The Breadth of the Impulse of Spirit Recollection

What will be presented below has come to the surface from the author's explorations and personal exposure. Table 7 is only a convenient way to offer an overview of the extent of human experience that experiential spirituality covers.
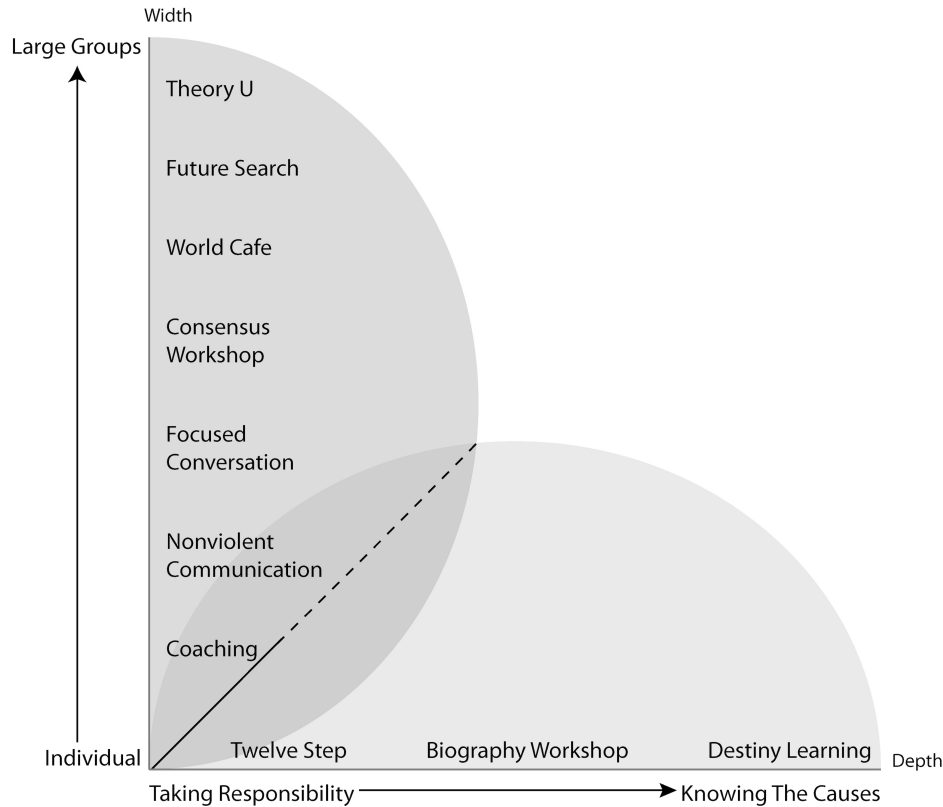

Table 7: The Field of Experiential Spirituality

The techniques have been ordered in such a way as to progress in depth (quality of the insights generated culminating in knowledge of previous lifetimes' experiences) on the horizontal axis, and in width (number of people that can be affected) on the vertical axis. On the horizontal axis we move from subjective to objective knowledge in a way that will be made apparent shortly. On the vertical axis we move from work geared for the sake of the individual, to work meant for larger and larger wholes: communities, organizations, networks. We should keep in mind that this is only a device for making trends more visible, and that there is no way to quantify the position of any given technique along these coordinates. It is to be expected that different people will make significantly different judgments in this regard.

Individual Work

Let us start with work done with individuals. Two such examples can be mentioned: life-coaching, and the work of the various Twelve Step programs (Alcoholics Anonymous [AA] was the first and most well-known of these).

Coaching is a lighter version of counseling, less therapeutic and more goal-oriented. The individual who turns to a coach wants to align her life with her personal values; to have a source of support and someone who will hold her accountable to her commitments. Much of the coaching is determined by inquiries, assignments to be carried outside of the coaching session, and changes of attitude and beliefs.

