

Searching for the Spirit of the West

What Can the American Spirit Contribute to the Michaelic Future?

This essay gathers the results of twenty years of research and two parallel tracks: American history on one hand and American spirituality on the other. The approach narrows from the Americas before the time of Christ and up to the time of the Consciousness Soul. After that it focuses on the US specifically. The overarching questions I have lived with during this time have been two: "What does the American spirit have to offer to the world? How does it complement what is offered at present from Central Europe (German spirit foremost) and what will be offered in the sixth post-Atlantean age from the East (Russia and Slavs foremost)? The American spirit is part of the "Spirit of the West," which includes all English-speaking countries as representatives of the Consciousness Soul – the US, Canada, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. This approach confines itself to the US as a representative of this totality. What lies beyond the US has in no way been approached, though it can be suspected many similarities would emerge.

When I asked the above questions, I found myself a bit lost at sea. It is surprising that Rudolf Steiner speaks of the mission of the West as a matter of fact, but then lays very little emphasis on it. He seems to move in parallel with the people of the West themselves, who seldom ask that question, even when they are deeply involved in the work of anthroposophy or, paradoxically, even in the advancement of such spiritual mission. After a while I realized that the answer lay within what I had researched if I could extract a synthesis. On one hand a coherent line emerges through history. On the other emerges a polarity between what takes form in this continent and what we hear with force and presence from Central and Eastern Europe. To limit the length of this essay, I will offer the concentrated essence, so to

speak, of the results of the research and refer the reader to places where all of this has been explored in much greater detail.

The Dilemma

The Age of the Consciousness Soul started in 1413 and will finish around 3573. It followed the fourth post-Atlantean, or Greco-Roman, epoch. The present age has seen the rise of the scientific mindset and of that consciousness that is most present in the missions of the Anglo-American and English-speaking folk souls and the German/Middle European folk souls. It will be followed by the sixth post-Atlantean epoch, the Philadelphia epoch of the Spirit Self, which has been prepared and will be carried out primarily by Russians and other Slavs. At present the working together of these folk souls and world missions is thwarted by egotistic spiritual impulses that try to prevent the unfolding of the new Christ event in the etheric and the future mission of the Russian/Slav folk souls. The strongest of these reside in the Anglo-American establishment, leading to what Steiner calls Americanism, the strengthening of purely materialistic tendencies. Some of these may hide behind a spiritual veneer, but they reinforce by and large a super-materialistic spiritualism.

This essay will not go to any large extent into these aspects, though it will briefly point to them.¹ The tragedies of the twentieth century have left deep large-scale trauma between nations, and vast historical misperceptions. A reason for this is that history has been literally rewritten by the winners. When individuals see through the smokescreens of official narratives they may correct certain untruths at the cost of amplifying other distortions. Only spiritual science can see the larger goals at stake, which are spiritual in nature. All other historical explanations search in the darkness of purely external reasons, and confine themselves to documents. To really reach a correct apprehension of the dynamics at play requires two major steps:

¹ What is offered in the section below has been presented in great length in *Searching for the Spirit of the West: A Hidden History of the USA and the Twentieth Century*.

- an unlearning of great parts of what we know as official history, or the courage to question official narratives and willingness to see what we take for granted crumble before our very eyes
- the ability and willingness to extend the historical approach that Steiner followed in his *Karma of Untruthfulness* to the very end: what a symptomatologic view of history has to say about the undercurrents of history; the place that progressive and regressive social/spiritual impulses play in world history

I am forced to bring up a brief historical background because of two phenomena that come with the air that we breathe, so to speak: the attribution of collective guilt from one nation to the other or, from the other side, the internalized assumption of collective guilt beyond historical reason.

In *Searching for the Spirit of the West* I have followed the ample documentation that shows beyond reasonable doubt that communism in Russia and Nazism in Germany could not have thrived in their respective countries without the help of the Anglo-American establishment, without capital flowing from the West. Quite simply put, Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler didn't have the internal resources to sustain their respective regimes, let alone build a war apparatus and entertain illusions of world power. All the capital for these enterprises came from the West. History, however, has condemned the losers and portrayed the West as the savior.

With these premises come a host of consequences. Some Germans may still carry the weight of a collective guilt that needs to be redimensioned. If they have an inkling of the role the West has played, they may harbor deep mistrust and suspicion for *anything* that comes from the West: the bath water and the baby will go down the drain together.

From anthroposophy we most often have a clear understanding of what the spirit of Middle Europe, primarily the German spirit, has to offer for the

spiritual evolution of humankind. If nothing else we know that the ground for anthroposophy has been tilled in German Romanticism and in the German spirit. Nowhere else could it have taken root as it did in Germany/Austria/Switzerland. We also know what role will fall on the Russian soul for future evolution and for the birthing of a Philadelphia community of the future, and we can empathize with the tremendous suffering and tribulations it has to undergo in order to render this future possible.

Little can be said, or has been said, about what positive role the spirit of the West can play, and how this can be brought to bear in relation to Middle and Eastern Europe. Anyone I ask this question to, either looks at me with another question mark on their face, or confesses that s/he sees very little or nothing that can come from the West.

And the question becomes more important by the day, because the political situation has precipitated other dividers. The war between Russia and Ukraine has become another tool, among other things, to create a wedge between Germany/Middle Europe and Russia, natural allies under many economic, political, and spiritual aspects. It will draw Central Europe closer to Americanism, from which it can derive little to no cultural advantages.

Searching for the Spirit of the West

My roots go back to Europe on one side, Italy to be precise; South America on the other, via Peru. I was born in the US and since 1985 I have made the US my home in every sense of the word. I have felt thoroughly at home and deeply interested in American history, primarily North America, and even more specifically the US. I have found that this history is closely intertwined with an instinctive spirituality that takes many forms, and I have striven to embody it and document it. Much of the spirituality that originates from North America lives in the experience. It does not reflect on its own nature. Anthroposophy is natural, but somehow "wooden," in America, Steiner reminds us.

It is interesting that much of the spirit of the West lives unspoken: it just expresses itself in the will. It will create multitudes of social processes and forms and refine them over time, but rarely take the time to extract wider principles, other than those that serve the deed. I will offer examples in this essay and point to many others that can be found elsewhere. It is interesting that the mirror that America needs in order to see what good it does often comes from Europe. Otto Scharmer has written the epochal *Theory U* book in which I see an original, sizeable contribution, and also in a major way a theoretical background that matches and renders more understandable what many vanguard actors have done in the US for decades now.²

The cultural frontier in the US is most often led by the practitioner or visionary, not the thinker. Otto Scharmer places a large context of ideas to practitioners in which they can recognize what they do. The archetypal, immediately accessible level of thinking that Scharmer offers allows them to trust an intellectual thread that they healthily refuse, or instinctively dismiss, when it comes from purely materialistic angles. Most often many practitioners of individual, group, and organizational social change just know that what they do works, and they do not feel the need for a larger perspective.

Another great contribution to the understanding of the American soul comes from Europe once more, through the work of Carl Stegman, who intuited what lives in this country; what are the obstacles against which the American soul has to fight, particularly the strength of the Ahrimanic impulse in this continent; what was offered in the past particularly through the Romantic embodiment of the Transcendentalists, and what it can offer to the world at present.³

² Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges*.

³ Carl Stegman, *The Other America*.

All of the above leads us to the recognition of the strengths that live in the three major groups we have been speaking about: the Anglo-Saxon West, the German soul, and the Slavic East. Here we can look at what lives in each of these groups before turning specifically to the West.⁴

Center, East, and West

The history of the twentieth century has assumed a global dimension. Thus what is said below only highlights some major lines of strength and tension, those that exist between what we could call East (primarily Russia), Center (Germany and the German-speaking countries), and West (the English-speaking countries). It is among these that a ruthless battle for global hegemony, launched primarily from the West, has emerged gradually since the beginning of the Consciousness Soul epoch and has reached a climax in the twentieth century. Much of modern history can be more understandable if we recognize what forces have unfolded in these folk souls.

Germany and Central Europe

The German spirit has struggled in the endeavor of creating meaning and has given the world the most articulate philosophy of modern time, which became the foundation for spiritual science. The German spirit is at home in, or creates meaning from, the striving of the intellectual/mind soul.

The people of northern Europe were closest to the state of consciousness of old Atlantis. And they experienced the transition from the old vision to the new kind of vision. While the I was not yet awake, they could contemplate spiritual beings. Down until the eighth to tenth centuries AD, they could see how the soul forces started to work in the body and how the I was incorporated: “[The Germanic-Scandinavian] was present when the ‘I’

⁴ See *Searching for the Spirit of the West*, “Conclusions: Looking at the Future.”

membered itself into the body and took possession of each single human being."⁵

The Germanic people awakened to the I at a stage in which the folk-spirits still worked upon their souls. They could literally perceive the I as a being among other entities; they saw it clairvoyantly. In fact they "developed the vision of the 'I' long before they became conscious of the real inner striving towards the 'I.'"⁶ Through the I they could more consciously direct their relation to the outer world and form different relationships with it.

The philosophies of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, Steiner reminds us, are "the result of the most penetrating old clairvoyance, acquired by man when he worked in cooperation with the divine spiritual beings. It would otherwise have been impossible for a Hegel to have looked upon his ideas as realities."⁷ Based as it is on the substratum of the Northern Mysteries, German philosophy does not fall into empty abstraction. German idealism shows that German culture is in essence ready to receive the ideas of spiritual science once the time allows them. And the German soul is also the best suited to understand the revelations of the reappearance of the Christ in the etheric.⁸ This great responsibility and potential call forth externally the enmity and attacks of the Ahrimanic powers, mostly coming from the West.

The German spirit ushers in the first foundations for the Spirit Self in the cultivation that is possible in new group cultural pursuits, and the manifestations of the Spirit Self in single individuals. This is the fruit of the spiritual life of Central Europe, and also what Eastern Europe yearns for and needs to receive to create a path to the sixth epoch.

⁵ Steiner, *The Mission of Folk-Souls in Connection with Germanic Scandinavian Mythology*, lecture of June 14, 1910 (GA 121).

⁶ Steiner, *The Mission of Folk-Souls*, lecture of June 14, 1910 (GA 121).

⁷ Steiner, *The Mission of Folk-Souls*, lecture of June 16, 1910 (GA 121).

⁸ Steiner, *The Mission of Folk-Souls*, lecture of June 17, 1910 (GA 121).

Central Europe also finds itself privileged of standing in a position of balance in the fight against the adversaries, the Asian East being more inclined to succumb to Lucifer and the West to Ahriman. But it stands at risk when it comes to the right development of the Consciousness Soul: "In other words, whereas in British regions the instinctive basis for the development of the Consciousness Soul is present, the German Mid-European must be educated into the Consciousness Soul if he is to make this active within him in any way. He can achieve this only through education."⁹ If this is not cultivated consciously, a vacuum arises that can be filled by demonic forces. Extreme conditions of social upheaval and decadence, as those consciously cultivated by the powers of the West before World War II, led to this scenario and the rise of Hitler and the Nazi regime. This was further compounded with Western Germany being delivered to the mass anti-culture of Americanism and Eastern Germany to Bolshevism, both of which lead to a collapse of the free cultural life.

Russia and Eastern Europe

Though the people of Russia and Eastern Europe stand in an instinctive relationship to the Christ being, this does not find full conscious expression in their Ego. It is in this that the spirit of Central Europe, so linked to the awakening of the Ego, can play a central complementary role. Otherwise the Eastern European soul risks remaining in a group soul consciousness.

When evolution took its development from Atlantis to Ancient India, Persia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, like the German and northern tribes, the populations of Eastern Europe were held back in their development in view of future times. Whereas the Germans entered into the development of the fifth post-Atlantean epoch, the Eastern European soul is preparing for the Philadelphia epoch of humanity, the sixth post-Atlantean epoch: the first

⁹ Rudolf Steiner, lecture of December 8, 1918 (GA 186).

clairvoyant epoch of humanity. To them therefore falls the difficult task of an accelerated learning through the time of the Consciousness Soul, for which their soul is hardly fit, in order to prepare the social culture of the future.

In the times leading to our epoch, the Russian soul was prepared through the Mystery Centers that took place in southeastern (future) Russia to emerge in a condition of "oneness of soul" in which the Christ impulse becomes a matter of fact, and without which all meaning in life is lost. It's a striving for the oneness of the Ego.¹⁰ Alongside this yearning is developed a very strong impulse of conscience, speaking out of the Sentient Soul in terms hardly imaginable to the Western consciousness. Witness of the strength of this impulse are the works of the most famous Russian authors: Gogol, Dostoyevski, Tolstoy, Checkhov.

From the impulse of conscience emerge the seeds for the new faculties of clairvoyance that will render perceptible the presence of Christ in the realm of the etheric, for which the people of the East yearn and are predisposed. This is the reason for the pitiless fight against the Russian spirit waged by the Western brotherhoods. What is reflected at the external level on economic and political strategic terms is in reality the result of an intense spiritual battle.

The Eastern oneness of soul reacts as antipathy toward what speaks out of the anti-Christian Intellectual and Consciousness Soul so present in the West. For the people of the East to come to terms with the Consciousness Soul, they must turn their pursuit from the achievements of external world to the inner world. They must internalize it, spiritualize it, in order that it does not cause damage.¹¹

¹⁰ Rudolf Steiner, lecture of November 9, 1914 (GA 158), quoted in Sergei Prokofieff, *The Spiritual Origins of Eastern Europe*, 339.

¹¹ Sergei Prokofieff, *The Spiritual Origins of Eastern Europe*, 339.

The sixth post-Atlantean epoch will have a predominantly feminine stamp in contrast to our prevalently masculine civilization. The spiritualization of the Consciousness Soul will produce what esotericism calls the refined "Pistis Sophia," in which the Spirit Self can develop its first seeds. While the Ego divides us one from the other like the biblical sword, the Spirit Self reconciles differences at a higher level and will naturally unite individuals in spiritual communities. What is a difficult ideal to strive for and embody at present will in the future epoch be a common condition of soul in the sixth post-Atlantean epoch. For this purpose the great historical upheavals imposed upon the Eastern soul, can, if appropriately directed, lead to the integration of the Intellectual Soul and the spiritualization of the Consciousness Soul.

