

THE READER'S GUIDE TO
THE HOLY UNIVERSE

A COMPANION TO
*THE HOLY UNIVERSE: A NEW STORY OF CREATION
FOR THE HEART, SOUL, AND SPIRIT*

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INTRODUCTION

Why This Guide?

*“We’re going to need each other
as we square up to the challenges of
the Great Transformation;
we’ll need not one hero,
all shining and strong,
but hundreds, thousands,
even millions.
You, of course,
are one of these heroes.”*

— THE SAGE (p. 178)

There’s a story that needs to be told, a story that isn’t being told in our larger culture. The changes we face on our globe are far bigger and far more profound than our government or our mainstream media are letting on. Quite possibly they *can’t* let on, because of the way things are structured in our institutions and global systems. The Sage asserts these crises we face are forcing a “Great Transformation”; others, such as David Korten or Joanna Macy, have called this event the “Great Turning.”

Of course, prophets and charlatans throughout the ages have portended catastrophes and immense changes. The difference today is twofold: 1) these assertions are based not on holy writ or personal ecstatic visions, but on science, and 2) scientists tend to not whip people into a frenzy, religious or otherwise, over their discoveries, however disconcerting the facts that these scientists have uncovered might be.

While science, in its purest form, is to be commended for not seeking to manipulate people emotionally, I think it’s made an enormous mistake by not harnessing the power of story. The nonrational (as distinct from the irrational) parts of our psyches are orders of magnitude stronger than the rational parts (and I’m sure there are evolutionary reasons for this). To appeal to logic alone fails; as the Sage says, “facts don’t go far in feeding that part of the soul [atheists can replace the word “soul” with “psyche”] that desires

connection, loves imagery, craves meaning, demands metaphor.”

Stories beget actions, actions beget stories—it’s a circle that feeds back on itself. And right now, our collective and individual actions and stories threaten our human civilizations and are destroying many species—quite probably even our own.

I wrote this guide for the same reason I wrote the book—to challenge and change our stories and actions. I believe, however, that it’s vital that we not only read books, but that we also come together, face to face, and work to both change our behaviors and actions as well as our stories.

This guide, I hope, will help people not just dig a little deeper into the ideas and concepts within *The Holy Universe* but more deeply examine stories, and perhaps change them—both collective stories and personal stories—for the betterment of all.

This will likely not be an easy task, changing stories and behaviors. I’m wagering that getting to know some of your compatriots will help as you face these challenges. I *know* that I would simply have not made it this far in my journey, my dance, without these vital connections; I’m pretty sure at some point I would have simply laid down and given up—figuratively and perhaps literally.

So I hope that these large and small groups that I’m imagining will use their discussions about *The Holy Universe* as a launching point for creating more community connections, more positive action, and more powerful, uplifting stories, as each of you discovers your own dance within the Great Transformation.

Warm regards,



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

How This Guide Is Structured

I've divided this guide into thirteen sections. The first eleven correspond with the chapters within the book, and the twelfth section asks larger, more global questions. See more about the thirteenth section, "Getting into Action," below.

Questions marked with an asterisk (*) are also found in the back of the book (though they may be in a different order).

Group Discussions

Here are a few things to consider in creating a group to work through the guide.

Ritual: It's important to have an opening and a closing, however short (and shorter is better). It's good to close the group close to "on time," and then leave time for those who wish to stay and continue the conversations ignited by the group.

Size of the group. The group can be any size, but if it's larger than twelve, you might want to consider breaking into groups of four to six people so that everyone gets a chance to participate. Groups that have subgroups can then have a larger check-in with the entire group toward the end of the meeting.

Etiquette. It's useful to take ten minutes at the first meeting to come to agreement on ground rules for the group. Possible items for discussion include: choosing a facilitator for each session, being respectful of one another's thoughts and opinions, deciding when it is okay to interrupt or interject, not trying to persuade or "teach" too much, having those who like to speak a lot give others a chance to speak, etc.

Number of meetings. You can choose to meet for thirteen weeks (the time between a solstice and an equinox) and focus on one section at a time, or meet for a shorter period and focus on more than one section (two sections per meeting within seven weeks or so, or three sections in five). Book clubs can focus on the "Big Picture" section alone. The meeting can be anywhere from an hour to two hours long. The group might choose to hold potluck meals before the discussion, and allow time for free-for-all conversations and discussions to continue after the meetings.