Twelve Step refers to the specific stages that first emerged in the formulation of the Alcoholics Anonymous process. Its official twelve steps are:

> Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
> Step 2: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
> Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives to the care of God as we understood him.
> Step 4: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
> Step 5: Admitted to God, ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
> Step 6: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
> Step 7: Humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings.
> Step 8: Made a list of all persons we harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
> Step 9: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
> Step 10: Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
> Step 11: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out.
> Step 12: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry the message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.[1]

The whole life of an alcoholic or addict is an endless, repetitive act of denial of reality. Initiating the Twelve Step process means being willing to acknowledge our powerlessness and open up to the idea of a higher power (steps one to three). This is just the first breach in the armor that surrounds the addict and that nullifies all his well-meaning efforts. It concerns the intellect. A second significant step comes from the individual's involving herself with an open heart in making a moral inventory and letting herself be touched in her feelings through an understanding of the pain she has caused to others (steps three to seven), thereby acquiring new faculties of empathy. Finally, at steps eight and nine the candidate jumps into the crucible of the transformation of her will when she goes through the zero point of making herself completely vulnerable and

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[1] For further information on Twelve Step, its history and development, see Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism,* and Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

powerless, in making amends to all those she has hurt. This is truly a turning point, a seeming place of void that opens new doors. Past and future meet in the willingness to make oneself truly powerless; but new, deeper power emerges that connects an individual with her higher self and with what the future is calling her to become.
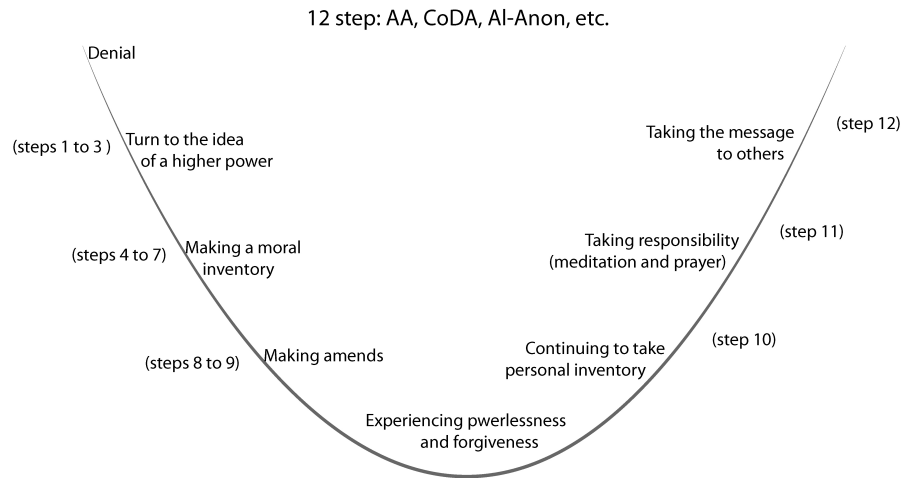
12 step: AA, CoDA, Al-Anon, etc.

Denial

(steps 1 to 3)   Turn to the idea
                  of a higher power

                                      Taking the message   (step 12)
                                      to others

(steps 4 to 7)   Making a moral   Taking responsibility   (step 11)
                 inventory   (meditation and prayer)

(steps 8 to 9)   Making amends   Continuing to take   (step 10)
                                      personal inventory