The spiritual bond of Russia with Germany, and more broadly between Central and Eastern Europe, is important for their future, but Europe as a whole depends on this union between the two national souls. This will further bring healing globally.

While at present the three cultural blocks—America and the West, Germany and Central Europe, Russia and Eastern Europe—are consciously pitted against each other, it behooves us anthroposophists and all striving Michaelic souls to discern what we each can create within our own specific cultures and realize how intertwined our specific efforts are for the good of the whole and for world evolution.

Great Britain and America

The English-speaking folks are the people of the Consciousness Soul. They carry within themselves the inherent challenge of the time, the choice between connecting to the spirit and the macrocosmic reality outside of one's

own being, or feeling trapped inside without any outer compass to guide the individual other than what comes from external culture: the fall into the complete materialistic outlook is the only other alternative. This is why Steiner also calls the Consciousness Soul the "Spiritual Soul." In it lies the possibility to form a conscious relationship with the spirit. Since this can only be offered to the human being in freedom, complete spiritual alienation is the other alternative.

America tends to fall into Ahrimanic, materialistic worldviews and conditions, while at the same time its younger forces, in relation to Europe, can preserve its future evolution. This paradox is highlighted by Steiner thus:

We in Europe develop Anthroposophy out of the Spirit. Over there [in America] they develop something that is a kind of wooden doll of Anthroposophy. Everything becomes materialistic.

But for one who is not a fanatic, there is something similar in American culture to what is anthroposophical science in Europe. Only everything there is wooden, it is not yet alive. We can make it alive in Europe out of the Spirit: those over there take it out of instinct. . . .

It is in fact so interesting that in America materialism simply flourishes, but actually on the way to the Spirit; while in Europe if someone becomes a materialist he dies as human being. The American is a young materialist. In fact, all children are at first materialistic, and then grow to what is not materialism. So too will the American blatant materialism sprout to a spiritual element. That will be when the sun rises in the Sign of Aquarius.¹²

Steiner reminds us that all life and growth processes are related to will forces: "All growth that proliferates in us is at the same time related to will. Seen externally in the body, it is a growth process. Observed in the inner

¹² Rudolf Steiner, "Color and the Human Races," lecture of March 3, 1923 (GA 349).

soul life, it is will."¹³ In America we witness everywhere in nature powerful growth forces that manifest in the world of nature; it is no coincidence that the highest of trees, the sequoias, grow in this continent.

Where the will is active, as in the growing child, consciousness has not yet awakened. Only with the withdrawal of these forces from the body does consciousness grow. Thus the will forces present in America can be transformed into new consciousness if the will is maintained in a state of purity, but only over time.

In contrast to the English-speaking, the German soul wants to sound the abyss of existence in order to find meaning. It wants to understand the mystery of the light born of the darkness, the mystery of resurrection. The Intellectual Soul can inspire the Consciousness Soul that wants to experience its own death and resurrection. This is what the German spirit can offer to the spirit of the West, America in particular. The Consciousness Soul in America has to court the destructive element, the element of death and decay; it cannot just believe the old, or stick to a creed. It has to live in the breakdown of everything that is dogma and tradition; witness the conditions American humanity faces at present.

This confrontation with death, even literal physical death, is the hallmark of the initiation trials of many great Americans. Their struggle at the abyss illustrates what form this challenge takes in the New World. We will look at three individuals over three centuries in which we can recognize commonalities even across vast differences: Benjamin Franklin, Bill Wilson, and Martin Luther King Jr.

¹³ Rudolf Steiner, lecture of August 14, 1921 (GA 206).

The Varieties of American Spiritual Experience

Benjamin Franklin is one of the first Americans to build a conscious bridge across the abyss of the Consciousness Soul. He overcame the separation between faith and science, though in order to do this he had to come close to dying.

As an alert individual of his time he could not simply accept faith and disregard science. With great coherence Franklin doubted the truth of the Bible from age fifteen and forewent church attendance at twenty-four, a step that took courage in breaking out of pervasive social conformity.¹⁴ Around age twenty Franklin met in London a group of young radical freethinkers, with whom he agreed "in a hundred axioms that he knew neither sin, nor liberty, nor personal immortality. God was only permitted to exist as a machine." When nothing could have saved him from within the realm of external culture Franklin was helped by the spiritual worlds. He faced his personal abyss after he almost lost his life from an attack of pleurisy. We can gain a sense of the importance of the event from his own words: "I suffered a good deal, gave up the point in my mind, and was rather disappointed when I found myself recovering; regretting in some degree that I must now some time or other have all that disagreeable work to do over again." No doubt the grace of previous lifetimes carried him anew, and he returned to life with new zest and wisdom: witness the words he composed soon after for his future epitaph in which he said about his own body that "it will (as he believ'd) Appear once More in a New and More Elegant Edition Revised and Corrected by the Author." One is left to wonder. Did the spiritual experience open such a perspective from personal recollections?

¹⁴ Benjamin Franklin's individuality has been approached phenomenologically in *Legends & Stories for a Compassionate America*, chapters 1 and 2. A spiritual scientific understanding has been sketched in *Abraham Lincoln: A Spiritual Scientific Portrait*, chapter 1.

At age twenty-two Franklin wrote his *Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion*, shortly followed by a resolve to form a "United party for Virtue." For his own spiritual progress he devised to follow thirteen virtues—temperance, order, silence, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility—rigorously in weekly succession; each virtue was thus practiced four times a year. He also devised to experiment in abstaining from meat and alcohol. Franklin went on to offer contributions to science, technology, even art; but most of all he provided the vision and social wisdom that fostered the birth of the new nation.

Another important American spiritual leader of modern time is Bill Wilson of Alcoholics Anonymous.¹⁵ His life incarnated a pattern of genius and failure. Abandoned from his parents at an early age, Bill displayed a unique personality with gifts of intellect and leadership, and even artistic capacities. He distinguished himself for courage, initiative, and unique insights. But alcohol plagued him, and any successful pursuit was doomed to fail in the long, or even short term. In recognition of his utter loss of control, in 1927 he signed off all his legal rights to his wife, Lois. Shortly after he met with his friend Ebby Thacher, who had been C. G. Jung's patient for about one year. Jung had warned him that given his condition, only a spiritual experience could save him.¹⁶ Ebby had joined the Oxford Group, an evangelical progressive group intent on practicing personal self-transformation. Bill confided that after he met Ebby, he knew "at once I must find an experience like his, or die."¹⁷ Along the way Bill was further helped by Doctor Silkworth of Towns Hospital, who ministered to his health and directed him to William James's book *The Varieties of Spiritual Experience*.

¹⁵ A portrayal of Bill Wilson's life and work has been offered in *A Revolution of Hope: Spirituality, Cultural Renewal and Social Change*, chapter 6. The further reaches and esoteric aspects of his work are explored in *Searching for the Spirit of the West*, chapter 9: "America and the Transformation of the Will."

¹⁶ AA Grapevine, Inc., *Spiritual Awakenings: Journeys of the Spirit from the Pages of the AA Grapevine*, 14–15.

¹⁷ AA Grapevine, *Spiritual Awakenings*, 16.

In 1934 Bill had reached the last stages of alcoholism and was facing the prospect of imminent death. In desperation over his now deeply organic inability to change, Bill turned to God:

My depression deepened unbearably and finally it seemed to me as though I were at the bottom of the pit. I still gagged badly on the notion of a Power greater than myself, but finally, just for the moment, the last vestige of my proud obstinacy was crushed. All at once I found myself crying out, "If there is a God, let Him show Himself! I am ready to do anything, anything!" Suddenly the room lit up with a great white light. I was caught up into an ecstasy which there are no words to describe. It seemed to me, in my mind's eye, that I was on a mountain and that a wind not of air but of spirit was blowing. And then it burst upon me that I was a free man. Slowly the ecstasy subsided. I lay on the bed, but now for a time I was in another world, a new world of consciousness. All about me and through me there was a wonderful feeling of Presence, and I thought to myself, "So this is the God of the preachers!" A great peace stole over me and I thought, "No matter how wrong things seem to be, they are still all right. Things are all right with God and His world."¹⁸

After the spiritual experience Bill stopped drinking all at once. When the demon of alcohol reared its head anew, Bill providentially met Dr. Bob Smith, a fellow alcoholic, whose growing friendship formed the symbolic marker of the beginning of Alcoholics Anonymous, a spiritual fellowship of immense worldwide importance for all who suffer from alcohol or other addictions. The writing of *The Big Book* and the forming of the Alcoholic Foundation rendered the A.A. Fellowship a formal reality a few years later.

¹⁸ Alcoholics Anonymous, *The Big Book*, 1957 edition, 63.

Closer yet in time we find Martin Luther King Jr, who is known for many of his singular gifts and achievements, though by and large not for his spiritual experiences.¹⁹ This is because they lay buried in his biographical accounts where they can easily be missed. One needs to tarry on certain aspects of his biography and his own accounts in order to give weight to his words and draw the logical conclusions. Sometimes his own flowery phrases could be construed as allegories, whereas they are actual experiences.

MLK was a unique thinker and was interested in a Hegelian dialectic pursuit in all his academic research. This led him to study Christianity and reconcile in thought its diametrical opposite stances. When confronted with two extremes, he could see value in either and intuitively gravitated toward an integration of opposites, which we can call *polarities*. In this he was rendering possible the play of thesis and antithesis, by finding a synthesis placed at a higher level of the two premises. Three examples will suffice here. In one such instance King placed against each other Christian liberalism against the views of conservatives such as Reinhold Niebuhr. He found a synthesis in the avowal of his naïve belief in human reason, realizing that reason alone had to be accompanied by faith in order to change human nature. No doubt his own conflicted nature and the weight of his personal battle against sexual addiction played a role in the background of this realization. This is what he recognized as the Jekyll and Hyde nature of the soul that he found mirrored in himself.

The same approach led him to find a middle way between idealism, the belief in immutable sets of values and moral relativism, assigning this canon to the individual but dissolving any possible ground of certainty at the same time. He found a synthesis in personalism, or personal idealism, in effect a convergence toward ethical individualism. Finally, in his PhD dissertation he explored the divergent views of transcendent and immanent

¹⁹ The figure of Martin Luther King Jr is explored in *Legends & Stories for a Compassionate America*, chapter 6, "Martin Luther King: Moral and Cultural Leader."

Christianity, the first represented by Paul Tillich, the second by Henry Nelson Wieman. He argued that transcendentalism negated individualism, whereas Wieman could not offer a synthesis out of all the parts he put forth. He argued that "a more adequate view is to hold a quantitative pluralism and a qualitative monism. In this way oneness and many-ness are preserved."²⁰ Here as elsewhere King was a champion of integrating polarities. The same synthesis of opposites became his practical tool for the achievement of civil rights. In nonviolence, following Gandhi's precepts and experience, lay reconciled at a higher level passivity and violence, in a way that bypasses the destructiveness of the first and the ineffectiveness of the latter.

MLK's spiritual experiences emerged from meeting the challenge and fear of death, very real for one who was battling racial prejudice in the South of the fifties and sixties. In brushes with death he discovered the nearness of Christ, which made the experience of the spirit both fully transcendent but also intimately personal. In the brief experience of the spirit he did not lose awareness of Self, nor grounding in the here and now.

After the police started harassing the Montgomery carpool, King landed in jail for the first time. After his release, hate letters often signed KKK, obscene phone calls, and more threats left King very insecure, scared, and guilty about submitting his family to these ordeals. He turned to prayer and reported that he "felt something, a presence, a stirring in himself." He felt a voice was speaking to him offering him quiet assurance: "Martin Luther King, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And, lo, I will be with you, even unto the end of the world." He saw lightning flash and heard thunder roar. He recognized this as the voice of Jesus who "promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No, never alone. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone." Facing reality

²⁰ Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: A Life of Martin Luther King*, 47.

anew, he felt stronger and concluded, "I can stand up without fear. I can face anything."²¹ Didn't the calming presence he felt in the spirit represent the meeting point of transcendence and immanence that he had struggled to apprehend in his PhD? A similar episode followed shortly after.

A final experience has been rendered famous by the speech MLK pronounced shortly before his death in Memphis, while working on his Poor People's Campaign. During the lead-up to the speech, the civil rights leader had felt quite depressed. On April 3, 1968, a reluctant King took the stage to deliver his famous speech. In it he reviewed many biographical milestones: the time when he had been stabbed in New York ten years earlier; the sit-ins and the Freedom Rides; the fights of Albany and of Birmingham; the "I Have a Dream" speech; the movement in Selma. Was King retracing the life tableau a person sees upon dying? In what seemed like a foreknowledge of death and an affirmation of life, King concluded: "Now, it doesn't really matter what happens now . . . because I've been to the mountaintop . . . and I've seen the Promised Land. . . . I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. . . . I have a dream this afternoon that the brotherhood of man will become a reality." And he finished, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, free at last!"

What has been said about these three leaders could be multiplied for many other important American figures, such as Daily Starr²² or George Ritchie,²³ to name a few remarkable individuals.

²¹ Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound*, 283.

²² For an overview of his life and life-changing spiritual experience, go to *Seeing through Harry Potter's Eyes: Bridging Reality and Imagination*, chapter 4, available at <https://millenniumculmination.net/legends-and-stories-for-a-compassionate-america.pdf>. For more see Starr Daily's autobiography, *Release*.

²³ George Ritchie, *Return from Tomorrow*.

The Anglo-American Mission

The Consciousness Soul posits the existential choice between the death of the soul or the recognition of the spirit. But it can only gain spiritual certainty through experience. It is indicative of the nature of the Consciousness Soul in the West to see how this meeting with the forces of death offers a turning point in the lives of individuals who most likely carry the inspiration of initiations in previous lives, though these do not show as such in modern time.

The quandary of the utter separation from the spirit lay for the English-speaking people in the Consciousness Soul striving for mastery over everything of the physical world. This is why they excel in modern science and technology, and political, economic, and social forms.

