

## JOINING VISION AND PRACTICE

*Transcript of a conversation from the Shambhala Institute's 2002 summer program. This conversation was the third in a series of "community dialogues" and was led by Michael Chender, Marianne Knuth, and Peter Senge, with Susan Skjei facilitating.*

**Susan Skjei:** In today's community dialogue we will explore what happens when we bring the learning from this week into our lives—when we begin implementing, engaging other people, and really bringing our visions alive.

The journey from vision to practice is not such a simple one. We have touched on some of the challenges in the first two dialogues: How do we create an environment that actually includes people, that includes all parts of ourselves? How do we work with our own fear? How do we move into a situation of uncertainty with some kind of presence—including our fear and our inauthenticity—and take a step? These are questions we'll be considering further today.

Today's dialogue will be a little less structured than before. As you can see, we've removed the tables [the previous two dialogues were conducted in a World Café format; in this case, clusters of six chairs are arranged randomly around the room]. We're beginning to remove some of the supports, in honor of the fact that we are *in* conversation now. As we move out into the world, we will have fewer props. Then, where will we find the support that we need, within ourselves and within our communities?

We'll begin by hearing stories from our speakers about times when they've implemented a vision—about what came up, and what went down, and how it all worked. We'll hear some of the questions they're sitting with, and about their learning edge. Then we will give you an opportunity, in your groups, to explore some of your own stories that are vivid and real for you, right now. They could be about a project or venture you're considering now, about something that's important to you that you want to bring into fruition, or they could be about a time when you tried to implement something.

We won't rotate groups today. We will just stay in one group, to give ourselves time to have a deeper conversation. After that, we'll bring the focus back here to the front, and we'll invite further comments and remarks. At that point Peter [Senge] will share something that is of interest to him at this point in his life, as his learning edge.

I'd now like to introduce our speakers, beginning with Marianne Knuth, who has been the director of a global youth leadership program, called Pioneers of Change. In fact, several people here this week are currently active in this network. Partly through that network and through other connections, she has initiated another project in her homeland, Zimbabwe, where she is creating a learning village called Kufunda. We'll be hearing more about this project today.

Peter Senge, whom most of us know through reputation and whom many of us know through friendship and association, is a spokesperson for learning organizations, which are

now all over the world. Over the years he has fostered not only his own organizations, such as the Society for Organizational Learning, but he has also been a mentor, friend, and support for many other groups that have different missions and constituencies but that are all linked through their commitment to learning. His connection with the Shambhala Institute has been around the question of how can we bring silence, contemplation, and awareness into everyday life—not as a big deal, but just as how we do things. He says he sees the potential for furthering that question here.

Our third speaker, Michael Chender, is the chair of the Shambhala Institute. He also runs several businesses here in Halifax and has been involved in the start-up phase of many different organizations, both for-profit and non-profit. He also asked me to tell you that he's very grateful that early on in his career he had some really magnificent failures, which he learned a lot from.

I'll now turn this over to Michael, who will begin. Thank you.

**Michael Chender:** Good morning. This is a vast area that we're going to explore today. We've each been asked to tell a story to begin.

First I have to say that I'm a bit under the influence of a conversation that several of us just came out of. One of the participants was a friend who's on his way to Jerusalem tomorrow to facilitate the meeting of one of the few organizations that's still active in funding Israeli and Palestinian cooperation. He requested the group's help in thinking about how to approach that challenge. As a prelude to talking about how to join vision and practice, it was quite extraordinary. What came out of that conversation—besides a sense of powerful fellow warriorship that arose without having to be talked about or strategized—was an appreciation that the qualities he needed to bring to that meeting and the qualities he needed to access himself were the same qualities that we've been working with and talking about here this week. So this issue of joining inspiration and the manifestation of that inspiration seems to be completely holographic. It's the same when we're at the kitchen sink as when we're on the world stage, which is very encouraging.

The story I want to briefly tell is about the Shambhala Institute. For us, arriving at this point has been a journey, and there have been some very powerful spots along the way. For many of us involved in creating the Institute, the actual inspiration goes back about 25 years. We were inspired by a vision of mixing meditation and contemplative practice with the life of society, in a genuine and meaningful way. Many of us were frustrated for a long time because we had this heart inspiration but were absolutely clueless about what to do with it. We made small attempts, developed some innovative programs, but nothing really magnetized much energy.