                 Experiencing pwerlessness
                 and forgiveness

Table 8: Twelve Step in Relation to the Seven Life Processes

In all the successive stages the individual goes from being supported by the organization to becoming an active supporter and shaper. At step ten what has been taken from the previous stages becomes an ongoing practice. This is what allows the point of openness to the future to become a source of continuous inspiration. The text mentions "continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it." The individual does not experience the stage of openness to the future only once, and then leave it, but must return to it over and over again. Step eleven means fully taking responsibility for our lives and being able to carry others, part of which is the taking up of an active discipline of prayer and meditation. The recovering addict is now putting his "shoulder to the wheel"; not only for his personal recovery, but also for the good of the group, and eventually of the Twelve Step program itself. Finally, there is in step twelve the complete dedication to and adoption in daily life of the goals of the Twelve Step process ("carrying the message to alcoholics and practicing the twelve steps in all affairs"), which means contributing to the continuance and regeneration of the group. Not surprisingly, from the accrued effects of all these steps practiced by thousands of individuals over many decades, AA is effective not only in its group work, but it is also very innovative, solid, and efficient in its organizational structure. The Twelve Step program can be seen as a way to change a given "double" (a particular manifestation of the larger double), and as an expression of Steiner's Lesser Karma Exercise.

Destiny Learning (mentioned in Chapter 3) attains the furthest reaches of individual work. It allows individuals to reach glimpses of previous life experiences, albeit very limited in scope, thus deepening understanding of karma and reincarnation, and reawakening individual pre-birth resolves.

Group Work

Let us move one step further, with Nonviolent Communication (NVC), which is undoubtedly a tool for self-improvement. It is also the quintessential tool of the encounter occurring between two individuals or two groups. In NVC, we pay attention to the expression of communication as it differentiates itself in observations, feelings, needs, and requests, by learning to express those in terms that derive from the expression of our higher self; and we learn to recognize when their expression is tainted by the content of our double(s). We learn therefore to take responsibility for the way we use language; the main corrective is to express ourselves more coherently (outwardly and inwardly), rather than falling into finding blame in another person.

Nonviolent Communication endeavors to render communication objective. It recognizes four levels to a conversation: description of facts or observation, expression of feelings, expression of needs, and formulation of requests.[2] We will consider the case of a mediation, because it illustrates most clearly the process of Nonviolent Communication. An NVC mediation is a process in which participants are helped in forming a true connection at the level of feelings and will before having to take on any decision. It is not a place of compromise, but a true shift to a higher level, marked by the active presence of the higher selves. A true NVC mediation can only occur after the participants experience a qualitative shift in themselves and in the relationship.

At the beginning of the process the participants are "behaving in jackal," an NVC term that means repeating past perceptions and behaviors. The situation is stuck; there is only a conversation between doubles. ("Double" is the closest anthroposophic term for the playful NVC "jackal.")

The mediator receives the participants, who are called "conflictants," and explains to them how the group process will lead them to interact with each other through his help. Basically this means he helps them each "reflect" what the other has said. In order to ensure reaching this goal, the mediator often verbally reflects what the other party says, feels, and wants, waiting for each party to repeat what the mediator said, in their own words.

At a first level, the mediator helps the participants refrain from bringing in past events. Those are known beforehand. Only those events that concern the mediation moment are looked at. This is a stage of grounding in objective truth. The past is already layered with interpretation, and cannot be counted on to add objective common ground. The two parties are invited to express each other's feelings and needs, and the mediator ensures that each is heard by the other. Basically, party A expresses himself, the mediator extracts the feelings and needs, and restates A's position. He then asks party B to repeat what he has heard in terms of A's feelings and needs. The same process is repeated for party B, and the process continues for as long as there is a felt need from the participants.

If all goes well, the participants reach a point of breakthrough, which can be noticed because there is a slowing in the pace of mediation, the participants acting noticeably more relaxed, breathing deeply, waiting for the next step. Most likely this stage will be reached only through iterations, requiring a return to the previous stages, particularly as new feelings, corresponding to new needs, emerge. Once the shift has been

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[2] Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion*.

