

The Spiritual Revolution: Bringing Meaning to Life

By Robert Tolz



Maligne Lake by D. Tolz

I am convinced that the best hope for a transformation in human society and a future of peace, equality and justice lies not in the hands of governments but in the minds and hearts of individuals who will devote themselves to individual spiritual transformation.

Institutions are merely a reflection of the predominant state of consciousness of the population they serve. History shows that purportedly utopian models of society cannot work when imposed on individuals from the top—note well the results of Marxism/Communism. When the predominant state of consciousness of a people changes, the government will follow, and a predominant state of consciousness expands only as individuals transform themselves and create a critical mass for a wider-based change.

A broad-based sea change in consciousness can occur as a result of external circumstances. For instance, the Industrial Revolution changed the world from an agrarian society to one which became dependent upon machines. Machines (and I use the term in the broadest possible sense) provided huge leverage, multiplying human powers in theretofore unimaginable ways and irrevocably changing the relationship of all people to life, to the environment, to others and to themselves.

Similarly, when people started having to wait in lines to buy gasoline, and beaches began to close because they were fouled by waste, a consciousness dawned that there was such a thing as “The Environment.” After a long history of ignoring our impact, we were hit smack in the face by a brick wall. Because we discovered how unpleasant and inconvenient life can become by remaining ignorant, we learned that the Earth needs to be treated with care, not as something that can be endlessly plundered.

These two examples demonstrate how some aspects of society’s consciousness can sometimes change in response to our surroundings. Interestingly, what characterizes both is that the transformations were involuntary reactions, not conscious choices. The changes in the predominant state of consciousness were... um... *unconscious*.

What would happen if, instead of merely *reacting* to circumstances, we responded by voluntary choice? What if we took responsibility for the direction of our evolution instead of being passively carried on a directionless conveyor belt?

One of the fundamental aspects of the Spiritual Revolution is the realization that much, if not most, of the sorrow in the world is generated by a predominant state of consciousness in which we each act as if we are the center of the universe. That we act in this manner is not surprising, given that we each exist within a separate physical body, with private thoughts and private sensations that nobody else can hear or feel.

This state of being is the root of indifference to the needs and feelings of others. The others are “not me,” so what do I care if they feel pain when I hurt them, if I try to get ahead of them, or if I steal from them? On the other hand, if I were able to transcend my separativity, I would empathically feel that the other person is part of me, his or her pain could be experienced as my own, and I would hesitate to cause any hurt. I would be more inclined to love them.

If we remain in this separate shell without recognizing the connection we have with what lies beyond it, we are in a prison. We suffer an existence whose underlying characteristics are loneliness and alienation, and we may feel incomplete, unsettled and unfulfilled, with a driving need to fill an existential hole in our lives. This need may produce feelings of sadness or insecurity, or we may desire to fill that hole with whatever will put an end to the ache.

Some will try to silence the ache with whatever numbing agent is close at hand—alcohol or drugs, non-stop work, or, very typically, a pattern of possessive behavior.

This possessive attitude is marked by a succession of experiences in which we (1) identify the object that we think we need to make us happy, (2) establish our plan to succeed in obtaining that object, (3) obtain the object (perhaps), (4) enjoy the gratification that the object produces or simply enjoy the exhilaration of our success, (5) after a period of time realize that the emptiness of being in a state of separativity still remains.

The object of our desires can vary widely. It can be as mundane as a pair of shoes or a super high-fidelity stereo system. But it can also consist of things which we do not often think of as objects to possess, such as a new friend, a spouse, an academic degree, a more interesting job, or even spiritual wisdom.

When we arrive at step 5 and realize we haven’t really fixed anything permanently, the next step is frequently to go right back to step 1 and identify yet another object to obtain. Rarely if ever does it occur to us that the entire method of acquiring something to make us feel whole doesn’t begin to fix the problem. Instead, we are more likely to say to ourselves, “Well, it looks like I misidentified what would truly make me happy. Let me figure out what I really need to go after.”

We may think that we're going forward in a straight line, but a bird's eye view would reveal that we are merely traveling in circles, repeating the same experience over and over again. This too is a prison. We shy away from asking ourselves what the purpose of our lives is, because if this is all we see, it's not a pretty picture. Rather than remedying the essential problem of being separate, this pattern of gratifying desires tends to accentuate our separativity by focusing us in on ourselves as the center of the universe.



Andes Snow Field by R. Tolz

The soul who responds to the dull ache from a spiritual point of view seeks not to dull the ache but to resolve it permanently by an inner transformation that shifts away from a self-centered prison towards an expansive inner freedom. Desire is transmuted into a yearning, and the soul acts to integrate his or her life to attain the aspirations which are generated by that yearning.

It is immensely difficult to stand apart and look back to see oneself clearly. Self-observation is inherently subjective, because of the underlying obstacle that the self

is trying to look at the self. This reflexive action is akin to a knife trying to cut itself. But if we are ever to see the patterns of our lives and to achieve true inner freedom, it is absolutely essential that we look at ourselves as clearly as possible, without fear and without deception. Then we can have a better sense of the raw material that we're starting with.

Consider that the best way to solve the conundrum of feeling separate from the rest of the universe is to crack open the shell voluntarily and reveal the connection with what is not me. It is not necessary to dispense with our own unique individuality and personality. What is possible is to develop a practice, an attitude and a consciousness in which we make our shell more permeable, so that the essence of what appears to be beyond us is allowed to enter into the heart of our being. When we are able to do this more and more, we are truly not alone. The sadness and insecurity wane. The feeling that we need to acquire something to fill up some hole in our lives tends to lessen, because, after all, we already have everything. A sense of sufficiency, plenitude and peace follows.

This change in consciousness is not likely to occur without some degree of effort and intention. The first step is to come to the realization that this is something worthy to engage in, to feel a calling. The next step is to take responsibility and make a commitment to follow the path of that calling. The third, fourth, fifth and nth steps are to find ways to walk on that path.

Taking this kind of responsibility and making this kind of commitment cannot be triggered merely by rational thought, though it certainly helps if the rational mind comes along for the ride instead of resisting with persistent doubts. The difficulty with all these words I've written is that they may tend to appeal primarily to the brain's logic centers. To reach that part of the being that transcends the mind, it is helpful for the message to be conveyed in non-logical ways.

A right-brain experiment I tried many years ago, in which I imagined myself on my deathbed looking back on my life to see whether it had been worthwhile, brought about the non-logical epiphany that was the genesis of my spiritual vocation.

Which brings us to music... Many years later, on my morning drive to the train station, I heard a melody that wasn't coming from the radio. It persisted in me and expanded. A few months later, in the middle of a week-long retreat, the words that corresponded to that melody became quite apparent and spilled out of me in a one-hour birthing, clearly inspired by that experience so many years before. If you want to see the lead sheet (melody, chords and lyrics), [click here](#).