Then about ten years ago a few of us who were working in various organizations began to see that in the model and disciplines of the learning organization was something that reflected our inspiration, and that there was an interesting possibility of joining these

streams in a powerful way. About four years ago that crystallized into a clear idea of a new institute.

The first difficult step was finding a way for a number of people, who each had their own stream of ideas, to join in within a common idea, because it was absolutely clear that this could not be one person's project, or even five people's project. It had to be a real joining of people's inspiration. In the beginning that joining seemed relatively easy and straightforward, and we began a collaborative circle of investigation, with lots and lots of conversation. Then at one point we had the distressing insight that if we were going to present this inspiration, and be the container for it, that meant we had to model it. Sad but true. The whole thing flipped from having a great idea about something to present "out there" to finding ourselves in an intensive process of inquiry and learning.

Magically, the idea still cohered and began to fill out, and then we were very fortunate during this early stage to meet Peter [Senge] and Meg [Wheatley], and we began to get a lot of very important moral support and ideas for how to go further, along with their willingness to participate.

And so it came to be that about two and a half years ago, we were at the stage of having brought together all the building blocks for our first program, which was planned for the summer of 2000. We had just designed our brochure and we had all of our very busy presenters lined up a year in advance. But because we were operating in this flat, collaborative fashion, things were going very, very slowly. We began to panic slightly and realized, "We've only got six months to go and we're just sending the brochure to the printer." We took advice from some people, who said, "Six months is enough time, but you're really going to have to push." We thought, okay, not only are we going to mail out the brochures, but we're all going to get on the phones every night. We had a meeting late one night and decided, there's so much invested in this that we have no choice, we can't turn back. It was a kind of heroic "into the breach."

The next morning a little doubt came up. We got back together again to investigate it, fresh from having all pledged to push forward the night before, and after a few hours of conversation decided to call the whole thing off. Something about that heroic thing just felt forced. So we decided to postpone the first program, and that was a very interesting moment, because close friends who had been watching this inspiration develop from the outside assumed, "Well, another great idea down the drain. They got this far, that was nice, they put together a lot of good things, but.... off to something else."

But for some reason we couldn't describe, we felt that we could call it off and still make it happen. So we decided to postpone it a year and see if we could get at least some of the presenters to hang in there with us. So we called them up and said [clearing throat], "Excuse us, but um, we're going to postpone this for a year..." while imagining that they were thinking, "You people are completely flaky." And to our great amazement, every presenter we called—Peter, Meg, Art, Jenny, and others—came through with a lot of

support, saying, “You know, this is the kind of thing we tell people they should be doing but they rarely do.”

That was a real watershed moment for us. After that we began to plan for the next year, at which point one member of our group asked, “We weren’t able to get it together the first time, what makes us think we’re going to be able to get it together the second time?” We realized, “Gosh, that’s right.” There was something about the structure we had to look at. We were in a collaborative discussion mode, and we were not going to be able to actually do anything out of that mode. The question of how to hold that spirit and switch into a hierarchical organization that was necessary to handle the logistics of creating programs was a tremendous challenge, and there was no way of getting through it that wasn’t painful.

Those were two points in our history that for me have been very instructive and powerful and that I wanted to share with you. Thank you.

**Marianne Knuth:** As Susan told you, I am building a village in Zimbabwe. I’m building a place where people—where we—can plant seeds of hope, of possibility, of another way of being in community, sustainably. I’m half Danish, half Zimbabwean. How many of you have been to Zimbabwe? Wow, quite a few. It’s a beautiful, beautiful country. I love it dearly. It is an amazing place, with the most generous, warm-hearted, loving people, and [with emotion] it’s falling to pieces right now. It is in the middle of chaos and darkness and greed and corruption and despair. And hope.

During the elections in March, I was helping at a place called the Human Rights Forum, and I think many, many people had the belief that we were going to change things—now. We were going to bear our cross. During the elections, we took calls from people who felt that something was being violated, or something needed to be reported. All of us working there were stunned to find out what was being done by the powers that be to insure that they won the election. And so they did.

I remember going back home and spending a couple of weeks feeling depressed and questioning what I was doing, and wondering whether I was in the right place. We are building a village—making bricks, putting one brick on top of the other, cutting thatch—and the country is falling to pieces. Am I in the right place? I still believe that the people are ready to rise up, to actually stand up and say enough is enough, if they had some help organizing and someone to take the lead. So I had all these thoughts—I needed to get involved, to do whatever was needed so that all the people of Zimbabwe would stand up and say, “Enough is enough!”