reached in a permanent way, then the mediator can work at finding common ground. Requests are put out in a sort of brainstorming session in which anything is possible. From these only the most concrete and doable emerge, through which the participants agree that they can meet all their respective needs. Finally the results obtained must be implemented and stand the test of time. At this stage there can be a solution; further negotiations between the parties on new agreements; or return, at a higher level, to mediation.
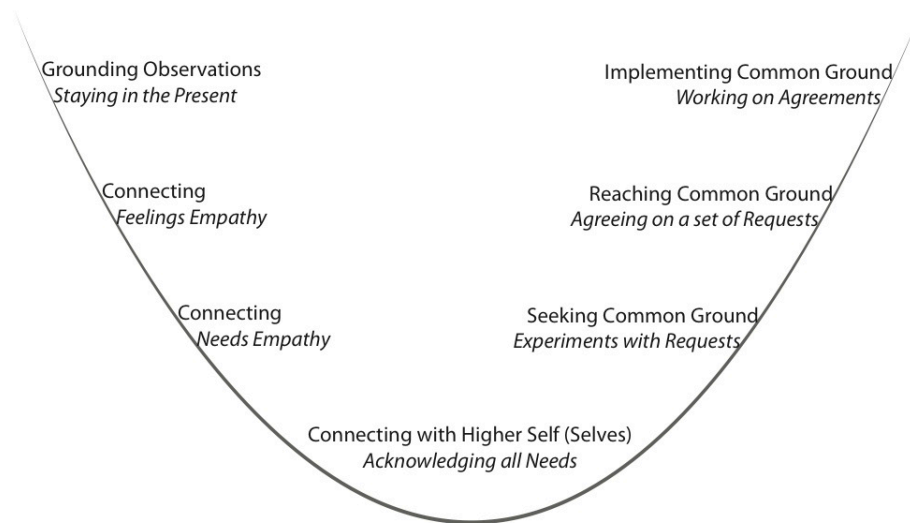
Grounding Observations
Staying in the Present

Implementing Common Ground
Working on Agreements

Connecting
Feelings Empathy

Reaching Common Ground
Agreeing on a set of Requests

Connecting
Needs Empathy

Seeking Common Ground
Experiments with Requests

Connecting with Higher Self (Selves)
Acknowledging all Needs

Table 9: NVC Mediation in Relation to the Seven Life Processes

We could say that mediation is a way to transform the "doubles" of the participants and of the relationship by bringing out the higher selves in both participants.

Organizational Work

At a higher stage, one can involve a whole community or organization. This has been done with techniques too many to name here that can be grouped under the general label "social technology": Appreciative Inquiry, Technology of Participation, Future Search, World Cafe, Open Space Technology, and so forth. To involve a group in decisions that generate the collaboration of all parties, these techniques build on a series of polarities and rhythms: rhythm of day and night; emphasis on past, present and future; movement from complexity to simplicity; from large to small groups; from single stakeholder groups to mixed groups; from individual to group work; analytical and imaginative activities, and so forth. To be effective, these techniques emphasize as diverse a participation as possible; a spirit of inclusion and participation; suspension of judgment; willingness to look at the whole picture, both good and bad; openness to the new, and so forth. The solutions will work when all individuals reach a stage in which they agree that they are all part of the problem, and that together they can contribute to the solution. This is the step of collectively taking responsibility for the situation at hand.

Many of the above techniques can be used at larger and larger levels, often in combination, to bring together networks of organizations around a concerted effort. Initiatives promoting sustainability across public, private, and non-profit sectors are an example of this. Worth mentioning at this level is Theory U, which is not a finite format, but an overall set of ideas that can be flexibly applied to create ad hoc formats fitting variable needs. Similar results can be obtained by variously combining the use of the various techniques mentioned above.

What NVC achieves for two individuals and eventually for the groups they represent (that is, mediation for two parties in conflict can take place between two of their representatives), social technology does for organizations or communities. Examples of social technology are Appreciative Inquiry, World Café, Future Search, Dynamic Facilitation, Technology of Participation, and so forth. In Otto Scharmer's *Theory U* an archetypal model is made manifest. All the social technologies listed earlier operate from this model. We will now look at one of the simplest interventions to help us hold a conversation (Focused Conversation), and at an approach that can be used at the highest levels of organizational complexity (Theory U).

