and the human “bios”, in its psychological and cultural aspects thanks to the myths, the history of religion and the collective images of the humanity (psychological aspect).

In this sense that is possible to consider Man as a “Complete Creature” that in its deepest meaning, expresses that dimension rooted in its physicality becoming the living temple of its own progressive conscious emancipation towards the unity. A dimension that is not yet ordered according to that harmonic constant defined as universal law, but that in its proceeding towards integration, opens up the consciousness to unpredictable meanings transcending the ordinary.

To have access to what hidden in the intimate sanctuary of the personal soul, it is not possible to count on a simple descriptive “linear” logics, it is needed a “circular” reading able to integrate the rational knowledge with the irrational value of the empathy and a real awareness of the essential interaction and interdependence of the physical, biological, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual phenomena.

It is essential to deprive ourselves of that exterior sight, those needs we chain our existence to, and embrace the gradual deconstruction of any egoism, sacrifice the illusionary hope of happiness projecting in the Other our own needs of completeness to open up to an inner sight able to overcome the barriers built by the egoic will and embrace the invisible and the inaudible. Only through the projections of the Ego, it is possible to start the path towards the complete consciousness and the real transformation that implies the pain and the suffering as privileged means of knowledge and awareness of a sense of belonging to a community of a more general order, that of Life: we are all part of the “earth family” and as such we should behave as the other members of the family – the plants, the micro-organisms – that form the vast network of relations known as the “web of life”. This living global network has disclosed, evolved and diversified in the last three billions of years without ever breaking. As members of the global community, it is also necessary that Man is able to develop his own projectuality as not to interfere with the nature of Life. But how to penetrate the mystery of nature? How to get the sense of deep entanglement with it? If we keep on living only with a limited state of consciousness of the Ego, our civilization may not survive long, some other form of life will emerge. The human being is part of the universe, but he is not but a traveler on this earth, a traveler who facing the passing of time is called to cross the threshold, and cross a symbolic bridge to have access to a new reading of the flow of life he is part of.

As Diego Frigoli would say «The true spirit of the integrated man has not got the aim to destroy the natural forces, but rather to dominate them, to adapt them, to put them at the service of his inner forces. In other words,

the human consciousness has to first dissolve from the inside those physical steps of the phylogeny, the individual mirror of those cosmic powers of life. Only on such premises the consciousness in the process of individuation can join with its inner movement that having lost its egoic character, becomes faster and faster to get to that greater movement that governs life itself. And it is then that in that vivifying contract the consciousness itself of man becomes the protagonist of that eternal dance that constantly transmute the becoming» (Frigoli, 1985).

Therefore the question is not that much to respond to the urgencies dictated by pollution, resource depletion, overpopulation, an economical system obsessed by ideas of growth and expansion, the political and religious decay and so on, but rather to look deep inside ourselves till we become aware of what is about to emerge: while we are still looking for the right instruments and processes to plug and stop a crisis sure of our supremacy over Nature exhilarated by our successes and unbelievable achievements, we have not yet come to control our inner nature, to understand that heap of emotions agitating in our “inner sea”, to accept the hardness of our limits and at the same time the grace and lightness we can experience in our dreams, to keep the fire of our deepest search burning as well as the precious gold hidden in our depths.

The echo of that faraway voice keeps on resounding: «Who will defend the Holy Temple?»: any change can originate anywhere, and start up in any human being ... in any one of us. No one has the right to stand by and watch waiting for the others doing what he is not willing to act.

To change or not to change: that is the question! We are witnesses of a race between tipping points and at the light of the theory of complexity, we are aware that these elements of instability can lead to damage but also innovations. As Albert Einstein would say, “We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them”, therefore the “overcoming” is characterized by the raising of the level of consciousness: the problem is not solved logically, is not removed, but it appears under a different “light”. While at an inferior level we are blocked in a situation of crisis defined as “pathological”, at a more elevated level potentially everyone can have access to, unfolds an amplification of the consciousness able to cope with the tension of the opposites, to recognize the legitimacy of both of them and to integrate new horizons. The focus is on the necessary “mentality attitude” for the understanding of the symbolic dimension that can permit the protagonists of the global world to approach the events getting not only the visible aspect that is immediately evident of reality, of people, of information and events, but also to penetrate deep inside the articulated connections.

From such premise, the project called “**The Web of Life**” is meant to meet Researchers from different disciplines, to welcome their “reading” not only of the time currently lived by the Man, but also of the “revolution of the consciences” necessary to be carried out. The drive for change becomes more and more intense and is necessary to reinforce it and in-form it contributing to link together the knowledge of the different disciplines on the same domains of the reality, permitting to the theories built on empirical facts by each science, to find an agreement for a sort of internal criteria of reality and a targeted perspective of integrated development. By thanking all the Researchers who have accepted to open a dialogue with our School, we hope to move forward together along the necessary process of the collective metamorphosis of the consciousness.

