

## 2016 Virtual Dialogue on Harmony with Nature – Theme: Earth Jurisprudence

By Joerg Elbers – Holistic Science

### **1. What would the practice of Holistic Science look like from an Earth Jurisprudence perspective? How is that different from the way that Holistic Science is generally practiced now? And, what are the benefits of practicing Holistic Science from an Earth Jurisprudence perspective?**

We are *all* born into an animate, living world, sensing and perceiving our interconnection with the whole of creation from the very first moment of our existence. But for almost all of us in Western culture, growing up is characterised by swinging into the path of reductionist education and—far more significant—by a “metamorphosis” of our natural, animate self into a rational, mechanistic self, nurtured by reductionist science and embedded in the Western worldview. Hathaway and Boff (2009) state that the adoption of a cosmology more closely resembles osmosis than it does formal learning because it takes place on a largely unconscious level. Smith and Max-Neef affirm that what we usually call “paradigms” are a *set of beliefs* practically all members of a given culture have in common, and continue, “a paradigm is not experienced existentially as something *you believe to be true*, but as something that simply *is true*” (2011:58). We are talking about very large *unstated* assumptions—unnecessary to state them—because everyone already knows them (Meadows 2008). Margaret Wheatley (2010) calls these dynamics “paradigm blindness”.

In my opinion, the power and potentiality of holistic science lies in the reunion of the ancestral, animistic and primordial worldviews of indigenous peoples with the discoveries of modern science (quantum theory, systems thinking, complexity theory, phenomenology, Gaia theory, deep ecology etc.) that caused a scientific revolution in the early 20th century (Elbers 2013).

In essence, holistic science introduces to a philosophy of life that gives us the potentiality and power to reconnect our mind, our heart and our spirit to the wholeness of nature, to sense our interrelation and interconnectedness with the whole of creation. Holism stands for hope—the hope of the emergence of a new, animistic cosmology that will be able to sustain life on Earth.

### **2. What promising approaches do you recommend for achieving implementation of an Earth-centered worldview for Holistic Science?**

Western society has led the world into an existential crisis that threatens life. This existential crisis is first and foremost a *spiritual crisis*. Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, editor of

the wonderful anthology *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, wisely explains in the book's introduction,

“The world is not a problem to be solved; it is a living being to which we belong. The world is part of our own self and we are a part of its suffering wholeness. Until we go to the root of our image of separateness, there can be no healing. And the deepest part of our separateness from creation lies in our forgetfulness of its sacred nature, which is also our own sacred nature” (2013:i).

For me, tackling the spiritual crisis is the only possibility to attain an Earth-centered worldview. Applying Spiritual Ecology means practicing mindfulness, empathy, compassion and love. Or, to say it in Joseph Jaworski's thoughtful words, “when all is said and done, the only change that will make a difference is the transformation of the human heart” (in Senge et al. 2004:26). In a profound interview for the MIT edx course *u.lab: Leading From the Emerging Future*, Peter Senge basically says, systems thinking is important but it is not enough. For a real transformation we need not only systems thinking but also *systems sensing*.

Spiritual ecology and systems sensing stand for the same issue: to attain an Earth-centered worldview we have to sense and feel that we form part of our living Earth, Gaia or Pachamama. Without the transformation of the human heart we will continue to produce superficial “change processes”, business as usual that maintains the reductionist paradigm and power structures.

Theory U, a framework and method for profound change, is a very powerful social technology to foster the transformation of the human heart. The tools and exercises of Theory U help to understand and transform the underlying causes of the ecological, social, and spiritual crises of our time (Scharmer 2007, Scharmer & Kaufer 2013). Apart from Theory U there are many other frameworks and methods to encourage profound change, e.g., Joanna Macy's *Work That Reconnects* or the *Art of Hosting*.

To spread the wisdom and beauty of holistic science, thinking and sensing, we need a revolution in education too. We need a transformation in education, educating the heart and the mind. Exemplary for higher education, Palmer and Zajonc (2010) promote an integrative and contemplative education. Anyone teaching at the university is called to go into and to implement it.

### **3. What key problems or obstacles do you see as impeding the implementation of an Earth-centered worldview in Holistic Science?**

The key problem for me is our separateness from nature, the dominance of the rational mind over the living body. We have to break down the *power over* of reductionist science and paradigm, characterized by coercion, control and invulnerability to maintain the status quo. We have to regain our ecological and spiritual literacy.

When Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh once was asked what we need to do to save our world, he replied, “what we most need to do is to hear within us the sounds of the Earth crying” (in Vaughan-Lee 2013:245).

### **4. What are the top recommendations for priority, near-term action to move Holistic Science toward an Earth Jurisprudence approach? What are the specific, longer-term priorities for action?**

Some ideas for action:

- **Spread the wisdom and beauty of holistic science, thinking and sensing.** As for Latin America, I think it is particularly important to make available basic literature in Spanish and Portuguese.
- **Encourage the focus on spiritual ecology.** We have to overcome the illusion of our separateness from nature, feel and sense our interconnectedness with the living Earth. Theory U and other frameworks and methods for profound change are powerful tools to foster the transformation of the human heart.
- **Revolutionize the education system.** Talking about higher education, we have to develop and apply concepts for integrative and contemplative education at the universities.

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