Rudolf Steiner saw this tension among the Anglo-American people expressed in the contrast between

- the puritanical stream, which, although the word is limiting, describes "all that is excellent in the British nation," and
- the imperialistic stream, which started to overpower the puritanical one at the end of the 1800s.²⁴

Steiner goes on to say that the British have a genius in the realm of political, economic, and social thinking. Through it they are able to create political structures and organizations that honor individual freedom to a high degree. For this they are rightly admired by other nations. These capacities are lacking among the Russian and Slav people, who on the other hand are preparing the first stages of the advent of the sixth cultural epoch. And esoteric knowledge of this polarity can be used for nationalistic and egotistic purposes, as has indeed been the case. In order to promote Americanism,

²⁴ Rudolf Steiner, *The Karma of Untruthfulness*, volume 2, 31.

the natural capacities of the West have been used for imperialism and global dominance. These are social forms that enslave nations to empires and the individual to the state and to the realm of Ahriman.

What has been said about the British resonates to a large extent with the American soul. Like its British counterpart, this one lives much more in the transformation and distillation of the meaning of experience than in the search for ultimate meaning. What the American soul struggles with is not to be found in the path of knowledge, where the soul would need to pierce through the veil of the senses and reformulate science. Of what transformation is needed in this realm Steiner has spoken at length, witness just one of his indications: "We must understand that strength and energy, perseverance, and a holy enthusiasm are necessary to transform into spirituality the intellectualism which, after all, belongs to the present age."²⁵ This mighty enterprise has been the pursuit of the German spirit, hardly that of the American.

We will hardly see any more American philosophers or Goethean scientists of caliber than we will find them in the UK. The vanguard of American culture is to be found in social entrepreneurs, practitioners, or visionaries, like the three pioneers whose spiritual experiences and work we described. We will also look at others. But first we must recognize the nature of the challenges that they face. In the fifth post-Atlantean epoch anything of a social nature has to fight for its establishment and continuity against the prevailing antisocial instincts. Antisocial instincts are much stronger than the social ones because individual freedom comes not only from the estrangement from the spirit, but also from the estrangement from one another. At present the individual is torn from the fabric of tradition, ethnic groups, local communities—and nowhere is this as visible as it is in the US. Steiner

²⁵ Rudolf Steiner, *Karmic Relationships*, volume 4, lecture of September 23, 1924.

has offered us many indications about how antisocial instincts can be overcome. And we will see shortly how is this done in the US.

In the American continent the sword of the Ego, which is strongest in the Consciousness Soul, manifests with the tendency toward perennial divisions between individuals, factions, and segments of the population, resulting in extreme polarization. No wonder the American Civil War was the bloodiest of such wars in any nation. And it is hidden from view that the American Revolution was not only a war of independence from British imperialism. It was in great measure a civil war, since it pitted for the most part English-speaking brethren against each other, and revolutionaries against loyalists from among the ranks of the colonists. It divided families and siblings. And is it any wonder then that something similar is reflected at present in the American social scene? Polarization is reaching a fever pitch worldwide, but is hardly anywhere as acute in the Western world as it is in the US.

Here lies the conundrum of the American mission. What is of greatest importance to the American soul presents itself in many places through great and numerous breakthroughs, but is all but drowned by the complete opposite of social disharmony and confusion, which is most immediately visible. This drove Carl Stegman to speak about the "Other America." Likewise in my initial research I referred to a "Hidden America." No doubt the fruits and seeds of this America are gifts for the future.

Overcoming Antisocial Tendencies

To understand what it means to face the social abyss of the present, we need only refer to some basic phenomena that Rudolf Steiner highlighted. I will here bring forward only the main lines of inquiry.²⁶ For this we will refer to the archetypal social phenomenon, to the creation of imaginations

²⁶ An in-depth look at the "social path" is explored in *Karl Julius Schröer and Rudolf Steiner: Anthroposophy and the Teachings of Karma and Reincarnation*, available at https://millenniumculmination.net/Steiner_and_Schroer.pdf. See especially chapters 3, 4, and 7.

of Self and other human beings that help us overcome separation and antagonism from the perspective of the lower Ego. Finally we will look at how this overcoming can be addressed in the social realm through the help of the hierarchic spiritual beings that Steiner called the “new group souls.”

The archetypal social phenomenon has a central place in anthroposophic social science. Our social impulses are strongest in our sleep, when we are least conscious. In wanting to stay awake we manifest our antisocial tendencies; in fact, developing a sense of our true self is the prevalent mission of the present time. This antisocial tendency, even necessity, contributes to illness in our bodies. The social nature in us contributes to our healing, and that cannot be done without going to sleep, to a certain degree.²⁷ This principle explains, in great measure, why socialization is both one of our time’s greatest yearnings and greatest difficulties. The assertion of the antisocial impulses will continue for many more centuries—in fact, up until the thirtieth century. We must therefore learn to know others more consciously. This cannot be done through the subconscious, in our feelings. Our current of antipathies and sympathies does not guide us into an understanding of the other any better than our thinking does. In our will, we direct our actions through what we call love, which for the most part is self-love. This self-love is antisocial, and can be transformed only through self-discipline.

How then are we supposed to develop what our natural constitution in the age of the Consciousness Soul most naturally resists? To overcome our natural antisocial tendencies in the encounter with others, we must move away from our natural inclination to form concepts about the being of the other, and move toward developing images.²⁸ Through imaginations, we will acquire a deeper faculty of empathy. Steiner insists that in the future, the social life can be founded only on a development of our imagination.

²⁷ Steiner, *The Challenge of the Times*, lecture of December 6, 1918.

²⁸ Rudolf Steiner, *The Challenge of the Times*, December 6, 1918, lecture

When we meet another person, a picture should arise from the other person. "But this requires of course the heightened interest that I have often described to you as the foundation of social life, in which each person should take in the other person." Here, we must find the social impulses. In fact, Steiner reaches even further, into a description of the sacramental aspect of this type of encounter; he calls it "the capacity to be mystically stimulated" in the encounter with another human being.²⁹

For the purpose of strengthening this social path, Steiner devised a number of exercises that were offered with great consistency in the years 1918 to 1924 and more fragmentarily here and there in the previous years, for example, in the Neuchatel 1911–12 lectures about Christian Rosenkreutz.³⁰ Most of these exercises are offered, not surprisingly, in lectures about the social question, uniting thus in conscious fashion the personal experience of the forces of destiny with the attempt to promote the newly advocated threefold social order.

Those I have called "karmic exercises" look at self and other individuals with two mutually reinforcing goals.³¹ On one hand we can start looking at our life with more detachment by disidentifying with our lower Ego and the false securities it offers us; our race, upbringing, national culture, religion, social status, profession, life-connections, "fortune" or "misfortune", etc. On the other hand the exercises systematically teach us to look at individuals in our lives in ways that eschew sympathy and antipathy, likes and dislikes, and move toward the creation of living imaginations. Seeing under this light we don't meet "good" or "bad" people, but living imaginations that

²⁹ Rudolf Steiner, *The Challenge of the Times*, December 7, 1918, lecture.

³⁰ See *Esoteric Christianity and the Mission of Christian Rosenkreutz*, especially the lectures "The True Attitude to Karma" of February 8, 1912, and "Intimate Workings of Karma" of February 9, 1912.

³¹ For a comprehensive review of these exercises and ways to render them more accessible to the individual see *The Journey of Spirit Recollection A Handbook for the Practice of Steiner's Karmic Exercises*, available at <https://millenniumculmination.net/spirit-recollection-journey.pdf>.

continuously evolve, and we can make room for this evolution. We can behold those we meet with imaginations that can continuously grow in our souls, or fall into stereotypes, rash judgments, condemnation, all the traps that the antisocial instincts of the Consciousness Soul have set in place and with which we will live for a long time still. The path goes even further. The two previous steps naturally converge toward the goal of taking full responsibility for our lives. If we can separate from identification with our lower Ego and can behold living imaginations of other human beings, then the fabric of human relationships lay open to the understanding of the karmic intentions, encounters and accidents that our "other self" has laid in store for our lives. We begin to reach the inescapable conclusion that we are solely responsible for our lives.

What Steiner is telling us is that there is no way out at the present other than through a consciously pursued path of personal development. Something needs to be done consciously to keep antisocial tendencies at bay, something other than good intentions. What is said about interpersonal matters extends to the working of larger groups, communities, and organizations. Here come into being those who Steiner calls the "new group souls," the hierarchic beings operating in our time in all group pursuits that are striving consciously, all the more so when the striving is accompanied with spiritual awareness. Steiner was in effect referring to the first Anthroposophical Society when he said the following:

An emancipated human being possesses his individual soul, which is never lost when it has once been attained. But when men find themselves together in voluntary associations, they group themselves around centers. The feelings streaming in this way to a center once more give beings the opportunity of working as a kind of group soul, though in quite a different sense from the early group souls. All the earlier group souls were beings who made man unfree. These new beings, however, are compatible with man's

complete freedom and individuality. Indeed, in a certain respect we may say that they support their existence on human harmony; it will lie in the souls of men themselves whether or not they give as many as possible of such higher souls the opportunity of descending to man. The more that men are divided, the fewer lofty souls will descend into the human sphere. The more that associations are formed where feelings of fellowship are developed with complete freedom, the more lofty beings will descend and the more rapidly the earthly planet will be spiritualized.³²

We will pursue now the theme of the social path as it emerges in the front-lines of the new American culture.

Transforming Social Reality

We have seen three individuals who contributed to American culture, and in order to do so had to meet at the abyss with the prospect of physical death. Literally at the end of the physical they met the spirit, before reemerging to life with new meaning and zest. But we can also see further commonalities from these three examples.

Franklin was a multifaceted genius and did in effect offer contributions to science. But these were rather fragmentary. No urge took hold of his soul in trying to overcome the confinement of the senses and create a bridge to the spirit in the realm of sciences. No, his major contribution lay in showing America that another social reality was possible than that of the British Empire, a social contract in which the individual would not be subsumed by the government, a noble experiment in upholding self-evident truths, as his co-written Declaration of Independence advances. Franklin upheld these ideals without personal attachment in order to educate his fellow Americans to the creation of a new social construct. He had to find his equals and let

³² Steiner, *The Influence of Spiritual Beings upon Man*, lecture of June 1, 1908.

go of the attachment to his ideas in order for something to emerge that would be the result of the pursuit of many.

From Franklin's diplomatic work in France emerged the delicate international diplomacy and loose political alliances that put the new nation on the map, so to speak. Finally, when a new political form had to emerge, Franklin was one of the few who could encompass in his mind and hold at bay the range of tensions that were at play—primarily small versus large states, slaveholders versus free states. Franklin had the wisdom, the patience, humor, and tenacity to hold all emotions at bay, share pearls of wisdom when needed, and trust that the spirit would create a path for all the ex-colonies. From the Revolution to the Constitutional Convention and the emergence of the federal government, he played a key role like no other, except George Washington.

Bill Wilson is rightly credited with the path that allows one to journey from alcohol addiction to sobriety coupled with a meaningful life of continued spiritual practice. The twelve steps were greatly inspired by his own spiritual experience, but they would not have reached as vast a public as they did were it not for a group process in which countless individuals were involved. Bill Wilson could not have reached such a large goal had he been driven by a strongly assertive personality. He displayed a unique collaborative genius.

The same is all the more true when we move our gaze from the individual to the A.A. single group, and from the groups to the Fellowship as a whole. The Twelve Traditions for the first and the Twelve Concepts for the latter bear all in all the stamp of Bill Wilson's genius. However, here too social vision could only take place through social tact. The Twelve Traditions shaped an unprecedented way of working, which upheld service and anonymity. To this day it is remarkable to register that A.A. and all Twelve Step programs are incredibly effective, while being free, self-managed,

nonprofessional, and anonymous. Bill Wilson had to negotiate the Twelve Traditions with his fellow recovering alcoholics and sacrifice cherished personal dreams in the process. The Twelve Concepts offer us an incredible social architecture encompassing every possible polarity. Bill Wilson championed them over decades. His vision emerged from the pressing needs that he felt keenly and most of his colleagues ignored. They evolved through sheer trial and error and an effort of continuous education. We will return to them.

When it comes to Martin Luther King Jr, his recent role is more familiar to all of us. Here was an individual with a truly encompassing view of philosophy and its relationship to Christianity, and a practical mind versed in problems of strategy and tools for social change. He walked the delicate balance of charismatic personal leadership and collective, essentially self-led pursuit. He did not obscure the strength of the movement with a heavy hand of leadership. He accepted many painful setbacks when the base was not ready to accept his generous vision—e.g., in instances when violence erupted. He acted essentially as an educator.

What MLK saw better than any in the civil rights movement was the importance of a movement keeping independence from political factions. He steered a middle way in which social change came from a cultural perspective, in his instance his deeply held Christian faith being the engine. To this day the civil rights movement stands out as a singular event in the history of social change in this land. And this is because here was a movement deeply rooted in spiritual values, be it the faith of many of its leaders or the commitment to the spiritual growth that comes from engaging nonviolently, accepting to suffer the evil to transform it in one's soul.

Over the space of three centuries, these three personalities have much to tell us about what lives in the American soul and what it can offer to the world. We could say that they show us what it means to overcome the

scourge of the lower Ego's antisocial tendencies in the time of the Consciousness Soul. They have worked at producing social reality that runs contrary to the natural gradient of the Ego, so to speak, giving space for the social instincts to temporarily overcome the prevailing antisocial tendencies. They have made it possible to make recourse to social structures that bring out the best of the individual for the welfare of the whole. They have embodied examples of the experiential spirituality that lives in America, to which we turn now.

American Pragmatism: Experiential Spirituality

Living the American spirituality from within seemed a fortuitous journey for me—I wasn't looking for it. This is probably how most Americans would find it, as running first and foremost in the American mind is the emphasis on what works and what solutions can address practical problems. Such was my journey as well.

I embarked on the search for tools to help me overcome my personal relationship blockages. Because I have been involved in community living for the most part of the last forty years, I also looked at methodologies that would address the blind spots of living together. Even though this journey is still continuing, it has led me to the heart of what I now call American spirituality.