Meeting content. Obviously you can use the questions in this guide around which to structure your meetings. However, you might also want to devote a session or two (or parts of each session) as a free space for people to share and discuss passages from the book that they found particularly compelling.

If you do decide to use the following questions, be aware that it's unlikely (especially with a more lively group) that the group will be able to go through every single question. I suggest that you choose two to start with for each meeting, and then answer others as time permits. You can choose them at random (write down the numbers and pull them from a hat), or if one group member particularly resonates with a particular question, the group can go with that question.

Journaling

While I do encourage people to gather together to discuss the book, you could also work through the questions on your own, writing down your answers and impressions to each question.

Online Connections

I also hope that people connect online, though I have little idea just how this will evolve: whether the focus will be on social media sites or on the book's website. I invite you to visit www.theholyuniverse.com to see what discussion and dialogue groups, organizations, contacts, ideas, and other sources of information and inspiration have emerged.

I really don't know what you'll find there—I have some ideas and a few plans, but the Infinite has its ways. We'll see what emerges.

Getting into Action

The last section, "Getting into Action," leads the group through the exercises (one of which is based on the piece in the book entitled "Four Ways of Working in the World"). It is designed to capture the wisdom of the group to help each person clarify potential vocational paths. The group can, if it wishes, devote two or more meetings to work through this section.

THE READER'S GUIDE TO *THE HOLY UNIVERSE*

PROLOGUE

1. When the Seeker meets the Sage at the café, he recounts how his concerns go beyond losing his job; he reveals deeper concerns about finding meaningful work in a world from which he feels estranged and disconnected. How much of a struggle has this been in your life? Have you been able to find meaningful work? (p. 10)

2.* To learn about the importance of story, the Seeker, at the Sage's suggestion, throws a birthday party for a friend. How does your experience with celebrations compare with the Seeker's celebration? When have stories been a part of the celebrations you've attended? Do you agree that adding stories helps celebrations? How might you incorporate stories into your celebrations? (p. 16)

3. In discussing story and celebrations, the Sage says, "But notice how we shout 'Speech! Speech!' as we honor cherished ones at a celebration . . . but their words seldom satisfy." What has happened when you've heard people shout out for a speech at a celebration? When have you seen someone handle this request well, and share meaningful words? What did they say, and why did it work? (p. 25)

4. The Sage asserts that "we *are* the stories we tell ourselves—a person cannot exist without a story." Do you agree with this? Why or why not? In what situations might a person lose his or her story? (p. 26)

I: A NEW STORY OF CREATION



THE GOSPEL OF THE UNIVERSE

5.* The Sage points out to the Seeker that he's thrown away the stories he was given as a child, but can't reconcile with the "Big Dumb Rock" story. The Seeker exclaims in response, "I don't have a story!" to which the Sage replies, "Well, you *do* have a story, but 'There's got to be a better story than this' is hardly a foundation for a fulfilling life." At what times in your life, if ever, did you not have a clear overarching story? When, if ever, was your story seriously challenged, even changed? What happened to challenge and change your story? (p. 36)

6. Even though it is based on science, the story of creation that the Sage begins with has parallels to other creation stories (e.g., Genesis). What similarities did you see in relation to these other stories that you are familiar with? What differences did you notice? How well do you feel the "poetic" structure works? How well does this

structure enhance a science-based narrative? (p. 41)

7. What other parallels and differences between this creation story and others that you are familiar with did you notice in the two sections entitled "The Seven Creations" and "The Grandmother Star and the Creation of Earth"? Were there any sections of this narrative that you found surprising or intriguing? (pp. 44–54)

8. The idea of "beauty" is often mentioned only in passing in scientific discussions, yet the Sage presents it as one of the core essences of the Web of Life. Do you feel beauty has a place as a core essence? Why or why not?