Focused Conversation

This format creates the conditions in which a group of people may turn to a way of separating the essential from the non-essential, in discussing a general topic or exploring an agenda item in a meeting.[3] Participants learn to explore how any given situation has objective external factors; how the situation may cause internal reactions that cloud an objective relation to and understanding of it; how the situation needs to be thoroughly understood; and how decision-making depends on all the previous elements. More specifically these are the stages of the conversation:

Objective Level: a key word is "what." These are sensory questions. It is important not to downplay them. One has to face initial resistance and go through it with courage and persistence. This corresponds to the breathing life process. Key questions are: "What objects do you see?"; "What happened?"; "What words and sentences stand out?
Reflective Level: a key word is "how." It serves to integrate right brain with left brain, and corresponds to the warming life process. Key questions are: "What does it remind you of?"; "How does it make you feel?"; "Where were you surprised?"; "…or delighted?"; "Where did you struggle?"
Interpretive Level: a key word is "why?" This is the level that may take the most time. It corresponds to the life process of nourishing. Key questions are: "What is happening?"; "What is this all about?"; "How will this affect us?" "What are we learning from this?"
The stage of individuation is seldom mentioned; when so, it is called the "Maieutic level" (from the Greek "giving birth").[4] In a study group this is the time of generating insight. In a decision-oriented conversation this is the moment when the group reaches consensus.
Decisional level: key words are "what, who, when, where." It corresponds to the two levels of maintaining and growing. And key questions are: "What is our response?";

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[3] Brian Stanfield, *The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 Ways to Access Group Wisdom in the Workplace*.
[4] Jean Watts, *Guided Dialogue For Releasing Depth Wisdom*, at http://wikifoundryattachments.com/-3lwFFV7xW6uYeMw-Y9RMw72928

"What decision is called for?"; "What are the next steps?"; "What changes will be required of us?"

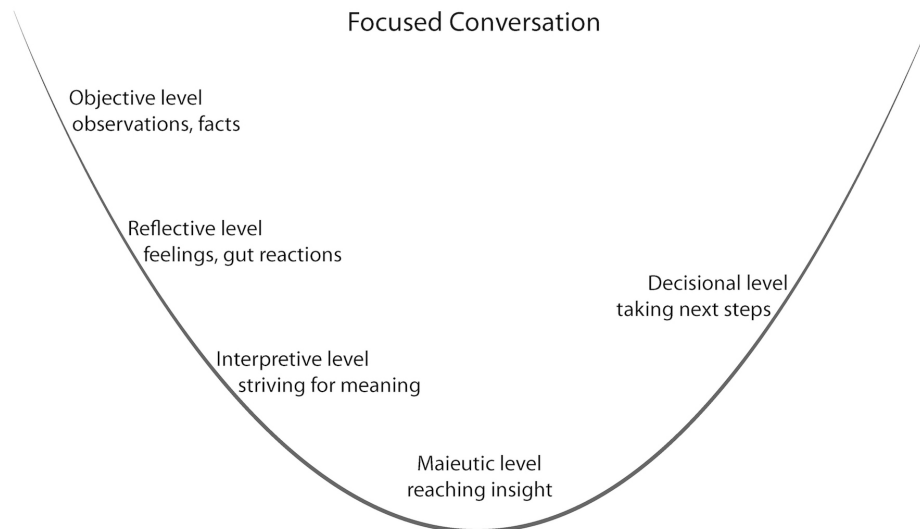The last stage is not considered in the Focused Conversation.

Table 10: Focused Conversation

By going through these steps in sequence, in many possible variations according to the matter at hand, the group is led to a place in which the conversation can be owned by all, and can naturally lead to results to which all can subscribe. The group will eventually take responsibility for their joint analysis/review of an event or action, for a study topic, or for joint decision-making.

Theory U

Theory U posits that organizational and social change follows an archetypal seven-step process.[5] The first step in working with an organization or community is helping it to see things differently. When we are part of an organization, we daily inhale its patterns, and become blind to how they shape us. Usually we find outlets in blaming the CEO, other people in positions of authority, our colleagues, and/or external forces.