I didn’t do that, and now I’m very happy I decided not to go down that path, because then I would have been acting out of anger and fear and anguish. I’m still at the farm. We’re still making bricks. We just planted our permaculture garden. And I am so in love with what I’m doing. Every now and then I stop and I have a moment where I feel a little guilty

because I'm so happy. I'm so enjoying it. I'm seeing all the possibility of Zimbabwe at Kufunda Village. I'm seeing so much light.

And then I stop and hear about someone who just got kicked off their farm, or I hear about something terrible that happened to someone, and I think, "Shouldn't I be there? Shouldn't I be involved in that?" I had a conversation with Meg [Wheatley] about this, and what came to us was that something is dying and it's very painful. That is true all over the world. And something new is wanting to be born. When you're in the middle of giving birth to something new, you can't be grieving over what is dying. That's not to say that the grief isn't there, but in the moment, doing something, creating something, is its own little miracle.

It's only been nine months since I moved back to Zimbabwe. I was living in Denmark and working with Pioneers of Change, and I moved back because I suddenly had the sense that this was what I had to do. I had to go back and create something. I didn't really know what it was that I had to create—some kind of learning community, an opportunity for us all to realize what we can do when we come together. I announced to the world that this was what I was doing, and then I thought, "Oh my god, now I have to do it and I don't even know what it is." I traveled to different places in Zimbabwe, I met people, I told them this was what I was doing. I sat down with my sister and said, "I think we need a date. We need to say we're going to start something at this point." And so we announced, "We're going to start a program on May 4th. We're going to bring people to live at the village, and together we will explore how we can create sustainable communities."

And then things just started moving. But by the time I got back to Zimbabwe from Denmark, the Danish government had decided they were no longer funding anything in Zimbabwe because of the political situation—and this was where I was going to get my money! I told my friends, I told my networks, and the money just been coming. I call it love money. Everything we've done so far has been created by people who want to support this.

The people in Zimbabwe have also been coming. "Marianne, you should get in touch with the Permaculture Center." Okay. I got in touch with them, and they are so excited because the soil that I farm is very, very poor and they want to show what is possible in poor soil. I met someone who is very interested in compost toilets, and now we're going to have cutting edge sewage composting. So things have just been arriving, and I think it all started by just stepping up and saying, "I'm going to do this because it feels like something I have to do, and I have to trust, even though I don't really know what it is."

Michael suggested we should also share a little about the mistakes and the challenges, because this can all sound very rosy and fairy tale-like. "Isn't that wonderful, this young woman went back to Africa, and she's going do all this great work." But it's not so pretty, and it's lonely, and often I'm someone who I don't even recognize—managing construction sites and making sure we have what we need. Sometimes I lose touch with the source of my inspiration.

One time something went wrong with the building, and the workers—four big Zimbabwean builders—were trying to explain it to me. “We thought this, that, and the other and da da da da.” I’m standing there and I’m just fuming and I scream, “My word is law! Do you understand that?!” And they stopped and just looked at me, and I thought, “Did I just say that? What is happening to me?”

Through it all, it has been so helpful to be able to contact friends abroad, people who hold some of the same values, inspirations, and ideals. Whenever I haven’t been sure what was going on or what to do, their support has been so instrumental in my continuing, even through all the flaws and doubts and uncertainties. I still don’t know exactly what Kufunda Village is going to be, but I’m feeling blessed and honored to be a part of making it happen.

I want to share one other little story, because I’d like to bring a few more people into the room. Three or four years ago, a group of about twenty of us got together because we felt there was something about the organizations we worked for that needed to change. And so we created the network Pioneers of Change, which was really just a learning community of young people that had a belief but didn’t know what to do about it, and who wanted to bring that inspiration into their workplace. I wanted to share that, because there are so many of us out there doing this work and not really knowing what this work is.

The first year, we were fortunate enough to find funding to support a couple of full-time positions developing the Pioneers of Change network. People would ask us, “What are you doing?” “Well, you know, um, peer support, networking...” They couldn’t understand how we could work full-time for a network. “Isn’t a network just a way to meet informally? What are you actually doing?” Now, looking back, I appreciate so much that we managed—with the generous support of two CEOs—to stay in that uncertainty and that questioning, that feeling of, “Something is needed here and we don’t quite understand it, but we need to stay with it.” Today Pioneers of Change has more than a thousand people across the world who are coming together, very informally, to learn with and from each other.