9.* The Sage uses the terms "Infinite" and "the creative force of the Infinite" to describe her idea of ultimate reality. What words do you use to describe this ultimate reality? What do you believe are its characteristics? (p. 56)

THE EMERGENCE OF THE WEB OF LIFE

10. The Sage uses the term “Web of Life” as opposed to “Nature” when describing the biosphere of Earth, saying that the term “recaptures a greater reality.” Do you feel this is true? Why or why not? (p. 59)

11.* The idea of catastrophe spurring creativity recurs often in the story of the emergence of the Web of Life. How have you used the large and small catastrophes in your life to create anew? How differently do you view these catastrophes now versus when you were in the middle of them? (pp. 62–68)

12. The Sage outlines six “Essences of the Web of Life”: Emergence and Unpredictability, Flow,

Flexibility, Relation, Beauty, and Creation and Destruction. Which of the descriptions of these essences did you find most intriguing, and why? (pp. 61–76)

13.* At the end of this chapter, the Seeker answers the Sage’s question about the emergence of consciousness with “When humans came into the picture, that’s when we became aware.” The Sage, however, counters with a much larger view of consciousness. Do you agree with her view or the Seeker’s view? How far do you think consciousness extends throughout the Universe? Throughout the history of the Universe? (p. 79)

THE BOOK OF ANCIENT MIND

14.* The overarching Story of Ancient Mind tells a story of deep connection with the Web of Life. Are there times in your life in which you felt more connected with the Web of Life? With the Universe? What needs to happen for you to feel that connection? How easy or difficult is it for you to invoke this sense of connection? (p. 87)

15. Ancient Mind used some plants (what Modern Mind would call psychotropic plants) to “help it journey to worlds beyond the physical.” Modern Mind, as a rule, does not condone the widespread use of psychotropics. How appropriate do you

think the use of psychotropics is? Why do you think their use is strictly regulated within the cultures of Modern Mind? (p. 89)

16.* The Sage points out that many (though not all) cultures of Ancient Mind experience a significant level of violence, which surprises the Seeker. What ideas have you developed regarding cultures of Ancient Mind (i.e., indigenous peoples)? Have you tended to view such cultures as essentially violent? Essentially peaceful? Both? What contributed to your development of these ideas? (p. 94)

THE BOOK OF MODERN MIND

17.* The overarching Stories of Modern Mind have at their core a sense of separation from the Web of Life, from the time humans began to settle in farming communities to the present day. Do you see any examples of this sense of separation expressing itself in your life? In the larger world? Throughout Modern Mind’s history?

If so, what are some of these examples? (p. 101 & p. 108)

18. At a certain point, Modern Mind “turned a deaf ear toward the songs of the Web of Life.” What does this particular passage mean to you? What did Modern Mind stand to gain by turning a deaf ear, and what did it stand to lose? (p. 101)

19. Religions are presented as institutions that were used “not to liberate, but to control the multitudes as Modern Mind sought power and glory.” How accurate do you feel this assertion is? What roles have religions played throughout the course of Modern Mind’s history? (p. 106)

20. According to the text, at a certain point Modern Mind places its faith in science and reason alone, and sees the Universe as a dead object. How has this faith expressed itself in the cultures of Modern Mind? Do you see the Universe as

dead, alive, or something else? Why do you hold these views? (p. 107)

21. The power of Modern Mind has indeed caused ecological devastation, but it has also brought comfort to humanity (albeit a minority). Is the price worth the benefits? Why or why not?

22.* The Sage asserts that the crises perpetrated by Modern Mind are not because humanity is essentially fallen or flawed. Do you agree with the Sage’s assertion? Why or why not? (p. 120)

THE GOSPEL OF PLANETARY MIND

23.* The Sage suggests that Planetary Mind can emerge out of Ancient Mind and Modern Mind. How possible do you think this is? What do you think needs to happen to allow Planetary Mind to emerge? (pp. 128–131)

24. At one point, the story text says, “Ancient Mind knows . . .” versus “Modern Mind understands . . .” What do you think is the difference between “knowing” and “understanding”? (p. 134)

25.* In the overarching Story of Planetary Mind, the text refers to Planetary Mind awakening within

the Holy Universe. What do you think the author means by the word “holy” in this context? Do you think this is an appropriate word to use in the context of the Sage’s story? What does the word “holy” mean to you? (p. 137)

26. The text asserts that humanity is both the painter and the canvas being painted upon, that there is no creator separate from the created. How do you see this depiction relating to the concept of the “Infinite”? How does this differ from other concepts of ultimate reality (e.g., God, Brahmin, etc.)? (p. 137–138)

