

Spirituality and Economic Transformation

David Korten (Positive Futures Network)

Julie Matthaei (Guramylay: Growing the Green Economy)

Nicola Torbett (Network of Spiritual Progressives)

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION: The U.S. economy is built on the myth that the search for money and power through consumerism and careerism can bring well-being and fulfillment. The spiritual emptiness of this narrow self-interested materialism, along with the anti-religious/anti-spiritual bias of the left, has helped feed the rise of the Religious Right in the U.S., and various forms of religious fundamentalism all over the world. This workshop focused on the important role that spiritual healing and spirituality-based activism plays in progressive economic transformation.

WORKSHOP TRANSCRIPT:

David Korten, author of *When Corporations Rule the World* and *the Post-Corporate World*, introduces his work with the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE)

Summarized the spiritual dimension of his work. His frame grows out of Riane Eisler work of *The Chalice and the Blade*. The idea that some 5000 years ago, we humans moved from more egalitarian, peaceful and more gender-balanced forms to organization by domination, competition, conflict for few positions at the top, most relegated to positions at the bottom. This organization by domination has to maintain itself in way that's contradictory to human nature; creates alienation from human community and from life on earth; is fundamental spiritual alienation.

Transformation from domination to partnership relations is so fundamental and deep that it can only come as an outcome of a very broad spiritual awakening, to our inherent spiritual nature.

Virtually every progressive leader he knows is working from a spiritual place – yet we never talk about it – it's time to come out of the closet on that issue; it is foundational; a key piece of our work has to involve sharing our spiritual stories, how we think about that dimension of our work.

Key piece of moving out of empire is breaking out of cultural trance – which is maintained by controlling the stories by which we define ourselves and our understanding of; what is prosperity and how achieved? Security and achieved? What is our source of meaning, our creation, stories, nature of cosmos, our place in larger scheme of creation?

Prosperity stories – economic transformation – we’re conditioned daily by media, universities, economics, to idea that wealth is defined in terms of money; progress is achieved by making decisions based on how to max returns to money. Relates to empire, because we focus on money this alienates us from our spiritual nature. If we make all of our shared decisions based on what will max returns to money, means maximizing returns to people who have money. He (Korten) has MBA and PhD from Stanford Business School, taught at Harvard Business School, was never taught in all of that study what money really is – it’s only an accounting chit. It makes no distinction between real wealth, living wealth, social capital—relationships of trust and caring – natural capital, ecology and earth. Money is abstraction with no meaning except in our minds. It is part of our fundamental alienation.

Part of breaking out of trance is through realizing that money is a con game – is instrument for total control of the society, for creating dynamic totally geared to concentrating wealth in the hands of a few people, empire; we need to awaken to that reality – and realize that real wealth is living capital, human and natural.

Competing creation stories: difficult ground; our religious beliefs are foundational to our identity. Prevailing creation stories contribute to alienation and denial of our true spiritual nature. Public debate on these stories – creationism (God as white man with beard waves hand and creates it all) vs. materialistic/scientific, only material is real, all of creation came about simply through material mechanism and chance; we don’t know how life emerged, not sure how, out of material complexity, no intelligence or consciousness in the world (even though we are) – get evolution story, comes out of competition and survival of the fittest, most vicious, competitive – foundational belief system for most ruthless forms of capitalism. Idea of purely materialistic world strips life of meaning. Story of anthropomorphic white male, connect to patriarchy, empire built on stories that exclude most people from competition to get to top by denying their humanity, women and people of color; in his generation there were active debates about whether women and people of color have human souls. Frames how we think of ourselves.

In fall of 1999, Washington state and Seattle council of churches hosted conference in Seattle before wto demos on economic justice, Korten spoke along with Marcus Borg, well-known Christian writer; he says “tell me your image of god and I’ll tell you your politics” and he traces this back to different strands of religions. Anthropomorphic god, all knowing and makes all decisions – i.e. people with power and wealth most favored by god, and should control.