So why do I call it so? What gives me that right? The hallmark of many approaches I will highlight is that many individuals, including myself, embark on similar journeys with the concrete goals of improving relationships, mutual understanding, communication, facilitation, decision-making and other *practical* challenges of the common life. It has been my experience that along the line I realized I got more than I bargained for. And these experiences that I have discussed and compared with many other individuals are what I have called *spiritual awakenings*. An example: I took on four hundred hours of training in all aspects of Nonviolent Communication,

including mediation and coaching, and after four to six months first one experience and then another led me to realize that once I got past the prosaic method to the consciousness that lies behind it, I experienced that human relationships are the doorway to a concrete experience of the spirit that lives, however dimly, in our higher selves. Where a conflict lived that seemed beyond resolution, a new door opened to deeper connection that dissolved even the memory of the conflict. Truly the stream of the future was tangibly at work. Where an individual faced a seeming dead-end, even the prospect of death, I have seen sudden transformations and resolutions inspired by the presence of the new group souls.

When I revise this field of transformational experience, I can order it according to a criterion of size. I will move from the personal to the interpersonal to the group and organizational dimension, and even beyond, through the archetypes that unify the whole field of experience.

This exploration was made possible by my inner journey through support groups, Nonviolent Communication, facilitation approaches, and governance methodologies—in effect everything that encompasses how the individual is supported by groups, how individuals can support each other to better communicate and interact, and how stakeholders can better interact among each other for better decision-making, increased mutual comfort, and positive outcomes.

Breakthroughs in the understanding of the whole field came through the work of Coenraad van Houten's Destiny Learning and through the research that led to Otto Scharmer's writing of *Theory U*. Here were two individuals working at the two extremes of this vast field. On one hand lies the understanding of the deeper roots of individual behavior in what can be apprehended of causes in previous lives; at the other, working at large-scale transformation within or between organizations. In effect Destiny Learning is no other than Rudolf Steiner's three nights/four day exercise or "greater

karma exercise” applied in a group setting with the help of observation, artistic exercises, facilitation, and mutual support. Otto Scharmer looked at the field of collaboration within and between organizations of all sizes around common goals. Both Scharmer and van Houten came to the very same archetype. Van Houten spoke of the seven life processes. When Otto Scharmer speaks of the seven steps of the U, he is in effect referring to the same archetype emerging from the field of experience.

Scharmer’s Uwas popularized in a way that addresses practical needs. I have given elsewhere the larger picture of the link of the seven life processes and their transformation from the physical realm—the growth of the individual in the first 21 years—to the soul realm, which extends to social processes.³³ For the purpose of this exploration I will look at Scharmer’s approach, one that keeps closest to the American approach and spirit.

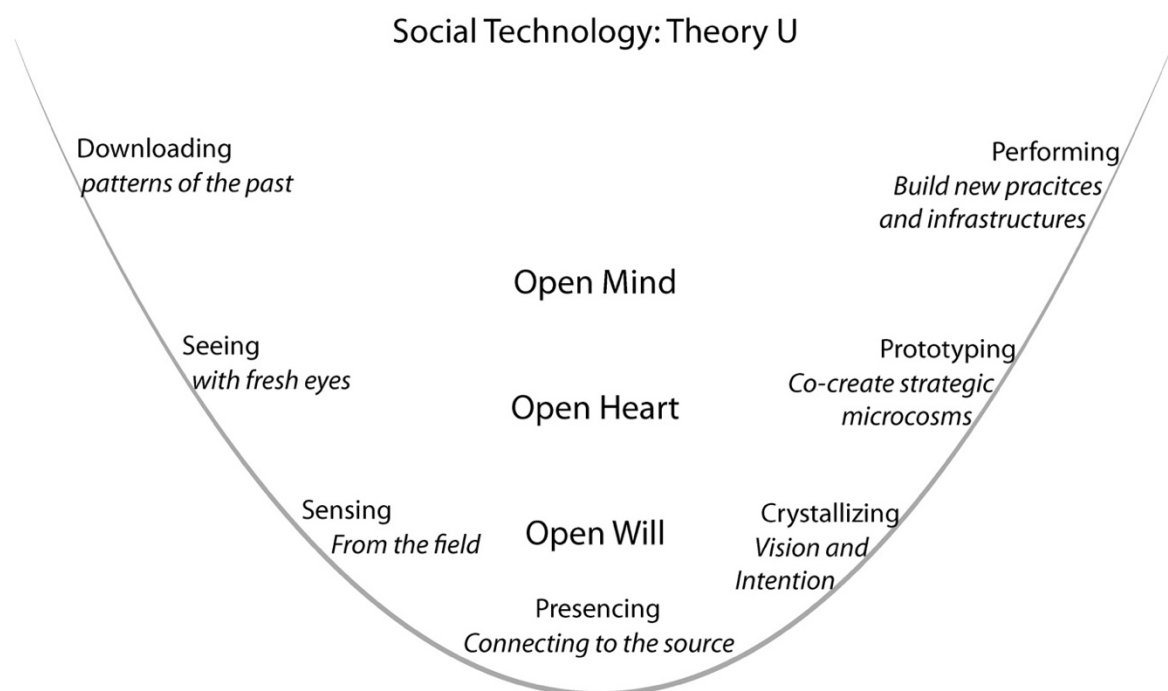


Figure 1: steps of Theory U

³³ See *Karl Julius Schröer and Rudolf Steiner: Anthroposophy and the Teachings of Karma and Reincarnation*, chapter 7, available at https://millenniumculmination.net/Steiner_and_Schroer.pdf.

What Otto Scharmer says in looking at social processes is that in order to move forward with the new group souls and with the stream of the future, we need to invite all stakeholders implicated in a common goal, and we need to invite the whole human being. Let us look at the second proposition before returning later on to the first.

If we want to achieve full participation of all individuals in decisions that are taken together—if we want to maximize participation and buy-in—we need to move through the layers of the soul in a certain order: through the Open Mind, Open Heart, Open Will. We manage to achieve a moment of so-called presencing when the stream of the future speaks to us, as it were. This means that we must avoid the most common trap of moving from perception of facts to action while bypassing the realm of emotions, concerns, biases, prejudices, etc., in the belief that we can thus be more efficient. This is such a cultural and global modus operandi that it forms the blind spot of most of humanity, including most spiritual movements and many of our circles. We are automatically subsumed within the blind spot of modern humanity, the quandary of the isolation of the Consciousness Soul, unless we make a special effort not to be so.

What this means in practice when working with large groups is a willingness to reconstruct facts and data together, the stage of the Open Mind. In social matters, only the whole can have a perception of the whole, and retracing the complexity of the basic facts has both a humbling effect and a constructive one. Humbling, because each one of us can realize the limitations of personal or stakeholder perceptions; constructive, because all of a sudden we have a better understanding of reality and can be grateful to the contributions of others.

When we move to the Open Heart, we are invited to being vulnerable with each other, to participate individually without hiding behind a mask or role. We can perceive more clearly what role we play as individuals and,

especially, as stakeholders in perpetuating the problems of the system. We can thus take personal/stakeholder responsibility without assigning blame or faults to others. It also becomes clear in the process what the various stakeholders will need in order to find working solutions.

If the two previous steps have been honored with the wisdom of tested processes—of which more shortly—then the third step of the Open Will becomes easier. We can let go of previous assumptions and attachment to favored solutions and truly collaborate with others at new, audacious proposals that will work for all. In an atmosphere of mutual trust, it will become far easier than normally to find solutions that honor everybody's needs. When that happens, there is a tangible experience in any given group of a presence larger than personal or corporate, the presence of the spirit that wants to help us move forward because we have honored its presence among us. This is what Scharmer has called "presencing," from the merging of the words *presence* and *sensing*.

Presencing puts us in touch with the new group souls in ways that can only be partially apprehended by any given individual. Referring to large-scale interventions, single practitioners offer us facets of the whole. Betty Sue Flowers indicates: "When I am part of a social field that crosses the threshold at the bottom of the U, it feels as if I am participating in the birth of a new world. It's a profound, quieting experience in that I feel as if I've been touched by eternal beauty. There is a deep opening of my higher Self." For Joseph Jaworski, "moving through the bottom of the U is becoming aware of the incredible beauty of life itself, of becoming re-enchanted with the world. . . . When the sort of commitment you are talking about happens, you feel as if you're fulfilling your destiny, but you also feel as if you're freer than you've ever been in your life. It's a huge paradox." Otto Scharmer expresses it thus: "Moving through the bottom of EU is becoming aware of the incredible beauty of life itself, of becoming reenchanted with the world. . . . Presencing opens and connects you with a larger, underlying

field that goes beyond what exists now and opens up this great power and beauty.”³⁴ We are speaking in effect of how the individual can make contact in special moments with the overarching reality of the new group soul. The facilitator can only create the conditions for such a meeting, not predict the outcome.

On the other side of the U lie other steps that we will only explore briefly in this essay. Step 5 is the one that Otto Scharmer calls “crystallizing,” or consolidating and selecting from the ideas that have the greatest potential. From these will emerge those through which the organization, or the network of organizations, will start “prototyping” (step 6), which is to say launching small initiatives that can be replicated and scaled once they are successful. This is done with the awareness and support of the whole, which lends it greater likeliness of success. Finally “performing” (step 7) means iterating through all the above steps, which is rendered possible when this way of working becomes part of the organizational culture. Performing can be done through the formation of ad hoc, process-oriented groups, whose sole aim is to preserve the integrity of the processes and make sure they build upon each other on a continuous basis.

The U Working at the Individual Level

Americans like to work at personal problems with the support of a group. In my experience it was the work with men’s groups that introduced me to this dimension of personal change. And support groups are, generally speaking, a simplified version of what is done to support each other around life and death issues, such as those revolving around substance addictions, and more and more behavioral or technological addictions. I’m speaking here of Alcoholics Anonymous and its Twelve Step process.³⁵

³⁴ Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers, *Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organizations and Society*, 111, 113.

³⁵ For a spiritual scientific understanding of Twelve Steps, see *Searching for the Spirit of the West*, chapter 9.

I sometimes say jokingly that Twelve Steps could just as well be called Seven Steps because its archetype revolves around the seven life processes, hence its incredible efficiency. Apart from the lawfulness of the groupings below, there is ground for this subdivision in seven in Wilson's recognition that he broke down some steps, especially the initial ones, in order to make them easier for the individual in recovery. Let us see where we find such correspondences between seven and twelve:

Step 1 of the seven life processes = *steps 1 to 3* of Twelve Steps

Step 2 = *steps 4 to 7*

Step 3 = *steps 8 to 9*

Step 4: presencing, the "silent" step, the least visible because completely spiritual, not mentioned among the twelve

Step 5 = *step 10*

Step 6 = *step 11*

Step 7 = *step 12* (see the whole in figure 2)

These correspondences are summarized in figure 2. Let us see why this regrouping. *Steps 1 to 3* indicate: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable; Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity; Made a decision to turn our will and our lives to the care of God as we understood him." These are all steps of a change of mind, an important and difficult deed for an alcoholic whose life has become completely self-centered. Opening oneself to contemplate a higher power corresponds to what we have called the Open Mind.

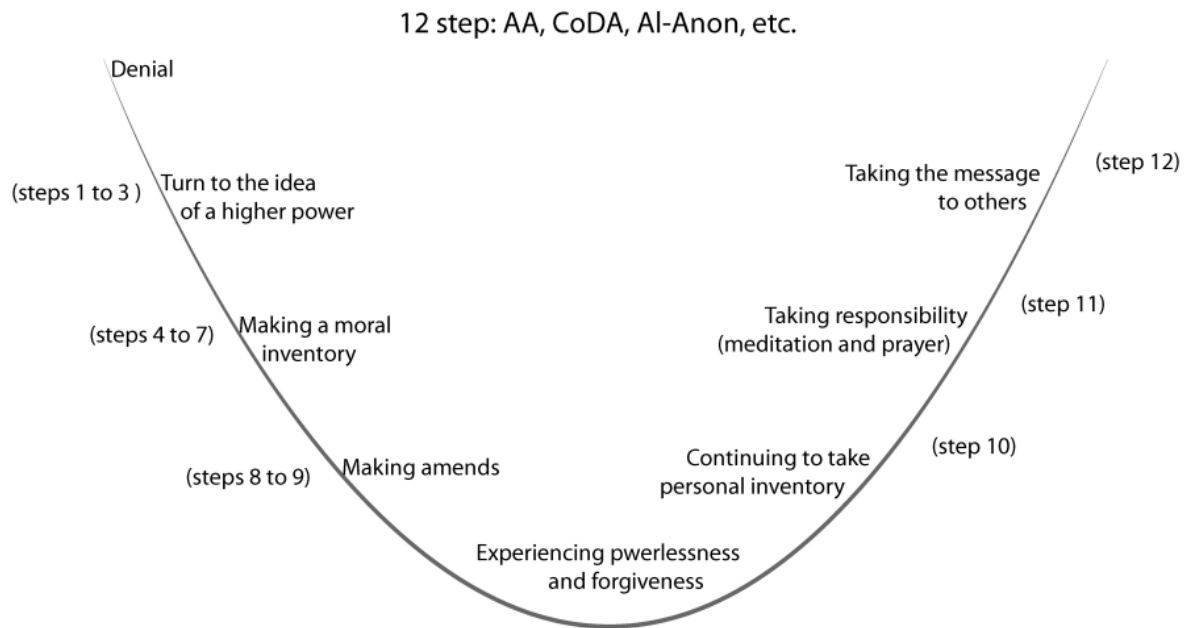


Figure 2: Twelve Steps

Step 4 to 7 say: “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves; Admitted to God, ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs; Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character; Humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings.” In effect once we have made room for God we can now move from thinking to feeling, to the key recognition of our own shortcomings and to taking full responsibility for our lives. The presence of a group is a great support in this soul-searching effort. This corresponds to the stage of the Open Heart.

Steps 8 and 9 move a step further and deeper: “Made a list of all persons we harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all; Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.” Here besides the group, the help of the mentor becomes essential because we are moving into the will, into the supremely humbling act of asking for forgiveness and forgiving ourselves. The Open Will implies a further stage of humility, one of emptying oneself of all expectations. It leads naturally to the central stage of presencing, the silent

central step of the seven life processes. In utter powerlessness we build a bridge between our lower Ego and the higher Self, which is made possible through the presence of Christ. In surrender we discover the true power of the higher Self, however tenuous and temporary this connection may be. Through the above steps we come to the equivalent of the experience that Bill Wilson was vouchsafed in a very brief space of time. The alcoholic has to undergo it over much longer time, a very variable one from individual to individual.