You can take whatever speaks to you from those stories, but I realized this morning that for me it is about stepping out into a space of uncertainty. It is about following whatever feels like it’s wanting to happen and doing whatever I need to be doing right now, even if it seems absurd. And it doesn’t have to be a big gesture. I think it starts very small. And really, it’s not very glamorous. We’re making bricks—it’s a small thing.

At the calligraphy session this morning, Barbara [Bash] said, “Don’t impose yourself with the brush on the white paper. Sit, and wait for what wants to come, and then paint it.”

Thank you.

**Peter Senge:** We said we would each tell a short story, to set the stage for all of you to do the same. The stories can be about anything—large or small—please don’t think they need to be grand. They can be about whatever “bricks” you are putting together right now.

I'd also like to bring some other voices into the room. As I was listening to Marianne, I realized I am very blessed in that I get to hang out with all kinds of extraordinary groups and organizations. I also have a deep feeling that a lot of the leadership that will really matter will come from young people. I'm quite convinced of that.

I want to tell you about an organization that you might say is one of many little bits of Zimbabwe in the United States. It's an organization called ROCA, which is Spanish for "rock" and which stands for Reaching Out to Chelsea Adolescents. Chelsea is an old town about three miles north of the financial district in Boston. ROCA also operates in Revere and several of the towns around there. It is an organization of street workers, many of whom are former gang members. Most of them are between 15 and 23, and if you talk to any over 20 years of age, they'll tell you their first big accomplishment is that they are still alive.

Not long ago, I spent a few days at ROCA because I wanted to understand the organization better. There are a lot of organizations like ROCA out there, but this one is right next door, so it was a wonderful opportunity to hang out with the kids and spend a few days together. On the last day I was sitting in a circle with about 25 people, two-thirds of whom were street workers, and they asked me to talk to them about leadership. Probably somebody had said, "Oh yeah, he's written some stuff about leadership...." I looked around the circle and I just knew that I didn't want to do that. Everything about it felt wrong. So I said, "I'll make you a deal. Let's do a check-in. Let's go around the circle and each person can say whatever they want about leadership, and when it's all done, I'll add whatever you think needs to be added." They agreed.

About three sentences into the first person's statement, I pulled out a pad of paper and starting writing furiously, because I knew no one was recording the conversation, and I knew what I was hearing was something precious. I want to share some of these statements with you, but first I'd like to sketch in a bit more background.

What do street workers do? Most violent crime occurs within two to three hours after three o'clock—in the afternoon, after school ends. That statistic is fairly common in American urban centers. For the street workers, the first job is just to draw kids. ROCA has a facility with a gym and break dancing room, a place where kids would like to go to hang out. The street workers' first job is to get kids to come, and secondly, to hang out with them.

Often the street workers are former gang members. What is their role? In the simplest sense, it is to help build a community. In the most obvious sense, it is to save kids. In a still more fundamental sense, I actually think ROCA is an example of the school of the future. I think *this* is a real school. In fact, they recently got a large grant from the Kellogg Foundation for something called The Street School—as they say, the school you can never get kicked out of. By the way, after four or five years as street workers, they often go on to college or jobs, so it really is a school, in a very practical sense.

The street workers always hold their meetings in a circle, and they always start with a ritual of some sort. I found out later they had been mentored by several Native Americans. They do smudging and various other kinds of ceremonial openings, which is quite interesting because these kids come from Cambodia, Puerto Rico, East Africa, West Africa—from all over. Something about the practices of native peoples seems to connect to all of them.

To finish up my story, I'd just like to share with you some of the things the kids said, going around the circle. I didn't get all of it—I couldn't. Periodically I was stopped; I just had to just listen. And then I went back furiously to writing.

In the response to my question, "What does leadership mean to you?" an 18-year-old from Cambodia started off by saying, "It's direction in a democratic way. Like geese in a flock, where a new lead goose takes over every few minutes. You don't even know where you're going. If I open the gate, it opens for others." He then added, "It's not one person's brain working other people's bodies." I like that line.

Next was a 20-year-old from Puerto Rico. "When I think of leaders, there's always an essence or energy about them. I think it's about truth, and standing in truth. A place of truth and integrity. And standing there, even when it's hard. My brother is like that."