II: THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION



THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION

27.* The Sage makes a distinction between the authority that is handed down from on high versus a shared collective authority and the internal authority within an individual. What are some examples that you’ve seen from each? What authority do you use, and how has that changed over your lifetime? (pp. 147–150)

28.* Of the three major crises driving the Great Transformation—ecological, social, and spiritual—which one has been paramount in your own awareness, and why? What parallels can you

draw between this particular crisis and the others; i.e., how do you see them as related? (pp. 156-158)

29. The Sage offers three explanations for why our culture knows so little about the Sixth Mass Extinction: the feedback loops aren’t in place to tell us we’re in trouble, we don’t know how to respond to the facts, and the facts threaten the Story of Modern Mind. Which, if any, are more prevalent than the others? What other reasons might there be for our culture not knowing about the Sixth Mass Extinction? (pp. 159–161)

30.* The Sage uses the story of how life responded to the oxygen catastrophe early in Earth's history as a metaphor for our time, that the catastrophes we face may drive an evolutionary change, or, as the Sage put it, the Great Transformation. How do you think the Great Transformation might play out as these catastrophes become larger? (pp. 161–164)

31. The Sage has a hunch that the evolutionary odds are in humanity's favor; just as the caterpillar cannot imagine the vast distances it will travel when it becomes a butterfly, humanity may have unimaginable possibilities open to it as it makes its way through the Great Transformation. Do you agree with the Sage? Why or why not? (p. 173)

32. The Sage talks about the millions of heroes that humanity will need, but offers a different definition of what a hero is from the stereotypical "lone hero." Do you see yourself as a hero? What aspects of this new definition resonate with you? (p. 179)

33. When deliberating a course of action, the Sage offers a question that can reframe a consideration of a course of action: "Which looks like a picture of your own soul?" Where might you see this question applying in your life (at home, at work, in volunteering, etc.)? (pp. 192–193)

34. The piece entitled "Seeds" at the end of this chapter says, "all that do not survive share in the one that thrives." How does this resonate with you? (p. 201)

STORIES OF MODERN MIND

35.* The Sage asserts that examining issues of privilege is as important as any work to bring forth Planetary Mind. Have you had experience with doing this sort of work? How did it change your perceptions of privilege? (p. 216) *Note: before further exploring issues of privilege within a group setting, it is strongly recommended that a skilled and experienced facilitator be brought in to lead the discussion.*

36. Instead of the word "resource," the Sage offers the use of the word "bounty" when referring to the support humanity receives from the Web of Life. What thoughts and images come to mind when you use each word? What might hinder us in using the word "bounty" instead of "resource"?

37. The Sage and the Seeker talk about how technology is both a magnifier and a separator, though they initially have different ideas about what "separator" means. Which definition do you most agree with? Do you agree with the final definition that the Sage comes up with? (pp. 236–243)

38.* Do you agree with the Sage's idea that the Universe is neither friendly nor unfriendly? If so, why? If not, which do you think it is, and why? (p. 254)

39. The piece "Thriving Within the Web of Life" tells how each creature not merely survives but thrives within the Web of Life. How does this idea compare to what you were taught about the struggle for survival? (p. 257)

PERSONAL STORY

40.* The Sage describes how our stories influence the "river of mind." What are some positive and negative stories from your life that influence your own river of mind? How have they helped or hindered you in your life? What stories do you want to change? (pp. 266–270)

41. The Sage discusses how the Seeker's attitude and stories can be like pollution in the "river of mind." In what instances have your stories helped you? Describe when you changed one of your stories from a negative to a positive one. How did you address the "grooves" that pull you back into the old story? (pp. 273–279)

42. In response to the Seeker pointing out how hard it is for him to feel gratitude, the Sage points out how he might change his attitude from one of “I *have* to” to “I *get* to.” How much of a struggle has it been for you to feel and express gratitude? What helps or hinders your feelings of gratitude? (pp. 287–298)

43.* The Sage presents the Seeker with a model that outlines “Four Ways of Working in the World,” which roughly coincide with (1) the philosopher, nun, or monk, (2) the helper or healer, (3) the activist, and (4) the storyteller. Which of these is most reflective of your own work in the world? In what ways might you want

to change how you work in the world? What is your work in the world, and how has it changed over time? How have you discovered what your work in the world is? (pp. 297–303)

44. Do you feel that humans were indeed designed to serve one another? How does our proclivity toward cooperation reconcile with our proclivity toward competition? (pp. 307–309)

45. The piece entitled “The Gift of Sacrifice” infers that life cannot exist without some measure of suffering. Do you agree with this? If so, how does our desire for comfort fit in with this reality? If you don’t agree, why not? (p. 310)

CONNECTING WITH THE INFINITE

Note: before meeting to discuss these questions, you might want to try some of the exercises in the sections “Awe” and “Turning Toward Evening.”