When we move to the other side of the U, we leave behind the personal transformation we have achieved and work at consolidating its results—at making sure we do not fall back into the traps of the past and that we keep working at maintaining a meaningful life, the only achievement that can counter the force of addiction.

Steps 5 to 7 (*steps 10 to 12* of the twelve) correspond to the metamorphosis of Open Mind, Open Heart, and Open Will, but in reverse. In step 5 (*step 10*) we exert will to maintain what we have established after the experience of presencing. We continue to take personal inventory. We deepen in the will the resolve we have taken that has led us to the turning point (Open Will). Next, in step 6 (*step 11*) we honor the heart's desire for a new quality of lived experience, that of incorporating meditation and prayer, efforts calling to the forces of the heart (Open Heart). We acknowledge that only spiritual practice can lead us away from addictive habits. Finally all of this is crowned by step 7 (*step 12*), of deliberately enlarging our mental horizons. Taking the message to others means fully embracing the culture of change we have embarked upon, which is based on exerting our will energetically, while knowing we can only do this because of the support of the group and of the A.A. Fellowship. It means enshrining a new culture of which our life is an integral part (Open Mind) and taking responsibility about it. Incidentally, offering our help to others is also a guarantee for maintaining our own health.

It is through the group that the individual can emerge from alcoholism, but this is done in such a way that nobody needs to delegate or abandon personal responsibility, freedom, and independence. But the group would be of no practical help, were it not because it holds antisocial impulses at bay effectively. The Twelve Traditions emerged as a response to all initial problems; they were the wisdom of trial and error gathered in by Bill Wilson. They predicate that the groups be self-supporting and free, that they be anonymous, nonprofessional, and separate from any other cultural endeavors, be these religious, cultural, or political.

The U Working at the Relational Level

When it comes to relationships, we have to rely on the spoken word and its power to heal or wound. Here we can notice that what we express to each other in conversation relates to the areas of thinking, feeling, and willing, or, expressed slightly differently, through thinking we relate to the realms of observation, feeling, and willing. By *willing* is meant at first what lives in the soul. The movement of the first three steps is completed when the will turns outward and makes a request of the other person.

At each stage of this progression lies a danger of misinterpretation and confusion. It is a danger that we face both within our soul and in expressing ourselves with the other person. Because in our lower Ego we are constantly under the influence of our double, a special vigilance needs to be exerted in figuring out what is a pure expression of the above four levels and what is a distortion of it. These are the obstacles that Nonviolent Communication helps us navigate and overcome.³⁶

³⁶ For more detail see *Visions for a Compassionate America*, chapter 2, available at <https://millenniumculmination.net/visions-for-a-compassionate-america.pdf>.

When we offer an observation, we run the risk of mixing accurate description of facts with interpretations, without noticing the difference by simply using language in an elastic, inaccurate way. When we describe our feeling life, we can mix feelings with judgments of self and others, failing to notice the difference. When we express our will, we reach into the universal realm of our needs/values. Values such as appreciation, understanding, autonomy, integrity, and freedom place us on the ground of universal experience that cannot be disputed, even though it lives very differently in each individual. Problems arise when values/needs are confused with the strategies we are attached to in order to fulfill them. We need to separate one from the other and speak in more universal terms, solely from the ground of our values/needs. Finally, the will can formulate a request or a demand. The difference lies in a quality of invitation and openness that a request has, and a demand lacks.

Examples of the above can be offered in more detail, without being exhaustive:

- Observations versus interpretations: generalizations (you always/never do/say something) and stereotypes (women, men, Latinos, English people do or say . . .). True observations support the stage of the Open Mind.
- Feelings versus judgments: describing with words that express disapproval (you are insensitive, selfish, cold, etc.) or feelings of self that attribute intention that cannot be vouchsafed (I feel abandoned, devalued, cheated. . . .). Real feelings allow the unfolding of the Open Heart.
- Needs versus strategies: "I need you to do this or that for me," "I need money," "I need you to be more considerate, gentle."

Expressing universal needs/values, instead of the above strategies, sets the stage for the Open Mind.

- The silent stage of presencing that denotes a real connection has been reached between the two parts.
- Requests versus demands: here the distinction is more subtle. A demand can be phrased as a genuine request. Only the answer the requester offers to a “No” indicates whether it was a true request.

In figure 3 the four levels are arranged according to the steps of a mediation, which carries the process further than a simple conversation. After a successful mediation and defusing of tension—reaching the step of presencing—we can brainstorm for solutions (steps 5), we can choose those strategies that best meet all our needs (step 6), and, finally, put them to the test (step 7) and eventually start the process again from the beginning, but this time at a higher stage.

When we can navigate these various obstacles successfully, we remove from our words the power to sting and hurt. We render our conversation open and inviting, all the more so if we listen empathically and try to discern what lives in the other person at the level of heart and will.

Nonviolent Communication predicates complete reciprocity, a “love your fellow human being *as yourself*.” In other words, complete honesty is no less important than full empathy. Thus a dance is established in expressing ourselves in a manner that invites and furthers appropriate vulnerability. When the method predicated by Nonviolent Communication becomes deeply entrenched in our soul—when it becomes a consciousness—we come to realize, at least mentally, the sheer futility of enforcing our will upon

another person, of manipulating for results, of seeking anything else than mutual satisfaction.

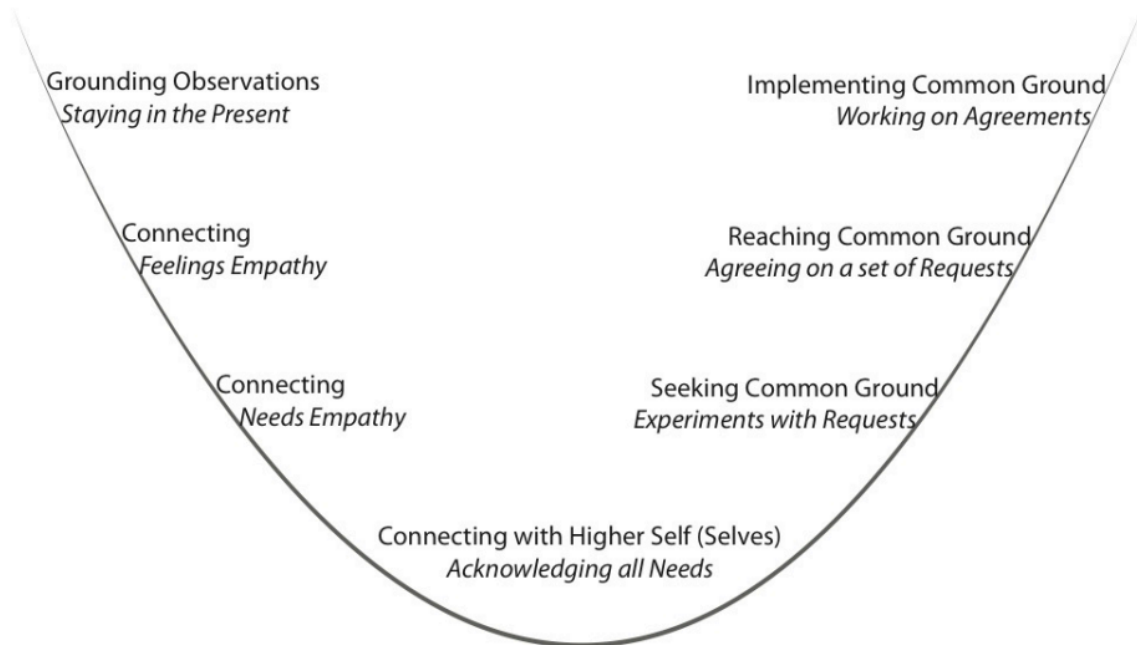


Figure 3: Steps of Nonviolent Communication

With time the new consciousness opens avenues for the perception of the forces of destiny, which live most strongly in our will and in our feelings. We start to recognize the uniqueness of each individual and live according to an ethical individualism that dictates that each relationship be a new field of inquiry, that no two relationships be treated alike. All of this finally means living more fully in the present and listening more carefully to what the future wants of us.

The U Working at the Organizational and Interorganizational Level

The living understanding of the seven life processes, most of the time discovered and applied intuitively, extends to the work within or between organizations. Within an organization, decision-making can be rendered more organically participatory while simultaneously becoming all the more efficient. The work between organizations can be the coming together of

companies, agencies, and nonprofits—even a collaboration between two or three social sectors—for the sake of a common outcome. The work of Otto Scharmer covers many examples in this direction. He has discovered and publicized the organic thread, or archetype, that makes this work productive and has also loosened the need for preset forms, of which more below. Before the publication of his insights, a great variety of approaches in the American experience had already revolutionized the way stakeholders can collaborate within an organization or community, and around common issues. Approaches here considered range from the short, two-hour intervention to two- to three-day gatherings, and they can even be carried out at regular intervals over months and years. They collectively loosely receive the name of “social technology,” especially in relation to the larger-scale interventions.

In other places I have considered examples of the simplest interventions, such as Conversation Cafés or Consensus Decision Making;³⁷ the most playful such as World Cafes;³⁸ those offering a great variety of levels, such as Technology of Participation;³⁹ the more complex, such as Future Search or Theory U itself,⁴⁰ together with examples and success stories of their applications. The list of such approaches grows every decade. *The Change Handbook*, published in 2006, listed some sixty approaches, and not all of those known to the author were included!⁴¹

Below we will consider another example, that of Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was first devised and used at the Cleveland Clinic, as a dissertation for Case Western Reserve University by David Cooperrider

³⁷ See *Accelerating Social Change: Impacting Our World While Transforming Ourselves*, chapter 3.

³⁸ See *Accelerating Social Change*, chapter 3.

³⁹ See *Visions for a Compassionate America*, chapter 3.

⁴⁰ *Accelerating Social Change*, chapter 3.

⁴¹ Peggy Holman, Tom Devane, Steven Cady, William A. Adams, *The Change Handbook: Group Methods for Shaping the Future*.

and his adviser Suresh Srivastva in 1980. Cooperrider decided to focus exclusively on what was positive in the hospital experience. Under the AI lens, whole organizations, teams, or departments are solutions to be embraced rather than a problem to be solved. AI finds a wide range of applications: it can be used for strategic planning, cultural transformation, leadership development, and other goals.

AI posits that our social structures and their evolution are miracles that can never be fully comprehended. More than a method, AI is a way of living with, being with, and participating in the varieties of social structures where it is called to intervene.

AI reverses the positivist paradigm that asks "Does this theory correspond with the observable facts?" into "To what extent does a theory present provocative new possibilities for social action, and to what extent does it stimulate an engaging dialogue about how we can and should organize ourselves?" This is because in social living systems there is no separation between observer and observed, as we can safely assume with inanimate objects, and therefore no moral neutrality. The social scientist can and should ask himself what is good, just, and desirable in social existence, and through bold assumptions help create the world he can later discover.

Two basic questions stand behind any AI initiative:

- What gives life to this system when it is most healthy, alive, and integrated among its stakeholders?
- What are the possibilities, expressed and latent, to provide opportunities for more effective and value-based forms of organizing?

And here are some basic premises:

- Organizations move in the direction of their images of the future.
- Their images of the future are informed by the conversations they hold and the stories they tell.
- The stories they tell are informed by the questions they ask, thus . . .

- The questions we ask are fateful.

In other words, the way we seek to know people, groups, and organizations conditions the outcomes we can generate.

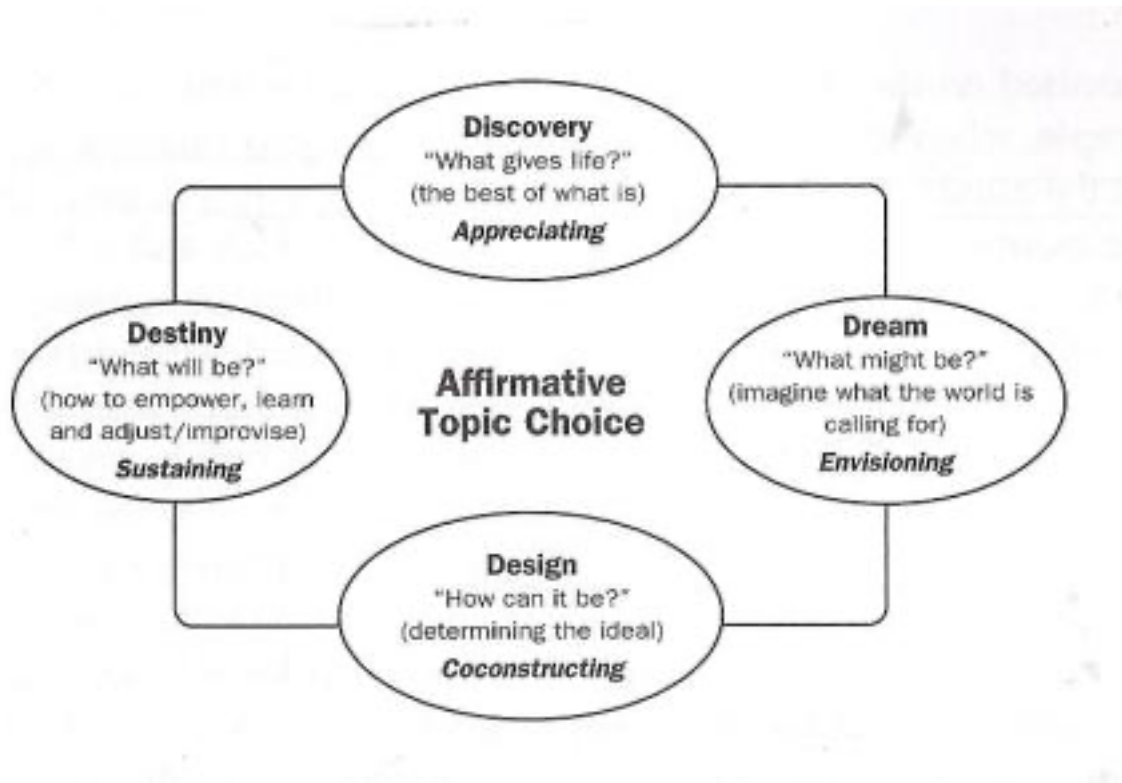


Figure 4: Steps of Appreciative Inquiry

The basic AI model is the following:

- Discovery Phase: appreciating and valuing. Identify the "best of what is," or "what gives life," the so-called positive core. Here is the Open Mind at work.
- Dream Phase: envisioning; a process to detect "what might be." Here we make room for the Open Heart.
- Design Phase: Co-constructing the future. Building on the positive core and the dream allows for co-creating the ideal design of "how it can be." We can design an organizational structure in which the exceptional becomes everyday and ordinary. We move to the Open Will.