A 17-year-old from Columbia then said, "A leader is like my mother." And then she paused and just allowed her mother's presence to be in the room.

A 17-year-old African-American said, "People will try to hold you back from what you're supposed to do." She then told a story about a girl who was taunting her during breaks at school. "Finally I just told her, let's meet after school. So we met outside and lots of kids came to stand around us. I guess they thought there was going to be a fight. She starts yelling at me again, and I just stand there. She yells at me some more, and I just stand there. And finally I say to her, 'Is that all you have to say? Because I've got a lot to do and I can't just hang around here.' So she stopped, and I just walked away. When it was done, everyone came up to me and said how terrific that was, how brave I was. But I just stood there."

The young woman who talked about her mother then said she wanted to tell a story about the courage to follow your intuition for the greater good. "Awhile back, a girl was being taunted by a gang of other girls after school. Without saying anything, I walked up to her, took her by the arm, and just walked her home. Afterwards, I thought, 'That was a really crazy thing to do. I could have gotten hurt. I could have even gotten killed doing that.' Then I thought, 'Who was it who saw this girl in trouble and just helped her like that?'"

A Cambodian who is the head of about 150 street workers said, "When I think about leadership, I think about the whole human being. I think of a servant for the greater cause. I don't like standing up in front of people," —he has to make a lot of speeches—"but I need to do it. It is not just an inner state of mind, but an inner state of mind *for people.*"

Hopefully you can start to see why I was writing as furiously as I could. There were some adults in the circle also, and you could see their courage lift up as they listened to the kids talk with this kind of extraordinary clarity and conviction.

A woman I've gotten to know very well, who is a little older than the street workers, said, "My goodness, you know, it's Uncle Bud. As kids growing up, we had this man in our life called Uncle Bud. He was just a real nice man who always had time for us. Then one evening, there was a special event and hundreds of people showed up to honor him. We were shocked to discover that Uncle Bud was a hero, that he was seen as a civil rights leader. When he finally spoke that evening, all he said was, 'I appreciate everyone's thanking me, but I do not see myself as special. I just always did what I thought was the right thing to do—for myself, for my family, for my community. For mankind.' That's all he said."

Another one of the adults in the circle, who works with gangs in East London, said, "Two words that stand out for me regarding leadership are *love* and *forgiveness*. These are seen as a sign of weakness in the streets where I live, and this is a tragedy because it is what keeps leadership from arising in East London."

A 17-year-old who had just recently left a gang and become a street worker said, "I think a leader is a person who sacrifices himself for the team. It is standing in the fire, taking responsibility."

And last, the young Cambodian who had started off, just said, "A quality I struggle with is learning to speak from the heart. A lot of time I'm afraid of not knowing what to say. I wouldn't be, if I just spoke from the heart."

Kids. By the way, I wasn't really surprised by their clarity. I've done this in a lot of settings, and I find that young people are remarkably clear. The only thing they lack is the space and respect to share their truth.

As I thought about the things I'd heard, I couldn't identify anything I'd learned over the years about leadership that they hadn't said. They knew it as well. There was no need to add anything else. But I was also left with one simple notion that was so clear to me. People who are leading never think about leadership. Leadership is a subject of interest to those trying to get others to lead or trying to get themselves to lead. In the moment, no one who is really leading ever thinks about themselves as leading. In their awareness are just simple thoughts—like doing what is right for the whole. It is other people who might call their actions "courageous leadership."

I hope that encourages you to think of your own stories. They can be small or big. They can be about something formative that is going on right now, even if it's not clear where it will go. I love the way Marianne expressed it—you're pulled into it but you don't even know why. And you certainly don't know what will emerge. The idea that you get a grand vision and go off and make it happen rarely describes the actual experience.

My suggestion is that when you go around the circle, do tell a story. It's not just about sharing concepts or ideas. My only other suggestion is that you try to limit yourself to not more than five to seven minutes per person. That way, you will hear from everybody and you will keep the freshness. And finally, before having a lot of conversation after the first story, I would recommend that you hear a few more. The patterns and undercurrents usually become more evident as you hear multiple stories. Thank you.