46. Try the exercise in “Awe”: pick up a dead leaf and examine it in the way the Sage has the Seeker examine the leaf. Describe your experience and reactions. (pp. 317–321)

47. Try the exercise in “Turning Toward Evening”: try to sense Earth turning (vs. the Sun setting), and sense the stars “out” in the sky (vs. “up” in the sky). Describe your experience and reactions. If you don’t have a chance to do the exercise, describe how it might feel to experience Earth, the Sun, and stars in this way. (pp. 322–328)

48. In “The Temple of the Infinite,” the Sage says, “There is a place for you in the Universe, in the Web of Life. You never were separate from the Infinite.” How deeply have you felt these connections? What takes you out of a sense of communion and into a sense of separation? (p. 336)

49. The piece entitled “The Smallest Vessel” implies that the Universe could be no smaller and still contain us (and the Sage says this a few pages earlier). What thoughts and feelings arose as you read this piece? How does the reality of the cosmic scale of space and time square with our human sense of space and time? (p. 338–341)

EPILOGUE

50.* In the Epilogue, the Seeker begins cleaning up the creek near his house in response to the serious disease with which he’s been diagnosed. Has your life been affected by serious personal crises? If so, what have you learned from them, and what changes did they catalyze?

51.* In the text of the Epilogue, the author refers to the Seeker “helping the creek heal itself,” whereas in earlier drafts the text said, “restoring

the creek as best he could.” Why do you think this change was made? What difference in worldviews do you see between these two statements? (p. 346)

52.* How might the story of the Seeker’s illness be a metaphor for what humanity is going through now? What are some parallels between what the Seeker is going through versus what humanity is going through?

BIG PICTURE QUESTIONS

53.* How does the arc of the story of the Universe that the Sage presents—from the Beginning of All Beginnings to the creation of the Web of Life—compare with the story that you grew up with? What parts of the Sage’s creation story, if any, resonate with your story?

54.* Of the four overarching Stories (Ancient Mind, the two chapters of Modern Mind, and Planetary Mind) presented in Part I, which one most closely reflects your own story and why?

55.* There are only two places in the book where Earth is referred to as “the earth”: in the two “chapters” of the overarching Story of Modern Mind. Why do you think the author might have chosen this construction?

56.* The Sage’s gender is not revealed until the middle of the Prologue, and her ethnicity is not revealed until Part I (and it is only implied at that point). How much were these revelations a surprise to you, and why? How does your response fit (or not fit) with the larger story of your culture? What assumptions did you make about the identities of both the Sage and the Seeker in the absence of such telling details?

57.* Some readers of early manuscripts suggested that both the gender and the ethnicity of the Sage should be identified immediately rather than later in the text. Do you agree? What bias might these

suggestions reveal? Why might the author have chosen not to do so?

58.* What is the overarching Story that has guided your life? How has it changed over time? What stories do you feel have served you; what stories have hindered you? What stories do you want to change? Have you ever had difficulty in changing your stories? How hard do you think it is for people to change their stories?

59.* Ponder the fact that the atoms and molecules in your body hearken back to the Beginning of All Beginnings. What thoughts and feelings arise within you as you consider this? Do you think it is a useful practice to ponder such things? What other habits and practices do you think would be useful in connecting with the Infinite?

60.* Have you ever tempered your expressions of awe toward creation? When and where did this happen? Similarly, when, if ever, have you been ridiculed for expressing awe at the beauty of the Web of Life or the Universe? How did you react?

61. The word “Gospel” is believed to have an original meaning of “good news,” and the author deliberately used this word with this meaning in mind. Why do you think the author might have chosen this word for “The Gospel of the Universe” and “The Gospel of Planetary Mind”? What do you think the “good news” is in each of these chapters?

GETTING INTO ACTION

WHAT IS YOURS TO DO?