When all the significant stakeholders in a situation are called to express their views in settings and contexts that encourage true dialogue, people can finally see the tapestry of elements that contribute to form a situation of conflict. Clarity is reached about the complexity of factors that contribute to a given group dynamic. This is the stage of the Open Mind (See Table 11). From this first level, the participants can start to see patterns emerging and realize that they have unconsciously been part of them. Individuals and groups are encouraged to take responsibility for their part in the collective patterns. This is what encourages connection between stakeholders at the level of feelings, and what Otto Scharmer, originator of Theory U, calls the work of the Open Heart. When the process is completed, the shift is perceived in that the participants acknowledge a

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[5] Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Emerging Future; The Social Technology of Presencing*.

common ground from which they can operate, allied with a new enthusiasm and desire for moving into concerted action. This stage, in which the new can finally emerge, is called "presencing." For that to happen, all individuals must reach the willingness to let go of everything that they wanted beforehand, and trust the process and the wisdom that is present in the whole. Presencing is made
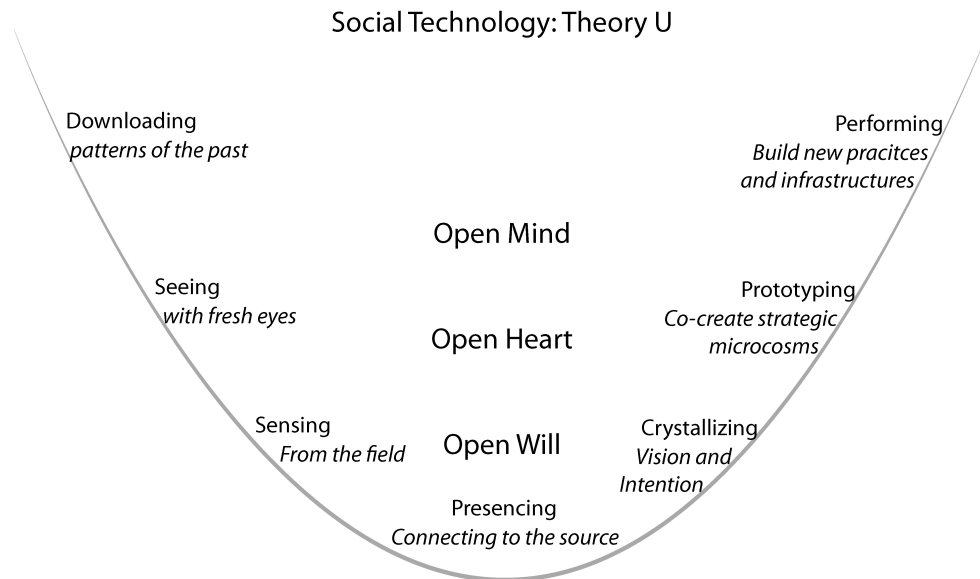
Social Technology: Theory U

Downloading
patterns of the past

Performing
*Build new pracitces
and infrastructures*

Open Mind

Seeing
with fresh eyes

Prototyping
*Co-create strategic
microcosms*

Open Heart

Sensing
From the field

Open Will

Crystallizing
*Vision and
Intention*

Presencing
Connecting to the source

Table 11: Steps in Theory U

possible through the Open Will. It is a place where the past is as if put on hold, and the participants can collectively listen to the future wanting to emerge. Letting go makes room for a process of allowing, or in Scharmer's words, "letting come."

After presencing, the group moves into the right side of the U. At the stage of crystallizing, what emerges as an insight, a simple place of openness, almost a place of vacuum in the idea of presencing, needs to acquire focus and direction. Ideas need to be built upon and solidified, key players need to find each other and determine what forms their initiatives should take.