Other model of God, spirit model; God isn’t manifest in a person, is manifested in whole of creation. David doesn’t like term God which evokes that man image; he likes to talk about integral consciousness or spirit or spirituality – truly brings together issues of science and religion.

Science has powerful data which gives us enormous insight into what happened in creation; but problem is ideology of science that claims all is material, never proven, is

useful assumption, but can't be a finding that that which we can't measure in a material sense doesn't exist – becomes unscientific.

Our stories are so diverse and mixed that it's dangerous to make generalizations.

3 models

-- No intelligence or consciences

-- Exists out there, in God

-- Intelligence/consciousness is integral to all of creation; profound integral consciousness in quest to know itself and its possibilities, burst forth, and brought forth dynamics cosmos, increased complexity and self-consciousness – to see face of god, simply look at any aspect of creation, its manifest- face of any human –

Moves us from my God versus your God, who is most righteous, what does big guy want from us. To model where we see integral connectedness of all of reality, see ourselves as part of co-creative process with rest of creation – humans are creation's most daring experiment in reflective consciousness – can reflect back on creation and use that capacity to contribute to the continuing unfolding of consciousness

How do we use this capacity to explore our own higher potentials as human beings, and move beyond terrible destructive dynamics embedded in our society – we have extraordinary opportunity to break out of it.

-- We're in trajectory toward self-destruction as a species –

-- We have communications technology to connect every human on the planet into seamless web of coop and communication – lets us make collective conscious choices as a species; it's our challenge to use that capability to use that to fundamentally.

Julie Matthaei, Guramylay: Growing the Green Economy and TransformationCentral.org;
Professor of Economics, Wellesley College.

Spirituality, how do we define it? Spirituality is the sense of one's place in the whole. Spirituality gives us a larger purpose, connection to the life process. A sense of values to guide one's actions, gives us a sense of meaning. It's at the core of all religions, but is not a religion.

Spirituality has been distorted terribly by the hierarchical polarization paradigm, which has been dominant in parts of the world for thousands of years, was the basis for

colonization and capitalist development, and is embodied in current neoliberal globalization

Hierarchical polarization has terribly distorted spirituality by facilitating the warring of religions, which denies humanity to each other.

Hierarchical polarization paradigm: (Refer to our pamphlet – hand out)

Our current neoliberal capitalist economy is the height of fragmentation – denies people any sense of connection to the whole.

Back of booklet – some of the hierarchical polarizations which divide us from one another and even from ourselves, including materialism over spirituality (“God is dead”).

This division is heightened even more by the way in which we are integrated into economic life, which we call the class system.

The capitalist economy was structured as a competition between free white husband-providers, bread-winners – trying to earn as much as possible to support their fulltime homemaker wives and dependent children, at least a family wage. Leaving spiritual values in church, or with their wives, who were supposed to hold the moral values as men participated in the “dog eat dog” world.

People of color and women, who were excluded from this competition, and from the possibility for economic independence which it brings – fought to get into it – “equal opportunity process” – was liberating, but also oppressive,

Bought our economic independence at the price of having to become materialistic and competitive, in the white masculine model –

-- Drawn into competitive careerism – goal in life is to earn as much money as possible; winners are those with highest income; losers don’t deserve a living wage, or even a job – That’s ok.

-- With development of advertising and marketing, firm’s aggressive attempts to keep expanding their sales by expanding our needs, “competitive consumerism” – hyper-materialism, affluenza, success is having more and more stuff, and new stuff, as dictated by firms.

David Loy, “the religion of the market” – and money becomes core and only value – have as much as possible; measures one’s worth; everything can be reduced to money, including the value of a person’s life, The Breadwinning competition broadened to be At present historical conjuncture, there are many cracks in it.