*“And it’s absolutely vital
that we also support one another:
that the monk
support the activist,
that the storyteller
support the helper and healer,
and so forth.
Who knows which one’s work
is more important?
Who knows where
our thoughts and actions
will echo out to?”*

— THE SAGE (p. 303)

This section dives deeper into looking at what it is that might form your path through the Great Transformation, using the intelligence of a group to possibly help you come up with new ideas and directions.

Do one of these exercises, all of them—or even none of them, if you know of a process that’s even better than what I’ve listed here. The important thing is to help harness the intelligence of the group, to find out if it can see patterns where your desires and the world’s needs intersect.

The ideal length of time for each of the exercise meetings is 90 minutes to two hours. The group should allow for another 30 minutes afterward for those who wish to stay and converse after the closing ritual (see page 3).

The group should read through all of these exercises to see if they would indeed like to do all of them or a subset of them, and also to decide how much time it wants to spend on them (and so the group members are familiar with what the exercises will be and what preparation needs to happen).

By the way, it *is* possible to do these exercises alone, though if it’s possible to do them in a group (and gain from the wisdom of the group), so much the better—but you will need to modify them, since the instructions given are written with a group in mind.

Finally, while it’s useful to take time out in a meeting like this, or in other seminars and workshops, it’s important to remember that this process of finding one’s path is a continuous process. Yes, sometimes it’s valuable to step back from your day-to-day world, but it’s also important to pay attention in that world, too, and to see how what you’ve learned in such workshops relates to that world and what things change over time.

I also encourage you to notice whether or not the work you’ve done before has led to any changes. If not, certainly don’t beat yourself up over it (if it hasn’t), but just notice, see what has happened to stop you from making changes or taking actions and from trying things differently or getting more support to help in making the change and getting into action. If it has led to change, acknowledge it, share your success with your group—and imagine the Sage saying “Good job!”

Exercise 1: Four Ways of Working in the World

This exercise uses the model of “Four Ways of Working in the World” that the Sage outlines for the Seeker in the chapter entitled “Personal Story.” Recall that this has less to do with *what* you do in the world and more with *how* you do it, how you *are* in the world.

Preparation: So you have fresh in your mind what exactly the Four Ways are, start reading from page 296, beginning where the Seeker says, “Look, you’ve said that a few times, ‘what calls to me.’” Read through page 303.

After reading this section, take a piece of paper and finish these four sentences:

“I am a philosopher (or nun or monk) when . . .”

“I am an activist when . . .”

“I am a storyteller when . . .”

“I am a helper or a healer when . . .”

Bring paper to the group meeting on which to write notes for yourself. One of the group members should bring a timer to the meeting.

With the Group: take out your paper, and quietly review what you wrote. You may add or change things as you see fit. For those who didn't get a chance to do the preparation, they can read through the reading (at least) or finish completing their sentences (optional).

If necessary, break into groups of three to four people. Each person then has five to ten minutes (or more, depending on the group size and time available) to talk about how they completed these sentences. They can also include answers to these questions:

- Which of the sentences felt most “natural” to complete? Which role(s) resonates with you the most?
- What stories have you had regarding yourself in relation to these roles? How have these stories served or not served, and how would you like to change them?
- Which role, if any, would you like to play, but may, for whatever reason, be hesitant to play?
- What, if any, surprises or “aha” moments did you have in doing this exercise? What, if anything, did it confirm?
- (If there's time) Who in your life have you seen in each of the roles? Did your parents, siblings, friends, or children play any of these roles? What can you learn from them regarding what your role is?
- How might you play this role in helping bring forth Planetary Mind as we make our way through the Great Transformation?

After the last person has spoken, have the group take about five minutes for each person to quietly write down and capture anything they might have learned or realized during this exercise.

Exercise 2: What Makes You Come Alive

*This exercise is adapted from the *Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream Symposium* created by the *Pachamama Alliance*.*

This exercise is a continuation of the previous exercise.

A good place to start in identifying new actions and ways of being for ourselves is to look at what we love to do and how that compares with what we care about.

Preparation: Read pages 305 to 306.

Then make a list of “what makes you come alive.” Start by closing or lowering your eyes for a moment and consider these questions:

- What is it that you love to do?
- What projects, passions, or interests give you joy and lasting satisfaction?
- What lights you up, gives you energy, ignites your imagination?