At the next stage, Theory U introduces the idea of prototyping, which means nurturing and sustaining pilot initiatives for testing concrete ideas on a small scale, and offering these all the needed support in order to later integrate the practices on larger scales. When pilot initiatives are successful, change is then brought to the level of the entire organization (performing). But performing means more than integrating the new. It means ensuring that the processes described before are sustained on an ongoing basis, particularly seeing, sensing, and presencing. For that purpose, the organization must set in place structures and processes that allow teams and organization again to go through collective experiences of seeing, sensing, and presencing, when needed.

Theory U and other similar applications do not address individual doubles. That process would be time-consuming and sterile on a large and complex scale of operation.

Rather, in a sense, we could say that these group processes call upon the being of the organization in order to enable it to see its larger double, and modify it by degrees.

Theory U could be described as a tool that allows organizations to work beyond the blockages of some of its "collective doubles," by working through to what Steiner called the "new group soul."

Commonalities on the Path of Spirit Recollection

What unites all of these approaches to individual and social change? We can examine them as a whole first, and then discover the essence of these approaches. Most of them were developed rather instinctively, and are not based on an extensive body of knowledge; most often they were developed collectively. Those who engage in their use, especially as recipients, are asked simply to be willing to work with certain basic sets of experiences. It is through engaging the will that the individual or the group can start evolving new ways of thinking, and of seeing self, group or corporate identity under a new light. Much of this work requires a willingness to act differently than out of old habits, then to review and learn from the new actions and to deepen new habits in the will.

All of these approaches somehow call us to cultivate a historical consciousness. In the Twelve Step programs, the addicted individual retraces his biography in relation to the phenomenon of addiction; most so-called social technology requires the willingness to look at corporate history and to discern failures and successes. However, these are not "deficit" approaches; invariably the focus is placed on resources, strengths, and ability to awaken to one's own responsibilities, as being the engine that drives change.

We could say that all the approaches mentioned allow individuals or groups to develop, strengthen, or enable moral imagination through moral technique. In *Philosophy of Freedom*, Chapter 12, Steiner makes a distinction between "moral imagination" and "moral technique." He explains that having a strong moral imagination does not mean necessarily being able to communicate these imaginations to our fellow human being. There is a step between what we envision and what we convey to others, which requires a process of translation. An individual may have a strong capacity to live in a world of ideas, and to see their implications in the social realm, but may not know how to speak to another human being in a way that fully respects her freedom; or may not know how to convey his views with clarity, how to inspire the recipient with interest or enthusiasm, and so forth. The contrary is also true: someone may lack the capacity to live in ideas or form larger moral imaginations. However, he may be able to understand ideas that others articulate, and may be able to convey them effectively to others. This second person has the moral technique that is lacking in the first one. We could say that the whole of experiential spirituality and social technology is the field in which we learn to align moral imagination with moral technique.

One example will suffice. Through Nonviolent Communication, one easily sees that communication can be blocked at any of four levels of observations, feelings, needs or requests. At the first level, I may state an observation mixed with interpretation; at the second, express a feeling mixed with judgment; at the third level, express a need mixed with the strategies aiming at fulfilling it; at the fourth level, articulate an open request that sounds very similar to a demand. Mastering all of Nonviolent Communication inwardly means developing a capacity for being both honest with oneself and empathic with other people. But the ultimate litmus test arrives at the moment in which we articulate

effectively each of the four elements of the conversation, and test the reaction in the other person. Increasing our capacity for honesty and empathy corresponds to the element of moral imagination. Conveying both effectively requires moral technique. Awareness alone is not sufficient.