THE GOOD NEWS:

Over the past 150 plus years, social movements have been building the basis for a new paradigm:

- Women's movement fighting gender hierarchy and polarization
- Civil rights and anti-racist movements fighting racial-ethnic hierarchy and polarization
- Ecology movement fighting man/nature hierarchy and polarization
- Worker's, coop, reparations, responsible wealth, solidarity economy networks, and other movements fighting class hierarchy

Barbara Brandt and I have noted 7 stages that are common to each of these movements which have developed to fight the different hierarchical polarities and the overall hierarchical polarization system

Discussed in booklet and on Transformation Central website in more detail

Go through very briefly—

Quest/envisioning – challenge status quo, naturalness and inevitability of the hp institutions; envision liberated world, but no idea of how to get there, more utopian

Equal opportunity –already discussed

Valuing devalued- what about women's unpaid work in the home? Questioning hierarchy

Integrative- mixing polarized traits and jobs, unpaid and paid work, assertive and caring sides

Discernment: – start to rethink institutions themselves, and the VALUES that underlie this. Challenge class system and the religion of the market -- and its key elements, competitive careerism and competitive consumerism—come in touch with humane values, which are spiritual values, their souls, and idea of real self expression

LAST TWO PROCESSES start to bring all the different movements together:

Combining: bringing together issues that women of all kinds of backgrounds are facing, creating of coalitions

Diversifying/unifying/globalizing: valuing diversity, opposite of hp.

Real ability for constructing spirituality that is not intolerant of other faiths – multi-faith centers, etc.

Liberating spirituality from the chains and distortions caused by hp paradigm

This spirituality, liberating spirituality, then becomes key in displacing the religion of the market, as well as the dogmatic hp religion forms.

It becomes a key force in the construction of the new world, new paradigm, based on unity and diversity, participatory democracy, economic justice –

Nichola Torbett, Network of Spiritual Progressives, Director of National Programs

I am the Director of National Programs for an organization called the Network of Spiritual Progressives. The NSP is dedicated to bringing about a “new bottom line.” The old bottom line means that all of our institutions and social practices are judged effective based on the money and power they generate. Under a new bottom line, they’d be judged effective not only based on money and power but also on the effect they have on human beings to be loving and caring, kind and generous, ethically and ecologically sensitive, and able to experience awe, wonder, and radical amazement at the grandeur of creation. This is, I realize, something of a tall order. It is also our best hope for economic transformation because it builds upon deep desires already present in the population.

There is no need to document how necessary economic transformation is at this point. You can’t have been at this forum for the past four days without hearing about the plight of those living in our inner cities, in our impoverished rural areas, in single-parent homes, in jobs where they have no healthcare...

Economic transformation is necessary not just for those populations, though. It’s an issue for all of us. Let me explain.

Traditionally, the route to economic transformation is conceived of as class warfare in which the working class rises up against the ruling class. The assumption is that people will never give up their privilege voluntarily.

In the Network of Spiritual Progressives, we do not buy into that assumption, which fails to take into account the ways in which our current system hurts people of privilege as well as those at the bottom of the system.

The reason it hurts is because people’s spiritual and meaning needs are not being met in a culture of extreme materialism and “me-firstism.” Increasingly, people of privilege, are realizing that all the money they’ve spent their lives pursuing is not bringing them the satisfaction it promised.

People have spiritual as well as economic needs. Those include needs for:

- mutual recognition and affirmation of their value and goodness

- connection to something meaningful that is larger than themselves
- a life consonant with their values
- experiences of awe and wonder and radical amazement
- enough time for pleasure and deep connection/engagement

A culture that tells us that we need to pursue wealth and the power needed to protect it, at the expense of everything and everyone else, does not allow these spiritual needs to be met. We learn to see other people and the natural world as resources rather than embodiments of the sacred. The magic goes out of living, and everything seems flat.

The vastness of the dissatisfaction with this way of life emerged over three decades of research done by the Institute for Labor and Mental Health.

- Those studies found that the greatest sense of dissatisfaction people had with their lives came not from insufficient economic compensation (though that did come up, and I'll talk about how in a minute) but from a lack of meaning. People felt their jobs didn't mean anything, that they weren't really making a meaningful contribution.
- They cared about making more money, yes, but only as compensation for what felt like a wasted life. People further expressed deep unhappiness about having no time for the things they did care about—family, friends, being in nature, helping people.
- This some valuing of meaning and connection over money is confirmed in research being done into new methods for resolving legal disputes. In most cases, what people care about in such disputes is being heard, having their grievance recognized. Often if that happens, they don't care much about the financial settlement.

