

The Emerging Power Of 'We': Awakening To The Evolution Of Community

December 2019 By Linda Sechrist; Natural Awakenings – Chicago



Franzii/Shutterstock.com

Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh's suggestion that the next Buddha would likely not take form as an individual but rather as a sangha, a community practicing mindful living, led many people to ask, "Why a community?" The author of more than 100 books that explore the Buddha's core teachings on mindfulness, kindness and compassion, Hanh clarified the meaning of sangha as a good community necessary for helping individuals learn how to encounter life in the present moment, resist the unwholesome ways of our time, go in the direction of peace and nourish seeds of enlightenment. Even the best

intentions, he noted, can falter without such a group of trusted family, friends and co-practitioners experiencing mindfulness together.

A Migration to Forming Community

Today's trend toward collaborative processes and opportunities for transformation through online communities is made easier by the availability of affordable video conferencing providers such as Zoom, Skype and Mighty Networks, as well as online platforms like Facebook and MeetUp. Although many groups form for marketing, political, civic or social purposes—allowing participants to share values and common interests—thousands more gather as online intentional communities associated with personal growth and spiritual awakening.

Myriad individuals have been able to experience some aspect of community through international organizations such as MindValley, Hay House, the Shift Network and Dr. Deepak Chopra's Jiyo, a wellness-focused mobile app intended to extend the reach of his ideas on health and social transformation from millions of people to more than 1 billion.

In MeetUp, spiritual awakening groups recently comprised 1,113,972 members in 3,631 groups worldwide. Additionally, co-housing communities, spiritual residential communities and eco-villages continue to form around the intention of designing and implementing pathways to a regenerative future.

The Old Story Versus the New Story

The increased interest in intentional communities may hint at a possibility that the human desire for community might be nature's evolutionary nudge toward a collective leap that helps us to survive a changing climate and Earth's potential sixth mass extinction. If so, this possibility needs a new supportive story that includes humans as part of nature, with its evolutionary impulse as a guide for body, mind and soul.

With our modern scientific worldview, when people talk about nature, they typically mean animals, plants, geological features and natural processes, all happening independently of humans. A more suitable new story is cultural historian Thomas Berry's moving and meaningful narrative in *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*, in which humans aren't above nature by virtue of superior intellect, but instead are equal

partners with all that exists in a materially and spiritually evolving universe. From Berry's perspective, humans are the eyes, minds and hearts through which the cosmos is evolving so that it can come to know itself ever more perfectly through us.

Apollo 14 astronaut Edgar Mitchell shared Berry's perspective. Traveling back to Earth after walking upon the lunar surface, Mitchell gazed out of the spacecraft window, whereupon he was flooded with an ecstatic awareness. "I was a part of the universe I was observing, and I became aware that everything that exists is part of one intricately interconnected whole," recounts Mitchell, who founded the groundbreaking Institute of Noetic Sciences to explore the nature of human consciousness.

A Guiding Light

Seijaku Roshi, the abbot and founder of the Pine Wind Zen Community, aptly named for its location in a pine forest in Shamong, New Jersey, advises, "People are searching and hungering for community, which is number one on my agenda. If we aren't talking about community, we're squandering the moment. Whether it's an evolutionary nudge or not, it appears that our tragic world situation is pushing us towards an alternative vision for living a meaningful life that meets the needs of people, society and the environment. We are awakening to the fact we're interconnected, interdependent and need community, which is the spirit and guiding light whereby people come together to fulfill a purpose, to help others fulfill their purpose and to take care of one another."

Conscious Evolution

Craig Hamilton, the guiding force behind the movement known as Integral Enlightenment, is the founder of the telecourse training program Academy for Evolutionaries. His spiritual guidance and teachings reach a growing international online community spanning 50 countries. "Transforming ourselves in the deepest possible way is, in fact, an evolutionary imperative, and we need to be able to identify the indicators of emergent shifts and participate creatively with change as an evolutionary force. Evolution up to this point has been playing out unconsciously. We're now waking up and realizing that we can collaborate and participate in an emerging future."

Hamilton's experience is that where humans awake to the one that is expressed through the many, they also begin to engage together. "Practicing community isn't as simple as it seems. In online communities, a lot less can go wrong. The stakes aren't as high. People come and go, share and engage as they like."

A Community of Sisterhood

Laurie McCammon, author of *Enough! How to Liberate Yourself and Remake the World with Just One Word*, feels certain that humans are evolving. "We were last to the party with our big brains, and now we're trying to intellectualize our way to an uncertain future without important feminine values such as feeling, intuiting, nurturing, interdependency and vulnerability," says McCammon, who is deeply involved in the circle movement, in which women gather in small groups to empower each other.

A regular participant in Gather the Women Global Matrix, a worldwide sisterhood that connects thousands of women sharing meaningful conversations and celebrating the divine feminine with the intention of bringing about personal and planetary transformation through cooperation and collaboration, McCammon says, "No one of us can bring about large-scale transformation alone. It's time to tell the new story wherein our lives and actions demonstrate that together we are enough. Non-hierarchical circles that encourage authentic communication are part of this new story."

Citing other important circle communities such as Tree Sisters and The Millionth Circle, McCammon suggests that women tap into The Divine Feminine app, which allows them to find circle communities and events anywhere in the world.

Co-Creating With the Intelligence of Nature

Teacher and futurist Peter Russell writes books that are focused on consciousness and contemporary spirituality. His lectures help humans free themselves of limited beliefs and attitudes that belie many of humanity's personal, social and global problems. The author of *The Global Brain: The Awakening Earth in a New Century*, Russell posits that the evolutionary process naturally draws humans together. "Humans are social creatures that need community, which I find very energizing," says Russell, who cites the Findhorn Foundation eco-village, in Scotland, as a dynamic experiment in community.

"Although residents went through hard times, they recognized the need for honest communication so they could attune to one another in loving ways that would allow everyone to work through their difficulties. Today, life at Findhorn is guided by the inner voice of spirit, and residents work in co-creation with the intelligence of nature," he says.

The Collective Wisdom of Community

An uncertain future is emerging, making it necessary for new and more intuitive methods and spiritual practices for developing collective wisdom, human potential and the skills for practicing community. "I'm in the process of finalizing 118 chapters from 90 different authors for a *Collaborative Change Library: Transforming Organizations, Revitalizing Communities, Developing Human Potential*," says associate editor Carole Gorelick, who clarifies that spiritual practices are now playing a part in bringing about collaborative change. She notes that several chapters are updated versions of *The Change Handbook: The Definitive Resource on Today's Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems* (2007 second edition), which included modalities such as World Café, Open Space Technology, Art of Hosting, Appreciative Inquiry and many others.

A living handbook for developing human potential and the skills to practice community, Fred Eppsteiner has been teaching Buddhism for 23 years. A student of Hanh's since the 1960s, he is the founder of the Florida Community of Mindfulness, in Tampa. Eppsteiner sums up why the next Buddha could be a community: "A better future will be created by people who are living the values they want for the world, not just abstractly using only the intellect. In community, we ask ourselves, 'Can I be what I want to see in the world? Can I practice these things mindfully in community with love, acceptance, deep listening, compassion and kindness?' These are values that every Buddha has lived for centuries, and certainly ones we need to evolve from a culture of, 'It's all about me' to a culture of, 'It's all about we'."