None of the approaches listed in this chapter are "spiritual" per se, nor do they require subscribing to any set of beliefs, not even in the instance of Destiny Learning. Yet, it is very often the case that individuals engaged in repeated use of these approaches realize their spiritual dimension, sometimes in dramatic ways, as a result of key experiences. The spiritual dimension is shown in the expressions that have been adopted over time. In Appreciative Inquiry, the end of the process culminates in the "Destiny Phase"; this name was adapted over time in preference to the more prosaic "Delivery Phase," to denote the reality of the change set in motion through which the whole organization finds more of its essential being. And World Cafe speaks of "the magic in the middle," or of "the voice in the middle of the room" to refer to the presence that emerges as being larger than the sum of the parts. In Theory U, the turning point of group work is the moment in which individuals can experience the two streams of time: one stream coming from the past, and one coming from the future in what has been called "presencing." At this juncture, everyone can sense more of who they truly are, while at the same time experiencing harmony with what is willed by the group, or rather by the "spirit of the group." In anthroposophic terms, we are dealing with what Steiner called the "new group souls," who are active where people work together harmoniously.

Presencing is an all-encompassing experience; any single individual can apprehend only a facet. It is such a rich experience that everyone has a deeply personal way of expressing it. "When I am part of a social field that crosses the threshold at the bottom of the U, it feels as if I am participating in the birth of a new world. It is a profound, quieting experience; I feel as if I've been touched by eternal beauty. There is a deep opening of my higher Self," offers Betty Sue Flowers. For Joseph Jaworski, "…moving through the bottom of the U is becoming aware of the incredible beauty of life itself, of becoming re-enchanted with the world. … When the sort of commitment you are talking about happens, you feel as if you're fulfilling your destiny, but you also feel as if you're freer than you've ever been in your life. It's a huge paradox." Otto Scharmer says: "For me, the core of presencing is waking up together—waking up to who we really are by linking with and acting from our highest future Self—and by using the Self as a vehicle for bringing forth new worlds."[6]

Steiner expressed the idea that we can let the "new group soul" speak through a gathering of people who can create a vessel of trust among themselves, and render it effective for work in the world. "Later [in the future] we shall live in the connections and associations that men create for themselves, uniting in groups with those of similar ideas while retaining their complete freedom and individuality. To realize this is necessary for a right understanding of something like the Anthroposophical Society. The Anthroposophical Society is intended to be a first example of such a voluntary

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[6] Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, Betty Sue Flowers, *Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organizations and Society*, 111, 113, 222 and 234.

association, although we may be well aware that it has not yet reached very far."[7] And further in the same lecture cycle:

> But when men find themselves together in voluntary associations, they group themselves around centers. The feelings streaming in this way to a center once more give [spiritual] beings the opportunity of working as a kind of group soul, though in a quite different way from the early group souls. ... These new beings, however, are compatible with man's complete freedom and individuality. Indeed, in a certain respect we may say that they support their existence on human harmony; it will lie in the souls of men themselves whether or not they give as many as possible of such higher souls the opportunity of descending to man ... The more that associations are formed where feelings of fellowship are developed with complete freedom, the more lofty beings will descend, and the more rapidly the earthly planet will be spiritualized.

It is this higher spiritual presence that the author has felt very privileged to experience in memorable instances, when groups are led, in respect of the inherent laws of the seven life processes, to a deepening of the meaning of life experiences. Where one would normally expect to find the deepest experience of suffering (that is, in the stark acknowledgment of individual or corporate shortcomings or life challenges), the Easter experience of dying and becoming is made possible. Knowledge of the Christ is not a prerequisite for attaining this experience, nor is knowledge of any other spiritual level of existence. Nor is it necessary to know the seven life processes themselves. What is absent in individual knowledge can be rebuilt through the wisdom present in the harmonious collaboration within a group. In *A Revolution of Hope*, I illustrated how that was the case in the collective process that culminated in Bill Wilson's coming to the inspiration of the twelve steps that are now famous. Here the seven life processes are at work, though little did AA's founder know about them. All of this is, one could remember, in accord with what Prokofieff has said about the first stages of the Path of Forgiveness, where spiritual knowledge is not necessary. Only in later stages does it become essential.

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[7] Steiner, *The Influence of Spiritual Beings upon Man*, June 1, 1908 lecture.