- Presencing: the silent phase that is rarely mentioned in any of these processes.
- Destiny Phase: learning, empowering, and improvising to sustain the future. This aspect looks at the implementation of “what will be.” Here we are moving to the other side of the “U.” (See figure 4.)

Discovery Phase

This phase starts with a look at collective peak experiences, and asks what can be learned by looking at even the smallest wins. It requires a thorough collection of data through the forming of a core group, as small as four and as large as twenty-five, involving a microcosm of the whole organization. The core group develops the inquiry architecture and then conducts numerous interviews.

Among the tasks of this group lies the identification of key stakeholders, the groups who have a vested interest and/or a strong impact on the organization’s growth and future. The stakeholders should be well represented in the core group itself.

Next in line lies the crafting of an engaging appreciative question, which in AI is defined by a broad set of criteria. Among other things, it builds on an affirmative topic choice, making ample room for discovery while allowing ambiguity.

The group develops the “Appreciative Interview Guide” along some carefully crafted guidelines. It collects and organizes the data, carefully targeting the best quotes, stories, and practices, illustrations of the “positive core.” Change starts at this stage from the expansion of ideas and perspectives generated by the interviews alone.

Finally the data have to be interpreted and invitingly presented. They can be condensed and displayed in diagrams, charts, tables, pictures, story-books, newsletters, and other visual aids.

Dream Phase

In this phase, financial well-being is as important as social well-being and environmental sustainability. This triple bottom line is best sought through the collaboration of all stakeholders and the reconciliation of those who think of themselves as opposite (e.g., management and labor, corporation-minded and environmentalists). In this phase, "good news stories" are used for starting to paint on the canvas of new possibilities: "It is the image which in fact determines what might be called the current behavior of any organization. The image acts as a field."⁴²

The Dream Phase's objective is to amplify the positive core and expand the organization's true potential. This phase has two goals:

- facilitate dialogue among stakeholders by asking them to share their stories with the entire group, and
- begin to see emerging themes by observing and valuing the stories rather than critiquing and interpreting. All stories are given equal value.

Key activities include some kind of energizing activity (guided visualization, walk, high energy activity, yoga); individual to small-group work; reporting back creative scenarios in a playful manner (a picture, story, skit, commercial, newspaper, song, poem, etc.) with full participation of everybody in the team.

Sample "dream questions" are placed in relation to a target future. One example: it is the year 2050, and you see the world you always wished for.

⁴² Kenneth Boulding, quoted in David L. Cooperrider, Diana Whitney, and Jacqueline M. Stavros, *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook for Leaders of Change*, second edition, 129.

- What do you see?
- What are you doing that makes a difference?
- What do you see as the two or three most significant macrorends emerging?

Design Phase

Here attention turns to creating the ideal organization, the ideal social architecture. This is the stage for crafting *provocative propositions* or *possibility statements* or *design principles*. For this AI uses the best good news stories. "The Design Phase involves the collective construction of the organization's future in terms of provocative propositions based on a chosen social architecture."⁴³

Stages of the Design Phase are:

- Select the design elements (principles) among preset models or launch into new territory. The social architecture addresses the elements such as vision and purpose, governance, leadership/management structure, communication, education, systems and strategies.
- Identify internal and external relationships that need to be considered.
- Engage in dialogue going back to the AI analysis report and the results of the interviews and identify key themes in key relationships.
- Write "Provocative Propositions." First each member writes a preferred provocative proposition. These are shared, and a possibility statement is crafted. Carefully crafted questions ensure that the possibility statements are both daring and innovative, and grounded.

⁴³ Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros, *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook*, 46.

Destiny Phase

The Destiny Phase used to be called Delivery Phase. The term “did not convey the sense of liberation that the AI practitioners were experiencing.”⁴⁴ AI equates this phase to a stage of positive protest or a strategy for positive subversion. It encourages people to turn to those who have the knowledge and the enthusiasm, rather than those who have the titles. This is why it liberates destiny!

The Destiny Phase serves two purposes:

- aligning the organization with the provocative propositions
- building AI competencies into the organizational culture, or building “appreciative learning cultures.”

This is a time of continuous learning, adjustment and improvisation. It corresponds to Scharmer’s stage of “prototyping” in the service of shared ideals. Stakeholders are typically invited into an open-space planning and commitment session. To start prototyping, departments or ad-hoc groups affirm the pursuit of intended actions and ask for organization-wide support from every level.

Once in the Destiny Phase, AI takes the organization back to the Discovery Phase in what becomes an iterative process, going back to the updating and revising of provocative propositions, and holding additional AI interviews with new members or creating new questions.

Once the AI process is placed at the center of the organization’s workings, “At some point, apparently minor positive discoveries connect in an accelerating manner. Suddenly, quantum change, a jump from one state to the next that cannot be achieved through incremental change alone, becomes

⁴⁴ Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros, *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook*, 201.

possible.” The new kind of learning “goes beyond adapting to challenges and solving problems. Instead such learning focuses on imagining possibilities and on generating new ways of looking at the world. . . . an ability to see radical possibilities.”⁴⁵

Appreciative Inquiry has been used in a variety of settings: from large corporations to nursing homes and assisted living, to the UN’s Global Compact, to name a few.⁴⁶ From all of this we can see that AI is more than just organizational development; it’s a visionary rethinking of the roles of communities, organizations, and networks. It’s an approach to unleashing collective potential, where the role of the individual stands paramount in relation to the whole. In effect something that fully honors Steiner’s motto of the social ethic: “The healthy social life is found only when, in the mirror of each soul, the whole community finds its reflection, and when, in the whole community, the virtue of each one is living.” The name change from Delivery Phase to Destiny Phase underlines the nature of the ultimate goal of this type of social technology. In fact, what has been called technology—in line with American culture—could be predicated as a transformative social art.

That AI and numerous other processes form a large part of progressive, future-looking Michaelic American culture is rendered clear from a complete departure from all past traditions and dogmas in the direction of working with the new group souls and listening to the future that wants to emerge in completely new and organic ways.

⁴⁵ Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros, *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook*, 204.

⁴⁶ See examples at the bottom of the following blog entry: <https://luigimorelli.wordpress.com/2009/07/31/changing-paradigms-unleashing-imagination-for-social-change/> or at <https://www.davidcooperrider.com/2014/02/19/fairmount-minerals-secret-to-success-combine-high-engagment-with-sustainable-design-and-high-integrity-leadership/>.

The conversation about social processes we have just completed can be extended in the direction of social forms that Appreciative Inquiry has already announced with the term "social architecture." Here too we find a great variety of expressions of the American spirit, which can lead us into the future.

Transformative Social Architectures: The Example of A.A.

We have started this exploration of American experiential spirituality with the transformation of the individual through the archetype of the U or the seven life processes present in Twelve Steps. At the highest level these processes involve large numbers of people and/or organizations. They allow individuals to come together and experience moments of collective transformation through which shine the new group souls; a collective moment of transformation that has been called *presencing*. With this it becomes possible to create the conditions through which the best in each individual can be called in to participate. The wisdom of the seven life processes, incorporated in a variety of social processes, literally holds the individual doubles at bay and renders possible the work of the new group souls.

The facilitators are very aware of the role of the processes and the conditions needed to bring out full participation and social harmony. Most of the participants will go along, often noticing that the process is pleasant, but rarely asking more questions. If there is individual change, it's most often minimal. The transformation is as if introduced from external conditions and needs to be maintained and enshrined in the organizational culture in order to produce continuity. Without foresight and perseverance, single interventions amount to naught. Spiritual science clearly shows us that the antisocial impulses are too strong at the present, and rightly so, and thus the social processes act as a wise enclosure within which they can be kept at bay, a place where principles work above personalities.

We will look at another level of social transformation, which has been simply announced through the concept of “social architecture” in the example of Appreciative Inquiry at the Design Phase. A lot more can be said about the creation of social forms in which a delicate balance is held between the fundamental place of the individual and the collective will. Neither is sacrificed to the other, when we can let ourselves be guided by wise archetypes.

The Archetype of Emergence or Involution/Evolution

We have started this exploration with the example of Twelve Steps. Let us conclude it by returning to the Fellowship and contemplate the wisdom of its social architecture through the lens of Bill Wilson’s Twelve Concepts. We will look first at the history and achievements to let then emerge the guiding archetype under which the Fellowship’s transformation was guided.

A.A. saw its development as an official fellowship and spiritual organization in 1938, four years after Bill Wilson’s spiritual experience. Initially both group and members were anonymous. And the name Alcoholics Anonymous emerged when the *Big Book* was written in 1939, which familiarized the public with the twelve steps.

Here are the main turning points of A.A. between 1938 and 41:

- 1938: founding of the Alcoholic Foundation with a board of five non-alcoholic and four alcoholic trustees
- 1939: publication of the *Big Book*
- 1941: publication of the seminal *Saturday Evening Post* article that popularized Alcoholics Anonymous

The publication of the article in the *Saturday Evening Post* created the public relations challenge of presenting the face of A.A. to the wider world and to accommodate for a sudden growth: from around a hundred members in 1938 to about 30,000 in the mid-1940s.

Bill Wilson realized that Bob Smith and himself were the main links between the Alcoholic Foundation and the groups—very little to go by, considering that Bob’s health was deteriorating. Bill further perceived the need to officially pass on authority and responsibility from the Foundation to the membership. He envisioned that the groups would carry the consciousness of the Foundation and what later became the General Service Conference.

The First General Service Conferences

When Bill first proposed the idea of the General Service Conference, most of the trustees did not embrace the proposal or see the need for changes. It was a greatly serendipitous event that led Bernard Smith to the helm of the Foundation, for he understood the importance of Bill’s vision.

The first conference took place in 1951, with the prior assent of Bob Smith who had died shortly before. The first four conferences (1951 to 1954), it was agreed, would serve as a prototype and be evaluated in 1955. At the 1951 Cleveland Conference, there were thirty-seven delegates and fifteen altogether between trustees, staff members of General Service Office and Grapevine, plus Bill. From this first experience Bill concluded, “As I watched all this grow, I became entirely sure that Alcoholics Anonymous was at last safe—even from me.”⁴⁷ Bill saw that the transition of authority from Dr. Bob and himself to the group conscience was finally possible.

Within the “probationary period” Bill undertook a project leading to the writing of the books *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*. At the end of this period it was judged that the World Service Conference had been a success. Bill called it “A.A.’s great experiment in self-direction.”⁴⁸ At the end of the 1955 General World

⁴⁷ Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, *The A.A. Service Manual combined with Twelve Concepts for World Service by Bill Wilson*, 12.

⁴⁸ Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, *The A.A. Service Manual*, 26.

Service Conference, Bill formally resigned from his leadership role, and the Conference voted "to adopt the resolution authorizing the General Service Conference to act for Alcoholics Anonymous and to become the successor to its co-founders."⁴⁹

The new direction was consolidated with the milestone adoption of Bill's Twelve Concepts at the 1962 Conference. In 1966 the refounded Board of Trustees counted fourteen alcoholic to seven nonalcoholic trustees, the first time the alcoholics were given a majority, a sign of the growing maturity of the Fellowship.

The Fellowship's Social Architecture

The General Service Conference has been called an "upside down organization." The groups stand at the top; the trustees at the bottom. Ultimate responsibility stands with the groups through the delegates. Above the groups are first the local districts, then the ninety-three areas covering the US and Canada, each corresponding to a state or province or part thereof, depending on the density of the population and numbers of groups.

The groups let their will be known through their General Service Representative. They let the group voice be heard first at the district then at the area levels. Likewise they make sure that information flows the other way around, from the Conference to the area and the district. A delegate is chosen at the Area Assembly to represent each area at the Conference.

A typical Conference lasts a week. It includes committee work, presentations, workshops, and new trustee elections. Examples of the committees are agenda preparation, cooperation with the professional community, corrections, finances, Grapevine, literature, policy/admissions, public information, report and charter, trustees, etc. The committees bring their

⁴⁹ Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, *Our Great Responsibility: A Selection of Bill W.'s General Service Conference Talks, 1951-1970*, 193, footnote 2.

reports to the whole Conference, and these are generally voted on in the last two days.

The board oversees two corporations. A.A. World Services staffs the General Service Office and manages its services as well as publication of A.A.-approved literature. A.A. Grapevine oversees likewise all personnel, editorial, and publishing aspects of the *Grapevine* monthly magazine.

A.A. Governance: Encompassing Polarities

The Twelve Concepts were adopted at the 1962 Service Conference. In these Bill, working in concert with the group conscience, managed to reconcile many polarities. The Concepts aim at developing clear leadership guidelines, clearly defining rights and responsibilities that minimize conflict, and setting up checks and balances that distribute power and limit it. "Authority should be equal to responsibility" is an oft-repeated principle. Bill pointed out that, save for a couple of exceptions, provisions of the Conference Charter could be amended. He also proposed the idea of prototyping important changes for a period of time, to allow room for experimentation. This is in keeping with the four-year prototyping of the World Service Conference itself.

In addition the Concepts enshrine four important rights:

- Right of Decision. The trusted servant must be left free to act according to her conscience; she responds first and foremost to the conscience of A.A. as a whole, then to her respective group. This concept is key to ensuring empowerment, trust, accountability, and leadership.
- Right of Participation. This is seen as a corrective of ultimate authority because it mitigates its possible misuse. An important element is the inclusion of all possible types of stakeholders: for example, the management of World Services is distributed between trustees, volunteer

experts, and paid office executives, in such a way that no group prevails over another. Traditions that recommend consultation and inclusion play a powerful role; they are better than regulations. An example is the inclusion of members of one corporation in the decisions of the other corporation. Another is that in the Conference, delegates selected by lots work with members of a committee of the General Service Board.