This strikes me as very good news, actually. It means that most people are hungry for exactly the kind of economic transformation we need. As someone said in the first meeting of the solidarity economics caucus, solidarity is a resource. It's there waiting to be tapped.

If we can build an inspiring, emotionally and spiritually fulfilling, loving movement that awakens people's already-existing desires for more connection, meaning, and pleasure, we can create solidarity around a vision in which everyone has enough and resources are shared freely.

Implicit in this is a new vision of wealth. Wealth includes relationships, time, pleasure, deep connection.

This is a different conception of economic transformation that we typically hear at events like this. How do we convince people in economically disadvantaged communities that we're for real, that this isn't one more trick to get them to believe that people of privilege care about them?

We need to incorporate in our movement serious anti-racism work that is compassionate to all people. I've been impressed this week with the work being done by United to End Racism.

We also need to unlearn classism using a similar process.

People from those communities, including immigrants and people of color, need to be included in the planning of the movement and of new solidarity ventures from the very beginning.

People of relative privilege need to be willing to acknowledge and apologize for the ways in which they have, intentionally or not, hurt other people by their acquisitiveness. We need to be willing to be called on our stuff.

As a culture, we must overcome the "othering" tendency. While it is true that the accumulation of wealth by some in this country has hurt many others, we will not build a movement for real economic transformation without compassion for people of privilege.

We must be able to look at the driver of the Hummer in the next lane and see the pain on his or her face.

We must be able to see the suffering of even those we love to hate—George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, et al.

When such people hear about the needs of, say, African Americans for reparations—something I support—many are thinking, "But what about my pain? What about all that I have given up to get where I am? Was it all for nothing?" As repugnant as that sentiment may be, we've got to feel compassion around it. Otherwise, we do not have real solidarity. Solidarity has to mean everyone.

For example, if a universal healthcare plan is going to win the massive support it needs, it will have to cover everyone, not just all children, not just certain segments of the population, but EVERYONE. That's the only way to conjure up the vision of a loving and caring society in which EACH VOTER is safely embedded.

I think the notion of a solidarity economy is the most encouraging thing I've heard about in a long time and our best hope for real economic transformation of our country and the world.

Questions

More about Network of Spiritual Progressives? It started 2 years ago, 110 chapters on their website; at least 60-70 are active. Spiritualprogressives.org. Rabbi Michael Lerner chairs it. Wrote book *THE LEFT HAND OF GOD*, companion to *GREAT TURNING*. Sister Joan Chisister, Cornell West.

Is there room for people who have distaste for concept of God? – yes, as long as you're willing to allow someone to be an evangelical Christian

Within the forum lots of inflammatory and polarizing words are used. Should we not use imperialist term? – It is very important to transform our language. There is a way that the left self-marginalizes, says that America can never be a force for good. We have created a culture of marginality because we think we don't deserve to win. We have the right ideas; need to get over idea that no one will go with us.

We need to be able to critique, policies and ideas – but don't say a person is bad

Is hierarchical polarization part of our language? Ashok Gangadean, Haverford college; double bracket language – not in ego, subject predicate way of looking at the world; integral language – everything is in the same realm, plays off of each other.

What is the work we need to do as individuals? What is the work that we can do; and connect these worlds?

Julie: Barbara's left and right side of brainwork; Need balance of inner work and outer work; she is (Nichola) impressed by united against recognition, we're all racist, have internalized messages of the culture; do training in nonviolent training, nonsectarian spiritual practices in meetings, using mindfulness to change practice, usually white person dominating, bring attention to who is speaking.

Ray, as activist musician; one of most powerful way to get out of pyramid mentality and reach people and help them feel things they always knew is through the arts – for him, through music. How many speeches can you remember from the civil rights movement vs. how many songs? Whatever kind of art you're drawn towards, go for it. Art allows us to cross-tremendous barriers. One example, when SNCC was active, freedom singers, Mat Jones was active in that group, one day after lots of demonstrations, they were all in a meeting house, they realized that they couldn't get out of there, were surrounded by lots of very angry police, many probably members of the Klan, as door was being pushed open, they started singing, basically love songs – a magical barrier came up and even the most hardened faces paused, laid back, and let everyone walk out.