Image. Leonardo da Vinci, The Flower of Life in Codex Atlanticus, fol. 309v, detail, 1478 - 1519

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Interview with PhD Fritjof Capra
edited by Dr.ssa Alessandra Bracci*

This we know.
The earth does not belong to man;
man belongs to the earth.
This we know.
All things are connected
like the blood which unites one family.
All things are connected.
Whatever befalls the earth
befalls the sons of the earth.
Man did not weave the Web of Life;
he is merely a strand in it.
Whatever he does to the Web,
he does to himself.

Ted Perry, inspired by the Indian chief Seattle

These poetic words open one of the many wonderful texts by Prof. Fritjof Capra with whom it is a privilege to be able to start a dialogue with our school within the project "The Web of Life" whose title takes its inspiration from his own words.

Prof. Fritjof Capra, a well-known physicist and systems theory scholar, is the founder and director of the Center for Ecological Literacy in Berkeley, California, and has published internationally renowned works. Since his first book *The Tao of Physics*, written in 1975, he has highlighted the

transition from a mechanistic and reductionist worldview to a systemic and ecological one. A real paradigm shift capable of generating radical changes in all fields of scientific knowledge and society. A renewed conception of the human being that is not opposed to Nature but is an integral part of it, overcoming the traditional separation between mind and body. By accepting to be an integral part of Nature, man is somehow pushed to overcome a position of dominance and exploitation of other forms of life, and of the ecosystem as a whole, to assume an attitude of responsibility towards Nature itself, a responsibility that also becomes pragmatic "taking care" of the environment of which he is a precious guest, but not a ruthless master.

Going beyond the tendency to explain events according to a logic of cause and effect that excludes any "complexity", at the forefront of contemporary science the universe is no longer seen as a machine made of "elementary bricks", but rather characterized by an inseparable network of relationships. The emergence of systemic science comes from the simultaneous convergence of developments in physics, mathematics, biology, sociology, computer science, economics, which at various levels and with different modes of interpretation, have come to propose a new way of thinking, no longer in terms of separate conclusions but in terms of connections, relationships and global contexts. If the web of Life is made up of networks of connections, and if man - with his cultural and humanistic productions - belongs to these networks, the knowledge of the nodes through which the connections are established implies such a total immersion of man in the web of Life as to determine a profound change in his very "being in the world", such as to transform him into an ecological man. Therefore, his own evolution can no longer be seen as a competitive struggle for existence, but as a cooperative dance in which creativity becomes the driving force. Within this "dance" of Life, the human being, who on the one hand with his physiology is in contact with the cognitive worlds of other living beings, on the other, with language and abstract

and symbolic concepts, builds a world inaccessible to other living species, his language becomes articulated to build a new world, that of collective consciousness.

In this sense, ecobiopsychology, in the panorama of the sciences of complexity, contributes by proposing a network model that links the world of Nature and the most sophisticated and amplified aspects of human cultural productions, tying together very different areas that may appear contradictory. Its operating mode is to investigate the territory of the personal unconscious and even more that of the collective unconscious, to highlight the common traits or more significant in relation to the natural world. It is in fact in the collective unconscious that ecobiopsychology traces that dimension of the continuum according to which the phenomena of the real world express their mental and cognitive occurrence. The autopoiesis of the school of Santiago came to the innovative conclusion that every living system expresses a cognitive moment, but forgot to emphasize how this cognitive moment is unconscious of the living organism, that only man with his self-awareness and capacity for reflection can begin to make explicit. Therefore, all living organisms are linked together by unconscious cognitive networks that man, equipped with awareness, can begin to know in their meaning by being able to "translate" the unconscious language of living organisms in terms of language understandable to consciousness.

"Everything in my life had prepared me for this moment". Do you agree with that? What is the question your research is based on? What is at the heart of your mission? How did you discover your vocation?

I was trained as a physicist and spent twenty years doing research in theoretical high energy physics. Early on, I became interested in the philosophical implications of the conceptual revolution that took place in modern physics — a change from the mechanistic worldview of Descartes and Newton to a systemic and ecological view. In the early 1970s I began to explore these implications, publishing my findings in a series of books. My research and writing since that time has involved explorations of many fields of knowledge in a meandering process with many tangential pursuits, but always with an explicit systemic perspective. Looking back on these explorations now, I can see that they amounted to a systematic investigation of a central theme: the fundamental change of worldview, or change of paradigms, that is now occurring in science and in society; the unfolding of a new vision of reality, and the social and political implications of this cultural transformation.

The Corona virus is a pandemic going further into the health crisis although critical and extended it may be at a global level. It is a pandemic having its roots in a world where the actual and dominant "reductionism" typical of our economic, political and educative systems ignores limits of the real biological capacity of our planet exploiting in a capricious and prodigal way the vital resources, while using still insufficiently, the human capacities. What is your opinion about that?

In my view, the coronavirus must be seen as a biological response of Gaia, our living planet, to the ecological and social emergency humanity has brought upon itself. It arose from an ecological imbalance and has dramatic consequences because of social and economic imbalances.