After reading these questions, close or lower your eyes for a moment and see what answers bubble up, and write them down. Try not to think too much about them as they arise.

Take as much time as you wish to create this list.

Once you feel this list is complete, set down your pen, take a breath or two, and put your attention on the center of your chest, to the region of your heart, and ask yourself these questions:

- Where do I hurt over what is happening to others, what's happening to my community, or to my world?
- What troubles me or causes my heart to ache?
- Where do I get angry or frustrated or depressed?
- What breaks my heart open?
- What does the world really need right now?
- What does my community really need right now?

Again, after reading these questions, close or lower your eyes for a moment and see what answers bubble up, and write them down. Take as much time as you wish to create this list.

Bring both of these lists with you to the group meeting.

With the Group: take out your paper, and quietly review what you wrote.

For those who didn't get a chance to do the preparation, they can continue with these

instructions and still get something out of the exercise.

Get out a blank piece of paper, turn it on its side, and draw two vertical lines that divide the page into three roughly equal columns.

Using the lists that you brought, in the left-hand column, create a core list of what brings you the greatest joy . . . what you love . . . what makes you most come alive . . . what wakes you up. Put the words “What I Love to Do” at the top of the left column.

On the right side, list the issues in the world that make you sad . . . make you hurt . . . make you shut down . . . make you want to hide your head in the sand . . . or go numb. Take a moment for those things to come to you. Give it the title “What’s Needed.”

Now, look at the two lists you made and see if you can find connections or overlaps between the list on the left, “What I Love to Do,” and the list on the right, “What’s Needed.” If and when you find a possible connection or overlap between the two lists, draw a line that marks that connection, and then pause to think if there is an action that fulfills that connection, an action that could unite what you love to do with what you think is needed in the world.

This middle column can offer a good set of clues about what the purpose of your life could be: some of the most joyful and fulfilling things you could do with your life. This is what your *unique* contribution might be to creating Planetary Mind, because no one else has those particular two lists.

Now break into groups of four to five people. For 10 minutes, each person in turn shows the others what connections they found. They should then move away from the group (if possible) but stay within earshot and write notes (and if everyone agrees to it, each can record the session for later) as the rest of the group members consider what they see, and also answer these questions:

- What other connections do you see between the columns?
- What suggestions might you make for filling in the middle column?

After the last person has gone, come back together (if the entire group needed to split up), and discuss the answers to the question “What

work, what calling, is worth devoting one’s life to, and why?”

Exercise 3: The Kaleidoscope of Skills

In this exercise, you will be creating a set of cards that make up a list of skills that you love and enjoy using. You will then tap into the intelligence of the group to find new connections among those skills.

Preparation: using a simple list or a “mind map,” make a list of skills that you enjoy or love doing. The list can be as long as you wish; they just need to be skills that you truly enjoy or love doing—or think you would love doing if you had the skill. For example, my list includes “tinkering” and “building.” If you wish, you can take a look at the lists available on the counseling section of Richard N. Bolles’s website at <http://www.jobhuntersbible.com>. (Be aware that as of the time of this writing he had plans on changing the site, so you may need to poke around a bit to find the lists.)

Once you feel you have a fairly complete list, take 10 index cards and narrow your list down to the top 10 skills that you enjoy or love to do. (If you need to develop this skill, write “need to develop” on the card.) You can write them in plain pen or pencil or have fun with making them decorative.

With the Group: Take about 10 minutes to review your cards. See what impressions and connections arise as you look them over. For those who weren’t able to create their 10 cards, they can do so now.

Now break into groups of four to five people. Each person takes a 10-minute turn and shows the others their list of skills, clarifying any questions. They should then move away from the group (if possible) but stay within earshot and write notes (and if everyone agrees to it, each can record the session for later) as the rest of the group members answer these questions:

- What connections do you see among these skills? Does a natural grouping appear?
- What kinds of “jobs” use these skills?
- What kind of business might be created from these skills?

- What organizations need these skills, and in what roles?
- Where else might these skills be used?
- Who do you know who also uses these skills? What might they be able to teach the person whose cards these are?

Once each person has had a turn, the entire group should reconvene; a few members can offer what they learned through this exercise.