Realizing the role spirituality will play in the movement, could we create a conversation inviting every organization into the movement, to talk about how spirituality could inspire us?

Paul; happy to touch the reality importance of this subject; this room should be too small for this basic key issue and information for transformation of our reality. 6 billion people. We need only 10% of whole population to have this information to make it work. We have good news, very good news; it's concrete for him that what masters said to people like this today. We are 5 places in the world receiving very important energy: Darjeeling, Tokyo, Geneva, NY, and London. From those places, we get energy for transformation. Not all corporations are bad. The money and capital, we have to create a canal where we can orient this money for the change that we need. Money working for arms can be oriented for generosity. Money for war can be oriented to education and health care. How? The mind our greatest power as human beings. We will change the kingdom from human kingdom to spiritual kingdom; earth is very late; we can't count only on the human possibility, is impossible for humans to change the situation fast. We need a world teacher. The teacher is already here. And we're receiving the energy to do this transformative work, through 1977. He's in an Asian community in London. Believe it or not Transformation will be very fast, less than 25 years, we'll have declaration day, present to all people, through telepathy. We need to continue working in our homes, coworkers learn light and love. True forgiveness.

One practical way zaadz.com, community on line; spiritual facebook with values that facebook and myspace lack. Guided by vision of changing the world. Need to apply to be part of it. Have idea of conscious capitalism, companies that are doing well.

Don't use spirituality as a tool – is an end in itself (we devalue tools, like earth) – we can transform just by being spiritual; we can be the change we want in the world now, Gandhi – we don't have to wait for rapture or revolution, we don't need to wait for end of oil – we can save ourselves now and be our own saviors. Has a NSP pod on it.

Words we use – anti-racist, anti-war – in spiritual realm, we're all one, in complete compassion and love. Need to love bush and rumsfeld. We have to unconditionally love the world and everyone in it. Need to put spiritual with economics in creating what we want. Likes intentionality with the race piece – but panel is all white – do we have intentionality about being more diverse.

Nichola – key thing is to invite people in at the beginning of each initiative. They're trying to create a real peace movement, antiwar movement locked into us/them. She's talking to Rev Grayland Hagler, DC, Tim McDonald in Atlanta, Liness Pinkard in Oakland, all doing work on nonviolence in African American community. Not good to create movement first and then invite people in.

Which ways are you looking to engage the young in these movements? Most young are more spiritual than religious. He works with young people. RAP CRAP isn't really hip-hop. Young are looking for the next spiritual transformation, want to love god, serve god. They love the word spirituality, they don't like RELIGION, and their parents are forcing this on them.

One – we don't have to help them, they are here to help us. We're leaving 2000 years of Pisces cycle; new generation came to teach us.

Another commenter, leftist who went to Buddhist peace conference. Polarity between spiritual movement and the left. He felt potshots at the left. He agrees that there's kind of a hole there. United to End Racism talks about this. He urges that there be more attention to trying to define the combination that isn't polarized between spiritual movement and the organized left, which is on the ground-organizing people. Workshop yesterday where a number of left orgs were talking about how to build a more influential organized movement of the left – didn't acknowledge spiritual piece, did discuss cultural piece. Spirituals need to address the left; people learn through struggle. You learn to negotiate and your opponent becomes human. Dialectical materialism allows for material world and human agency.

Woman has been inspired by Kosmos, dialogue between quantum physics, political thought, and spiritual consciousness. We get caught in needing to name our spirituality – then it becomes a religion. Good to talk about the spirit aspect of why we do work. To have to name it instead of do it can get us into trouble.

Should we be calling ourselves leftists any more – if centering in inclusive, empowering, mutual spirituality? David, how do we find common ground between liberals and conservatives – many of our values fit with conservatives – not far right, monarchic, and authoritarian -