**Susan Skjei:** Thank you, Peter. I've invited Arawana to connect us up a little before we move into our stories.

**Arawana Hayashi:** Please stand for a moment. All of these stories—all of our stories—have so much heart and so much body, so much courage and intelligence. In order to access all of that, we're going to take a moment and actually feel ourselves on this earth, connected to this ground where we're standing, feeling all of the energy of earth—the support and sustenance and nourishment, the world of the ancestors, the world where things grow. The world of wealth. Everything related to the earth is connected to our feet, and we can feel that in our body.

Now we can take a few minutes to feel the great expanse of heaven—sky, space, openness, vision, the imagination—where anything can happen—the world of the mind.

Joining the earth and heaven is the heart. Our body joins the sky and the earth and right in the middle is the heart, where there's care and love and kindness and big ears to listen and big arms to hold. And then we have the courage of the back, the world behind us—the strength of the back. So we're making a standing shape.

Stretch up if you want. Please do something wiggly, just in case you're stiffening up. Please make a face. Please make a bunch of faces. Okay. Don't forget your body.

Later, after small-group conversations...

**Susan Skjei:** I think most everything has been said in the groups, but if there's something you would like to share, we'll take a few minutes for this now.

**Participant:** The stories we told in our group were about choosing to be in our workplaces from a place of feeling that was where we wanted to effect change. And we discovered that having passion to create something could be very lonely—we were surprised, when we actually got down to it, how lonely it all felt. The loneliness was in part because of the degree of obstacles we encountered as we tried to move forward. We were often surprised by the obstacles, because we had thought the passion would be enough to make it happen. In the last seconds of our conversation, we were starting to appreciate that obstacles were the gift to moving it forward, but we need to sustain the energy to accept that, instead of resisting.

**SS:** Thank you.

**Participant:** Maybe this is more of a political issue than a personal one, but it feels personal. In our group, we were talking about how to relate with the powers that be. Marianne, you told how the Danish government pulled your funding, so you found donors. I'm always torn when we talk about vision and practice, because in my organization it's nice to have visionary conversations—and we need them, absolutely—but the question is, how do we relate to what I'll call the power structure? How do we relate with the world as it is, which includes governments—all the organizations we love to hate—employers, industry? That is a big issue and I'm not looking for any one answer, but I'd like somebody on the panel to comment on what I think is a changing situation, particularly for non-profit and educational groups here in the Western world. How do we relate to governments in turmoil?

**SS:** Thank you. Let's hear more from the groups and then we'll see if there's a response from our presenters. Any other insights or questions?

**Participant:** Of the stories in our group, there seemed to be a theme of needing to be able to sit with people in their despair, and resisting the impulse to just do something about it. It goes back to what Marianne was saying, about staying focused instead of trying to do or to fix, which can simply create more fear and chaos.

**Participant:** This is a comment on the process. Somehow it's almost like the old Goldilocks and the three bears story about too hot, too cold, and just right. Of the three community dialogues we've had, something about the question and then the actual discussion here today, in this group of four people, for me felt just right. This question pulled things together, in a very important and powerful way.

**Participant:** The theme of the stories in our group was that leadership is in the doing—the living your passion in what matters to you, and not even knowing that you're leading at the time—struggling with the how but not the why.

**Participant:** Our group was also lovely, and all the stories had a quality—very similar to Peter's—of appreciating people who were in some way in a simpler walk of life, or younger, or more traditional, and that led to the question, "What are we needed for?" Because all of our stories were from the point of view of being more educated or more advanced or sophisticated. If the wisdom is already there, what's for us to do?

**Participant:** We had a thread about the voices in our heads. When we're trying to sort it all out—am I doing the right thing, am I really doing the good work, or is there more important work for me to be doing somewhere else?—there's often a voice, maybe coming from our upbringing or our culture, talking in one ear, saying, "This is not what you should be doing; you should be doing something more important, or something that pays more." It's the "should" kind of voice. And then there's the voice in our heart, in our center. How do we sort out those two voices? How do we find the voice that is really ours?

**Participant:** I can follow up on that. Our stories were about following an innocence of rightness, which comes out of an inner sense of wrongness, of knowing when something isn't sitting right. And out of that also comes a pursuit of the common good. I believe it is

generally true that once we learn how to find a sense of rightness, we are also, automatically, following the common good. This is something that can be difficult for people to believe. How do we go about showing that this is true?

**SS:** I'm glad we're not obliged to answer all these questions. Instead we can hold them. [Turning to presenters] Is there anything that the panel would like to say? You didn't know you were a panel, did you? [Laughter]

**Peter Senge:** First of all, I'm joining with my colleagues here in thanking all of you for what you're doing. I really mean that. As for the comments that have been made, I personally feel there's no need to comment on the comments. They stand on their own.