Exercise 4: Making It All Work

*“You may need to make peace
with the reality that
the economy of Modern Mind
may have no idea
how to value your work;
the way things are set up
might not reward such work.”*

—THE SAGE (p. 293)

However spiritual we are, our physical bodies need food, need shelter, need clothing—and for those of us who live in the societies of Modern Mind, we need more than this (transportation comes to mind). Perhaps highly enlightened beings can forsake all of these needs in light of their deep connection with the Infinite—and I’m not knocking that; I’m more than willing to acknowledge that possibility—but for those of us (including me) who are still on less perfect paths, we still need to make our way in a global economic system that, at its core, is extractive and destructive.

So, to paraphrase the Sage, you might need to distinguish your job, or what you do to earn money, from whatever work you choose to do in helping to create Planetary Mind—which is where your passions intersect with what the world needs, as you’ve identified above.

As a side note: it’s important to be wise with your money, to not be overly Pollyannaish about creating work that has questionable return for your time (note that I said “overly”—a touch of Pollyannaism may not be all that bad!). So be very careful with any savings you might spend or debt you might take on should you decide to venture forth in a very new direction (such as a new

business). Make sure you run any business or other plans by competent pros as well as friends.

Preparation: If you have one, print out a few copies of your resume that members of your group can share as they look at it.

Gather together all of your work from the previous exercises, and think about what you’d like to share at the next meeting. Bring whatever feels like it might be useful to the next meeting.

With the Group: Break into groups of four to five people. For 10 minutes, each person has a chance to discuss whatever would serve them most. This can include answers to some of these questions:

- What work have you identified as a result of the above exercises? What is exciting to you? What is scary?
- Will you, as the Sage warns, need to separate out your paid job from your true work in the world? How does that feel? Are there any smaller changes to make the combination more workable?
- What work *can* you do, if you must, to make ends meet? Is there any work that you can do but have chosen not to do?
- Pass around your resume and talk about it. What are you proud of, and what are you not so proud of? What contributes to the creation of Planetary Mind, and what is merely part of the economic system that hasn’t yet learned how to not fight against the lessons of the Web of Life?
- What feels impossible? What circumstances feel like stumbling blocks to you? How might you overcome them?
- What continuing support groups and action groups (and they may be one and the same) will you connect with to continue with your work?

Continuing On

As the last question implies, it is vital that you connect with others of like mind, whether or not they’ve heard of the term “Planetary Mind.” Perhaps they know of it by another name, perhaps not, but they do indeed sense that something is afoot—though they may not have words for it yet, or even know that there are others who feel the same way. Paul Ray, coauthor of *The Cultural*

Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World, asserts that one of the core characteristics of Cultural Creatives (if you've gotten this far in the reading, you are indeed a Cultural Creative) is a pervasive feeling of isolation, even loneliness; they feel as if no one else thinks like them and has the same deep concerns for the world, and they feel as if they don't quite fit in with the American dream of either a modern "winner take all" or a traditional "Mom and apple pie" attitude. Perhaps you've had these feelings yourself.

Whether it's to help yourself break out of this isolation or to help others realize that they're not alone, we need you to find your fellow Cultural Creatives, to find a place to let their heroism—and yours—shine through.

As the Sage says (p. 179):

*"No deity or elite group
chooses such heroes.
You instead choose yourself.
The choosing is done
by the spirits and hearts
of those unable
and unwilling to slumber
through the catastrophes
that are now upon us.*

*"These fellow seekers have already
created millions of organizations
working to transcend
the story of Modern Mind.
They are the myriad tiny seeds
sprouting in the cracks within
the story of Modern Mind.*

*"It is a movement of movements,
with no center, no one in charge,
a diversity of people
coming together across the globe."*

Your compatriots are out there. I have listed on the book's website a number of places to connect with other people, including the Pachamama Alliance, Generation Waking Up (for young adults), Bioneers, Transition USA, the Institute for Noetic Sciences, and the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies. Many of these organizations encourage the formation of local community groups.

There are also "new thought" churches, such as the Centers for Spiritual Living, Unitarian Universalist and Unity churches, as well as liberal Christian churches—all good places to connect with other like-minded folks—as well as action-oriented organizations such as Move to Amend, 350.org, and the Climate Change Coalition.

Find your tribe. Do the work that makes your heart sing. Have fun doing it. And may our paths cross as we find our dance in the creation of Planetary Mind.