- Right of Appeal and of Petition. These twin concepts encourage minorities to consider choices they feel would threaten A.A. as a whole to file a minority report, echoing Bill's concerns that "the well-heard minority is our chief protection against an uninformed, misinformed, hasty or angry majority."⁵⁰ The concept also applies for the filing of personal grievance without fear of reprisal. These two rights are also a safeguard to the limitations of group conscience of A.A. With the wisdom of hindsight, Bill comments: "During a time of great disturbance the group conscience is not always the best possible guide. When, therefore, the group conscience cannot or should not act directly, *who does act for it?*" And in response to the question: "These [trusted] servants must always be in readiness to do for the groups what the groups obviously cannot do or should not do for themselves. Consequently the servants are bound to use their own information and judgment, sometimes to the point of disagreeing with uninformed or biased group opinion."⁵¹

The Twelve Concepts have built Alcoholics Anonymous's social architecture, one that encompasses every possible set of polarities. Such are the contrast between group conscience and trusted servant, between rights of leadership and rights of participation or petition, between powers established in

⁵⁰ Bill Wilson, *Twelve Concepts for World Service*, 22, in Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., *The A.A. Service Manual combined with Twelve Concepts for World Service*.

⁵¹ Wilson, *Twelve Concepts for World Service*, 23.

tradition or in law, and other various checks and balances, such as specific time limits on all roles of responsibility.

The principle of evolution, dissolution, and re-creation of social forms has been dubbed in recent literature the phenomenon of “emergence”: what we may call an enlarged phenomenon of presencing, which involves the organization as a whole and over time. Figure 5 gives a synthetic overview of its steps.

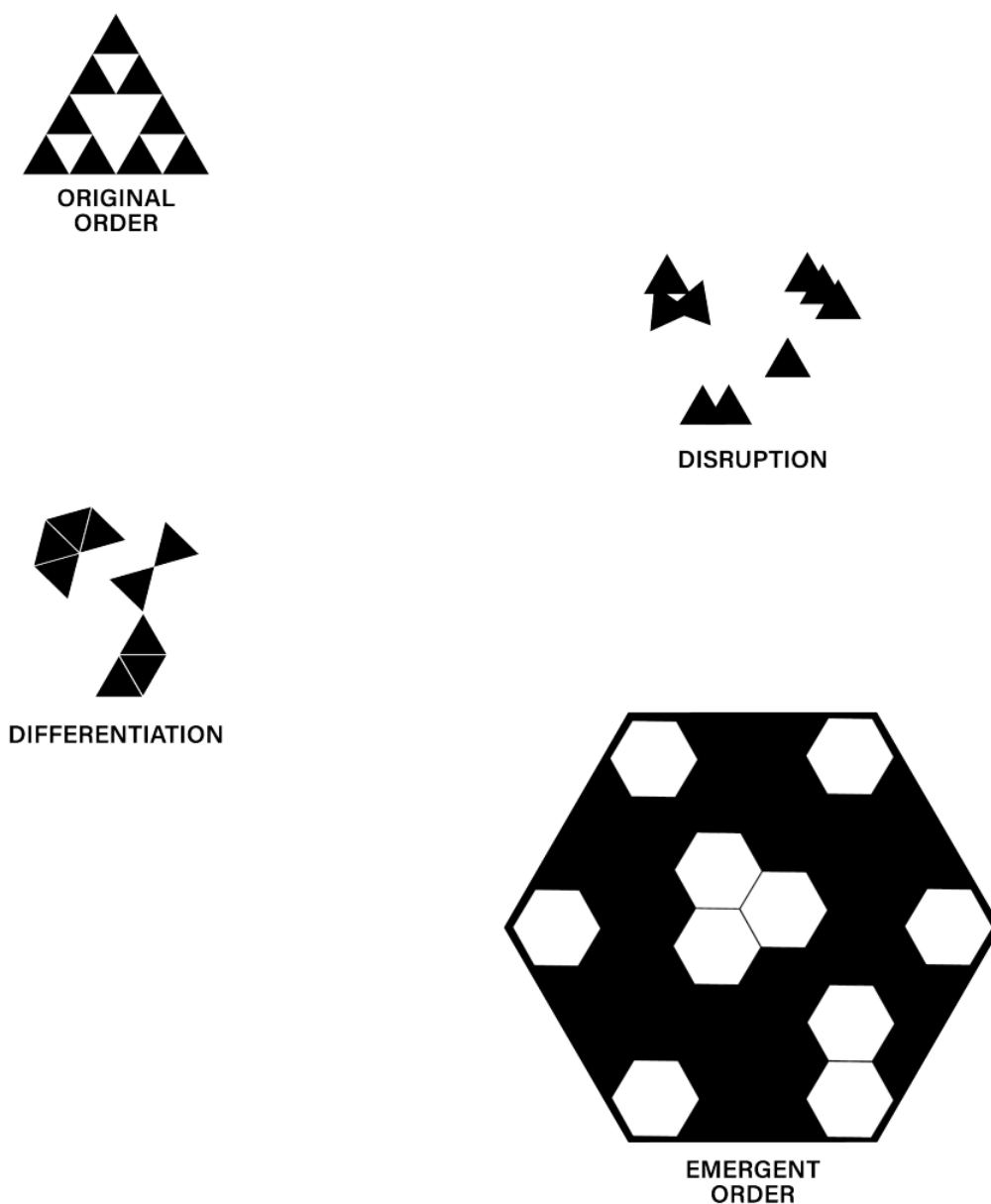


Figure 5: The Steps of Emergence

Organizational forms correspond to the need to channel life in appropriate instruments. Life cannot manifest without containment. The form, however, has to evolve organically in ways similar to the way organic forms evolve in nature. When growth reaches a certain point, the egg becomes a larva, the caterpillar grows and turns into a chrysalis. From the latter emerges the butterfly, to give but one well-known example. Social life requires an equal attention to forms, since here the changes do not happen of themselves.

The figure above shows how an organization regularly comes in its biography to a point of dissolution or disruption. However, something of the original order can still be preserved and remain functional, especially if the organization is undergoing this process consciously, not suffering it and resisting it. What is preserved can serve as a building block for the future form. We have seen how Appreciative Inquiry does this by honoring, highlighting, and preserving the best of the past. From these building blocks emerge new basic structures and a social form at a higher degree of complexity. We could say that one of the main focuses of the social art is to learn to operate with simplicity at higher and higher degrees of complexity. Embracing complexity, uncertainty, and paradox are therefore prerequisites in the life and work of social visionaries such as Bill Wilson.

The above form of emergence (figure 5) also corresponds to the well-known Cancer sign of the zodiac. Here involution corresponds to the arm spiraling inward, the original order disappearing. The pralaya moment is signaled by disruption. The other arm of Cancer, spiraling outward, leads to differentiation and emergent order (see figure 6 for the case of the A.A. Fellowship).

The Qualitative Leap of the General Service Conference

We could say that the Fellowship underwent first an involution, then a pralaya of five years at the time of the first five General Service Conferences

in the years 1951 to 1955, and an evolution afterward. Let's recapitulate the steps of involution preceding the Conference.

Involution:

- 1946: publication of the Twelve Traditions in the May *Grapevine*.
- Bill's writing of "The Alcoholic Foundation of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" in which he introduced the idea of a "General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous."
- 1950: Bob Smith gives his assent to the Conference idea.
- 1951: The first Conference, in Cleveland.

Pralaya, years 1951 to 1955:

- 1952: Bill outlined a five-year writing and research project that yielded *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*. He proposed a four-year prototyping of the Conference.
- The Conference Charter was adopted.
- 1955: Bill Wilson formally resigned from his role as leader of A.A.; the Conference voted "to adopt the resolution authorizing the General Service Conference to act for Alcoholics Anonymous and to become the successor to its co-founders."

Evolution:

- 1962: Bill's Twelve Concepts were accepted at the Conference.
- 1966: The General Service Board proposed to change the balance of trustees from 9 alcoholics and 10 nonalcoholics to 14 alcoholics and 7 nonalcoholics.

The above stages form a landmark for A.A.'s reaching what Bill called its adult stage. A new form was adopted through which the group soul could better penetrate the whole of the fellowship. Under this light the A. A. Service Manual can be read just as a drab "how-to" manual. If one tries to

immerse oneself in the struggles and iterations from which such work emerges, it can be seen as an integration of what Bill called in 1958 the “constructive use of trouble.” Bill summarized what a time of pralaya and emergence looks like thus: “For ten long years nobody could say whether the forces of destruction would prevail or whether the educational value of trouble would bring the right ideas.”⁵² Seen from this perspective, the manual becomes indeed a spiritual document, just as much as the Twelve Steps, Traditions, and Concepts. One can see this further even in the bylaws, unique among documents of a strictly legal nature, to incorporate Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts. Even a legal document can thus shine with the light of the spirit.

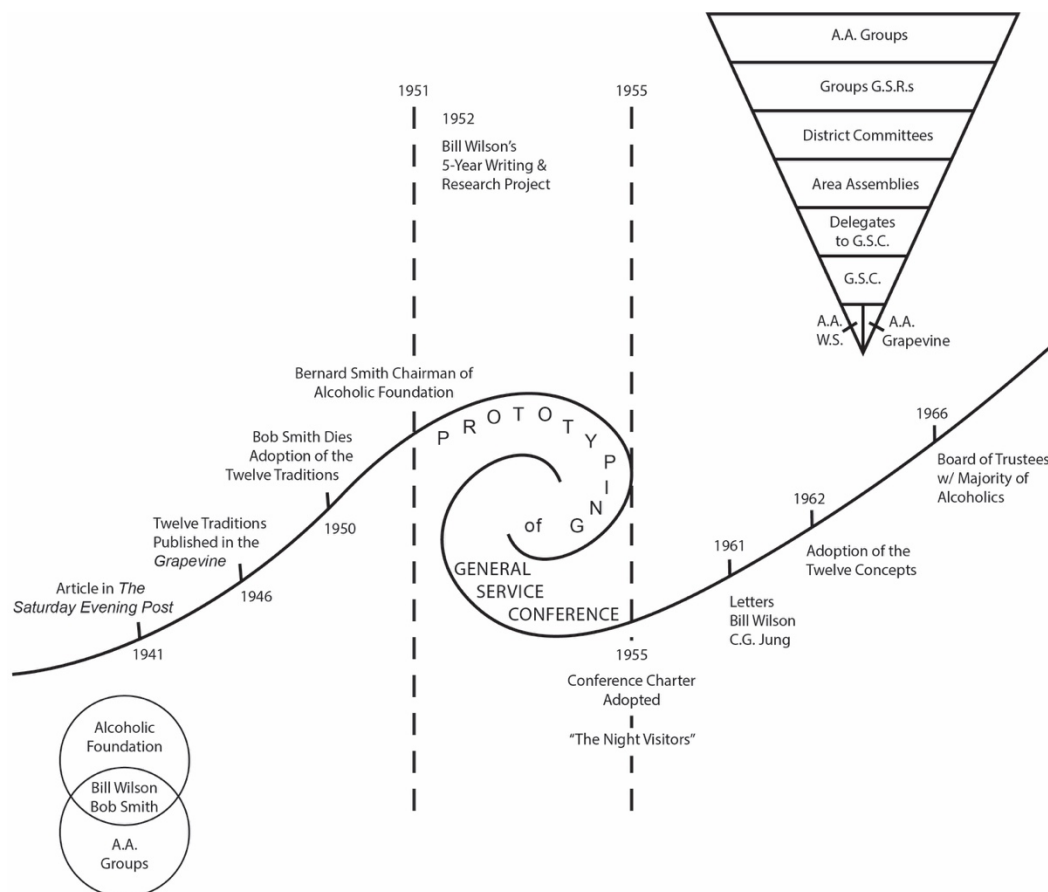


Figure 6: Stages of the A.A.’s Organizational Transformation

⁵² Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, *Our Great Responsibility*, 128.

Social Forms and the Working of the New Group Souls

In the social body of A.A., the group soul needs to be as alive in the local groups as in the General Service Conference. The blood of this social body is the information and concern that travels from the groups to the Conference and back. The heart is the tissue of harmonic cooperation that unites the various levels without stresses that undermine one at the expense of the other. The heart beats because "principles have replaced personalities." The mind of the Fellowship is the shared awareness of the whole that permeates each and every part. The active limbs of this body are found in the thousands of recovering alcoholics that embody leadership devoted to service.

It is easier now to understand Bill's appreciation for the achievements of the Conference and its effects on the Fellowship: "And strangely enough—and this is the paradox—we have been able to do this because of God's grace working through a sober but still defective people who, in his Providence, have been able to bring into being a society seemingly not only sound in principle, but of great beauty and great perfection as a whole." And further to illustrate the contrast between group and individual: "The Society itself is beauty and perfection. And it stays that way, despite the fact that we each take our turn in being destructive—in being juvenile and generally acting like hell. Is this not a great gift of Providence?"⁵³ The General Service Conference truly integrated social and antisocial impulses.

Ultimately, how much the group soul penetrates the whole is easy to figure out in a Fellowship like A.A. whose goal is so eminently measurable. A.A. has been exempt from public controversy, schisms, and internal struggles, and therefore has been able to constantly grow from year to year in the numbers of alcoholics that it serves, the ease with which they can seek and

⁵³ Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc, *Our Great Responsibility*, 160.

find access to existing groups, or form new ones. Bill Wilson was justified in devoting his life to seeking to recognize all the points of tension, dangers, opportunities, and needed social processes that would render group conscience and the working of the group soul a reality.

Penetration of the group soul through a diffused group conscience and effective work go hand in hand. A.A. has operated with a very low and effective overhead. In 1945 it counted 1 paid worker for every 98 groups; in 1955 already 1 for 230; in 1960s 1 for 7,000. By 2010 the ratio was of 1 for 17,000.⁵⁴ As of 2013 A.A. was spread over 170 countries.⁵⁵ Estimated global membership have gone from around 907,000 in 1980 to 2,138,000 in 2020.⁵⁶ The alcoholic worldwide can find access to any existing AA group with relative ease. This is the yardstick through which we can measure the effective working of the group conscience and the presence of the group soul.