As some of you probably know, I've had a single-pointed obsession in my life, which is systems and complexity. It's what I've always been interested in, just as when some kids discover they want to be a painter, or a musician, or a doctor, or a nurse. I found very early on that what I wanted to be had to do with understanding interdependence.

I've gradually come to appreciate that there are actually two schools—and I use that word in oldest sense—two schools or traditions that are concerned with interdependence. The dominant one is the one I was educated in and which you'll find in a wide variety of academic settings. We call this systems thinking. In consulting and when people try to understand complex interdependent issues, they have an image that there is a lot of stuff going on, and it all interacts. The challenge is to understand how it interacts, because that determines what really occurs. You can't just poke at one little piece in the corner.

There is a real problem, however, that eventually arises with this view of systems. It is very easy for the individual to disappear. When you get deeply into global warming, or sustained malnutrition, or poverty, or the social divide, or any global issue, it's easy to start thinking that only the United Nations could possibly do something about such a big systemic issue. Or only the huge multinational corporations could possibly have enough power. Oftentimes, lying behind this thinking are some assumptions about the nature of power.

There is another tradition, which is a complementary tradition—I've come to appreciate these as like the right hand and left hand—and the most common word for that tradition is holism. It's an important cousin, or sister, to systems thinking. Holism is also based on the assumption that the universe is infinitely interconnected, so it too is about interdependence or interconnection. It primarily differs from the tradition of systems thinking because it has a different notion of the *nature* of that interconnection.

The cornerstone of holism is understanding that the universe is right here. Everything is in anything. It's a very odd notion for most of us. We have been educated in a world that takes a little more naturally to the systems thinking perspective—things are complex and there's a lot going on, just like in my automobile. Obviously a system might be a little more complicated than my automobile, but it's the same idea—many different parts interact. Holism says yes, that's true, but in a living world, there is another level of interdependence.

Why am I bothering you with all this intellectualizing? Because in holism, the role of the individual is very different. In holism, you and I *are* the world. Not in some idealistic or romantic sense, but literally, physically.

Many years ago I heard Maya Angelou talk about all the horrible things that happened to her in her youth. When she told the story of how she came to terms with it all, she quoted an African from 2,300 years ago, a man named Terrence Afar, an African who was taken to Rome as a slave and eventually freed. She said that what she needed to eventually come to terms with her rapist, with the people who had been the systematic abusers of her and her family and her people, was what Terrence Afar had said over two centuries before: "I am a human being; nothing that is human is foreign to me." She said, "I had to realize that the rapist was in me as well. Whatever violence is acted out by one, I carry the seed of potential to act out myself.

For ending today, I brought a little surprise. It's actually a gift I received about two months ago, and it seems that whenever you receive a gift, you look for the right place to give the gift. It's a natural law. So this seemed like an appropriate place, and the Institute folks were willing to indulge me—so I hope you are as well.

About two months ago, a man from Denmark visited me, and we had a wonderful conversation. At the end he gave me a little booklet which turned out to be the results of research in Japan, which his foundation has supported. This research was conducted by Dr. Masaru Emoto.

If I have an obsession with interdependence, Dr. Emoto has an obsession with water. Dr. Emoto writes in the beginning of his book, "All my life I've been fascinated by water." Water is 70 percent of the planet, and it is 70 percent of you and me. When we're first conceived, we're about 98 percent water. About ten years ago, Dr. Emoto developed a method to carry out his obsession, which involves freezing water and then using electron microscopy to photograph the water crystals. And what he comes up with is... beautiful.

The first part of his book is a series of pictures of water from many different sources...

*[Peter Senge shows slides from Dr. Emoto's collection, which demonstrate that the molecular shape of the water crystals varies greatly, depending on the source and conditions of the water sample. Dr. Emoto also discovered that environmental influences, such as music, words, and thought patterns, affect the way the water crystallizes. See [http://www.wellnessgoods.com/fl\\_art\\_wat\\_messages.html](http://www.wellnessgoods.com/fl_art_wat_messages.html)]*

**Peter Senge:** The universe is enfolded. The human being is me. The world is more interdependent than we can possibly imagine. Who are we to say that our little brick doesn't really matter much? Thanks. [Applause]