Massive intrusions into ecosystems around the world have fragmented these systems and have fractured the web of life. One of the many consequences of these destructive actions was that viruses, which had lived in symbiosis with certain animal species, jumped from those species to humans, where they were highly toxic or deadly.

Now, when you look at the spread of COVID-19, it is evident that population density is the key variable; and population density is often a consequence of excessive profit maximizing — whether on giant cruise ships and in other forms of mass tourism, in giant meat-packing factories, or in crowded living situations caused by social and economic inequality. During a pandemic like COVID-19, social justice is no longer a political issue of left versus right; it becomes an issue of life and death.

When the pandemic spread around the world, one country after another went into lockdown. As a consequence, transportation of people and goods was radically reduced, businesses closed, and unemployment soared. The worldwide health crisis has gone hand in hand with a worldwide economic crisis.

However, from a planetary ecological perspective there have also been many positive consequences. As automobile traffic and industrial activities decreased dramatically, the pollution of major cities around the world suddenly disappeared, and we are once again enjoying clear skies and clean air. Wildlife is flourishing around

the world in ecosystems undisturbed by humans. The coronavirus has already been more effective in reducing CO₂ emissions and slowing down climate breakdown than all the world's policy initiatives combined.

This does not mean that we want to continue in the current situation. The current environmental regeneration has been the result of radically *reduced* human activities. The same positive effects could be achieved by radically *changing* our human activities. The world's COVID-19 response has shown us what is possible when people realize that their lives are at stake. Will we have the wisdom and the political will to apply this lesson to the climate crisis, economic inequality, and other critical global problems?

Einstein recalled how he imagined chasing after a beam of light and that the thought experiment had played a memorable role in his development of special relativity. What is the role of imagination in the creation of new scenario on future?

Imagination is critical, in my view. Only when we can imagine a desired goal we will have the motivation to reach it and to work on detailed strategies. It is not a coincidence, that one of the greatest inspirations for social-change movements around the world has been John Lennon's song *Imagine*. It gives us a poetic vision of a just and peaceful world:

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people living life in peace...
Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people sharing all the world...

In your book *The Systems View of Life* you describe the "vital roots " dimension of spirituality as an experience of unity that opens to a full awareness that has deep in the body and at the same time subtle connections with the entire Web of Life. How do you consider, in the context of this process of transformation of consciousness, the role of the body, the personal unconscious (as a container of the vicissitudes of the ego) and the collective unconscious as the "place" of action of archetypes and sediment of all the experiences lived by humanity and source of creative potential? If nowadays psychologists and psychotherapists accept the reality of the unconscious and if neuroscientists confirm this reality by finding it in neuronal connections, could we think that the dimension of the "unconscious" goes further synaptic connections to extend to DNA or, as quantum physicists say, up to the informations of the Cosmic Source of the Zero Point Field or Akashic Field?

Spiritual experience, in my view, is an experience of aliveness of mind and body as a unity. This is consistent with the systems view of life, which identifies cognition (the process of knowing) with the very process of life, and understands consciousness as a special kind of cognitive process that emerges when cognition reaches a level of complexity that requires a brain and higher nervous system. In this view, the relationship between mind (or cognition) and body is one between process and structure. This is a radically new and very recent understanding of mind and consciousness, which will have far-reaching scientific and philosophical implications. As far as I know, possible connections with C.G. Jung's idea of a collective unconscious and other esoteric ideas have not yet been explored.

"Be the change" can be on one side an exciting concept rich of potential, but on the other an extremely touching one dealing with profound fears. If the transformation of the totality implies an inner change on a scale many have not yet experimented, are we really ready for such a change? Which are the capacities and the knowledge that at individual and collective level, are necessary to develop and

strengthen to contribute to a more authentic comprehension of life and to discover who we really are and what we wish to become as a society?

The new systemic understanding of life will be critical to solve the major problems of our time, because they are systemic problems — all interconnected and interdependent — and they need corresponding systemic solutions. This requires a profound change of concepts and ideas, and also a profound change of values — a kind of learning known as transformative learning. In my experience, the most powerful way to experience such transformative learning is through the experience of community. When you discuss systemic interconnectedness within a learning community, you experience human interconnectedness at the same time, and this is when transformative learning takes place most effectively.

The change able to make the difference occurs in the depth of our hearts. According to you, how much is that true? How is this process possible?

I fully agree that change to make a difference occurs “in the depth of our hearts.” Throughout the ages, the human heart has been a symbol emotional life, a key metaphor for a variety of emotions — love, compassion, courage, emotional depth, and so on. These emotions are an essential part of the transformative learning we need in order to face the challenges of our time. As I have mentioned, the creation and nurturing of learning communities is an ideal path toward transformative learning. This is what I have been engaged in for the past five years, during which I have taught an online course on the systems view of life. Known as “Capra Course” (www.capracourse.net), it now has alumni network of over 1800 in 85 countries around the world. With this network I am building a global community of systemic thinkers and activists.

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