A.A. has been chosen as an example in this essay because of its scale and the length and breadth of its experience. It is not a stand-alone example or an exception. Much of the same kind of work of cultural renewal is being carried out in which the new group souls can shine at larger levels of integration. In fact what is true of individuals and departments/groups within the A.A. fellowship can even be the case of an array of organizations within a network. Examples of these have been brought forth in *Accelerating Social Change: Impacting Our World While Transforming Ourselves* through the social architecture of Holacracy or Collective Impact and the examples of "socially generative networks."⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, *The A.A. Service Manual*, 10, 75.

⁵⁵ See *A.A. Around the Globe*: https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/assets/smf-165_en.pdf.

⁵⁶ See *Estimated Worldwide A.A. Individual and Group Membership*: https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/assets/smf-132_en.pdf.

⁵⁷ See *Accelerating Social Change*, chapter 4: "Multiscale Logic," heading "Socially Generative Networks," available at <https://millenniumculmination.net/accelerating-social-change.pdf>.

The Nature of American Spirituality

On the basis of what has been brought forth in this essay, I believe it is possible to determine the nature of American spirituality in spiritual scientific terms and to recognize its “tone” or “color,” so to speak.

At times in my work I have called what comes from the North American continent, primarily the US and Canada, “American spirituality” or “experiential spirituality.” This is because the American spirit is rather pragmatic, and much of what it produces originates from practical concerns. Only over time, with the growing experience of certain approaches and methodologies, is it possible to realize that, in a way, we find more than we bargained for. It seems that the spiritual is almost a by-product of “getting things done.” Getting sober was the main goal of A.A. In the process it has become obvious that only vigorous application of the will renders it possible, that is to say rigorous spiritual discipline and work.

I have experienced very much the same in learning and offering coaching, in the instance of “co-active coaching.”⁵⁸ Much of coaching, especially life coaching or executive coaching, aims at attaining concrete targets—one’s own life goals or corporate goals. Only through trial and error has it emerged that attaining one’s personal goals is more efficient when one honors the full dimension of the human being, including the spiritual dimension. Practical and ideal merged once the promoters of many similar approaches realized a holistic approach is also more practical, and discovered with glee the larger dimension of being human. Likewise, part of the business world is slowly realizing that executive coaching works best when we seek to reconcile profit with people and planet, and that socially responsible businesses can be not only profitable but also highly enjoyable places of growth for everybody. Appreciative Inquiry has shown us what can be

⁵⁸ Henry Kimsey-House, Karen Kimsey-House, Phillip Sandahl, and Laura Whitworth, *Co-Active Coaching: Changing Business, Transforming Lives*.

freed of human potential and human destiny when we work with deeper awareness, leaderfulness, and appreciation of all individual contributions.

A deeper look at co-active coaching is quite indicative in our context. This kind of coaching seeks to honor the three spatial dimensions of the human being: primarily the forward direction of back to front, past to future, its stated goal. But this isn't possible if we don't look at our vertical connection with our higher self—here called "future self"—and take care of the question of balance by becoming constantly aware and able to come to the same issue from a variety of perspectives, addressing thus the right-left, horizontal plane of the human being. Much more could be said about this form of coaching if we looked at it in detail. What is said here of co-active coaching is true of "coaching with spirit"⁵⁹ or other similar approaches. Alongside these forms of coaching exist forms of behavioristic coaching, obviously shrinking the dimension of human experience and mostly aiming at change from the perspective of the Astral rather than the Ego.

An overarching theme that characterizes what we have offered of the American spirit lies in the striving to live life fully, to find meaning in the realm of experience. This is what we find in anthroposophy under the expression most often translated as "truly live" (*Wahrhaft leben*) that Steiner coined, under Michaelic inspiration, in the first panel of the Foundation Stone. And truly living is the crowning achievement of the practice of Spirit Recollection mentioned in the first panel. What I will advance here is just a short summary of everything that was brought forth in great detail in other places, particularly in *Karl Julius Schröer and Rudolf Steiner: Anthroposophy and the Teachings of Karma and Reincarnation*.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Teri-E Belf, *Coaching with Spirit: Allowing Success to Emerge*.

⁶⁰ The pertinent material can be found in chapters 3, 4, and 7 and in PDF format at <https://millenniumculmination.net/Spirit-Recollection-and-Spirit-Beholding.pdf> and <https://millenniumculmination.net/The-Breadth-of-the-Impulse-of-Spirit-Recollection.pdf>.

In Steiner's views, which can easily be confirmed in experience, if we only dedicate a little time and observation, thinking and willing are continuously intertwined. Thinking exists in the act of will, will in the process of thinking. It is only when the will is consciously applied to the effort of thinking that we can overcome associative thinking, direct our thoughts from percept to concept and complete in our minds what happens in the act of creation in Nature. We can spiritualize thinking by refining our gifts of observation and let reality dictate the direction of our thoughts, avoiding interpretations. Because this process is time consuming, conventional science most often bypasses it for the comfort of extrapolating from the little that is known and formulating theories to cover all or a certain aspects of reality. The body of spiritual science rests on the elaboration of thinking first into an objective phenomenology or Goethean science, then into direct spiritual perception. And through thinking we can understand human, natural, and cosmic evolution.

In the lead-up to the Christmas Meeting of 1923–24, Steiner called this transformation of thinking the Saturn path, or path to the macrocosm. In the Foundation Stone Meditation, where he didn't refer to the planetary spheres, he called it Spirit Beholding or Spirit Vision in the third panel. These two sets of terms are contrasted first with the Moon Path, secondly with the term Spirit Remembrance or Spirit Recollection of the Foundation Stone Meditation. Let us look at the first formulation of this second path, the Moon path.

In 1923, after referring to the Saturn path as that which leads us to the macrocosm, Steiner describes the Moon path as the one in which "one can advance on the opposite side [microcosm] by entering deeply into the will, to the extent of becoming wholly quiescent, by becoming a pole of stillness in the motion one otherwise engenders in the will." *Instead of becoming an unconscious part of world movement, one can consciously come to a stand-still.* Through this "one succeeds in *keeping the soul still* while the body

moves through space; succeeds in being active in the world while the soul remains quiet; *carries activity, and at the same time quietly observes it*; then thinking suffuses the will, just as the will previously suffused thinking [Saturn path]" (emphasis added).⁶¹ This description of the Moon path in effect applies to most, if not all, of the approaches we have outlined. From the advanced steps of the A.A. path to the approaches of social technology, we are endeavoring for the individual or the group to retain a detached, observer consciousness, which disidentifies the Ego or the group soul from past biography or history, a consciousness that "carries activity, and at the same time quietly observes it." Thinking suffuses the will in the practice of reviewing and evaluating our actions and foreseeing new possibilities.

For the aim of cultivating this path, Rudolf Steiner developed mostly in the years 1918 to 1924 a series of exercises that could be defined as pure Goethean observation in the realm of the soul. These I have dubbed "karmic exercises."⁶² They are part of what Steiner later called the path of Spirit Recollection or Spirit Remembrance in contrast to the path of Spirit Beholding in the Foundation Stone Meditation. Spirit Recollection is the path inward (microcosm through the gate of the Moon) whereas Spirit Beholding is the path outward (macrocosm through the gate of Saturn).

The karmic exercises entail efforts of recollection: looking back at periods of our life from a pure observer consciousness that doesn't interpret or lets itself be overwhelmed by feelings, emotions, judgments; looking at people in our lives in a completely objective way that eschews sympathies and antipathies, in effect a way to create an imagination of the individual; looking at events we tend to label "bad" and starting to perceive them with detachment and objectivity so as to completely overcome labels and take responsibility for our life. Other exercises can move our center of attention

⁶¹ Rudolf Steiner, *Awakening to Community*, lecture of February 6, 1923.

⁶² An overview of these exercises is available at <https://millenniumculmination.net/spirit-recollection-journey.pdf>.

from events in this life to causes in previous ones—such are the Greater Karma exercise⁶³ or the Moon-Sun-Saturn exercise.⁶⁴ The turning point of these exercises lies emblematically in the “lesser karma exercise” through the stage of taking responsibility for our lives, of recognizing that we are the architects of our “fortunes” and “misfortunes” to a much higher degree than daily consciousness usually admits.

With all of the above we can come closer to identifying on one hand the nature of American spirituality and on the other its particular tone or color. On one hand all the practical approaches we have outlined above have evolved along and work on the principle of Spirit Recollection. Approaches like Twelve Step or most of the facilitation techniques mentioned above have landed on a final form on the basis of a collective trial and error, the effort of putting a scaffold in place with the intent of constantly revising it and refining it. This means in effect bringing thinking into what has unfolded as activity of the will. The same is true of governance forms like those resting on the Twelve Concepts or Holacracy, which both evolved through long processes of rethinking and refining from the realm of experience.

When it comes to what the methods offer to the participants, the same is true as the above. The participants to A.A. groups are asked to look back at their biographies in an encompassing way, to look at their regrets, re-think their lives, and act differently along better guidelines. They are asked to take responsibility for their lives by regularly looking back at what they have done (step 10) and taking up spiritual practice (step 11) as a basis for living a better life.

Something similar happens when we move at the group level: here we look at the biography of the group/organization/community, key events, personal contributions, core values, etc. The group is then asked to individually

⁶³ Steiner, *Karmic Relationships*, Volume 2, lecture of May 9, 1924.

⁶⁴ Steiner, *Karmic Relationships*, Volume 2, lecture of May 4, 1924.

and collectively take responsibility for its past and to build a bridge across the abyss from past to future, which is in effect the experience that renders possible presencing.

Having established that the American spiritual experience lives primarily in the realm of Spirit Recollection, we can also contrast it with similar forms within anthroposophical culture. The path of Spirit Recollection is followed in anthroposophy in the work of Destiny Learning of Coenraad van Houten, the biography work of Bernard Lievegoed, George O'Neil, and many others.⁶⁵ The human life. It is expressed at the organizational level with the work of Lievegoed's NPI or its modern offshoots.⁶⁶

American spirituality is not all that different from the above modalities and approaches. It differs primarily in what I call its tone or color. The pragmatic approach and what Steiner calls "instinctive anthroposophy" are the hallmarks of all these approaches. Pragmatism is the doorway through which the spiritual emerges, and in almost all cases this is the fruit of intense group collaboration. This pragmatism colors much of American experiential spirituality, so much so that archetypes are used that render the work possible and effective, even though they are not clearly brought to consciousness. This work has tried to articulate them, first in the seven life processes, then in the processes of involution/evolution.

What Can America Offer to the Michaelic Future?

The ideas that Central Europe has advanced in the social realm, chiefly the whole of Steiner's social threefolding, can become a field of experience in

⁶⁵ Among others, Coenraad Van Houten, *The Threefold Nature of Destiny Learning and Practising Destiny: Principles and Processes in Adult Learning*; Bernard Lievegoed, *Phases of Childhood: Growing in Body, Soul and Spirit* and *Phases: The Spiritual Rhythms of Adult Life*; George O'Neil, *The Human Life*.

⁶⁶ See the work of Bernard Lievegoed's NPI (Institute for Organizational Development), and his books *Managing the Developing Organization* and *Management Development from a Psychological Viewpoint*; *Group Methods in Management Development Programs* ; *The Evaluation of Group Work*.

the West through the interplay of social processes and social forms.⁶⁷ The German spirit tends to apprehend in cognition the whole as it manifests in the present and to foresee its possible future evolution; the American spirit recognizes it in the dance between social actors, the experimentation with social forms, and the experience that can be distilled therefrom.

In essence what America can offer to the world is the wisdom of how to overcome antisocial instincts. This knowledge can live through its archetypes in the body social of all our common pursuits and at all organizational levels, up to the working of the worldwide Anthroposophical Society itself. In the applications of spiritual science to every domain of life, and in the social forms these take in concrete endeavors, the working together of the parts potentially serves the unfolding of the whole. Effective integration of contrasting social needs means greater accessibility for everyone involved or interested, ease in integrating all concerns, in connecting one part to another of the whole, in introducing new people to the abundance of spiritual science. Vibrant Anthroposophical organizations would be ones that integrate all parts seamlessly; ones in which each part feels itself connected organically to the others and the whole because it has equal access and voice. When this is achieved, then the new group souls can inspire our common work.

The incarnation of anthroposophy in all its efforts and all possible dimensions needs social forms that are both complex but also dynamic and easy enough to operate: it's a matter of working at higher levels of complexity in new ways that can be understood, integrated, and become second

⁶⁷ Instructive and inspiring examples in this direction are found in Steve Waddell, *Societal Learning and Change: How Governments, Business and Civil Society Are Creating Solutions to Complex Multi-Stakeholder Problems* and in the unfortunately out of print Jon C. Jenkins and Maureen R. Jenkins, *The Social Process Triangles*, which retraces the extensive work that the Institute of Cultural Affairs put forth worldwide from the 1970s to the 1990s. See a write-up on either one in *Accelerating Social Change: Impacting Our World While Transforming Ourselves*, chapter 2.

nature. They may seem challenging at first, but they are more organic and therefore also more inclusive and effective. The collective new group soul, which in this case is in the largest pursuits of *Anthroposophia* itself, should be immersed within a social garment that allows the individual to shine according to the social motto. In other words, the guiding being should be as present in the departments, work groups, even individuals, as it is present in the whole of the organizational body. We can work with organizations that are wise because they correspond to and work with larger archetypes, and operate effectively thanks to precise yet flexible social processes and social architectures, likely to evolve in time according to the need.

In conclusion, we can say that America, and very likely the other English-speaking nations representative of the Consciousness Soul, can offer a great contribution to the transformation of the will. What America achieves in the will is only a small step for something that can only be achieved consciously and fully in the sixth and seventh post-Atlantean epochs. At present it is but an attempt that needs to be shored up with renewed consciousness; it is like a seed sown in the fields of Ahriman, as it were, to die and resurrect repeatedly. Everything that America can offer to the world—rich and articulate as it already is—bears an embryonic nature. It will need to be reborn at later stages when humanity will acquire greater spiritual and social maturity.