

# The Heart and Soul of Transition – Creating a Low Carbon Future with Psychological and Spiritual Awareness

Sophy Banks

## What's Transition?

We live in times of unprecedented challenge, and unprecedented change.

As the global problem of climate change regularly hits the headlines a new kind of response is emerging, one which seeks to inspire and involve a whole community in creating a positive future vision and working towards making it a reality. The first of these initiatives, Transition Town Totnes, was launched in September last year. Already hundreds of people from the local area have been involved in coming regularly to talks and films about issues ranging from peak oil to the psychology of change, and several working groups have started to address themes from 'Energy' to 'Local Government Liaison' to 'Arts'.

The project has received widespread attention through national events and media and has already inspired similar initiatives in around twenty other towns, villages and bio-regions. Bristol looks likely to become the first 'Transition City' and there are Transition projects starting in some boroughs of London. The

first national meeting of people from these initiatives – and representatives from a further fifteen places considering forming one – took place at the end of May.

Although still in its infancy the Transition model appears to be having a different impact to other sustainability or climate change initiatives because of the positive energy it generates and the scale of its vision. This is an attempt to create a genuinely inclusive, community-wide response to our global crisis, recognising that many of the challenges that climate change and reducing fossil fuel consumption pose can be addressed successfully at the local level.

In this article I write about my experience as one of the focalisers of the 'Heart and Soul – Psychology of Change' group within the Transition Town Totnes project. This group was one of the first to form, and includes in its brief exploring and

evolving the areas of psychology, spirituality, relationship, consciousness and group dynamics during the process of transition. In all these areas we aim to address these four questions of our time:

- How did we get here?
- What is happening now - what is it like to be alive right now?
- What is needed to help with the journey of awakening and change?
- What is our vision for a different future? What processes and tools can help make the vision a reality?

It is difficult to write this article without some assumptions about where you, the reader, are in your relationship to the issues of climate change and global crisis. Rather than covering the ground which is so well explained elsewhere I'll assume that you are aware of the pressing need for considerable change in the ways we live. In TTT we mainly talk about the twin drivers of climate change and peak oil, but other factors include deforestation, overfishing, fresh water shortage, soil erosion and pollution. In practical terms this might look like reductions in carbon emissions of perhaps 50% in the UK over the next decade or two and continuing to 80% by 2050. This is only achievable with major changes to how our world and lives are structured. If you don't think this scale of change will be needed I offer you some reading suggestions at the end.

The wonderful news that the Transition Town model brings is that not only are these reductions really achievable, they can also bring real benefits if we plan and prepare ahead. One of the key themes of



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transition is re-localisation. As oil production starts to decline we will no longer be able to ship food thousands of miles; it won't be economic to import all our manufactured goods from China. We won't be able to afford to build washing machines and fridges that are designed with limited lives, and then throw them away after a few years. These crazy aspects of our modern lives will stop because there won't be the cheap energy to support them.

We could learn to trust and rely on our neighbours, to share, to simplify because there will be a pressing need to. We can relearn skills which our grandparents largely took for granted – how to grow and preserve our own food, repair things when broken, get about without cars. At a recent talk about the transition concept to a fairly elderly group one response was 'Oh it'll be just like the 1950s... That's ok then, we know how to do that!'

However some aspects of transition will be very different from what has gone before. Effectively we will be changing the course of our industrial growth society's evolution over hundreds if not thousands of years. Apart from a few exceptional times every generation has collectively had greater material wealth, broader horizons, more access to travel than the one preceding it. Now we are looking at levels of material consumption and travel falling as we accept the inevitability of the need to contract our economy and dramatically reduce our ecological footprint. This will not just be a sudden recession and then back to growth as usual, but a long term descent in energy and therefore material consumption, continuing probably for the next hundred years at least.

### **Energy Descent – Consciousness Ascent!**

At a physical level the project names one of its objectives as 'Energy Descent' – to map out a way for a community to steadily reduce its energy consumption over the next twenty years (and beyond). In the Heart And Soul group we use the phrase – 'Energy Descent, Consciousness Ascent' – to remind us all that while we will be learning to do without on some areas there is are other aspects to the journey of transition which will be expansive and illuminating.

Some of the themes which have been emerging and clarifying through the Heart and Soul group can be summarised as follows:

- Inner and outer worlds are inextricably connected. On the one hand the outer world is created from the inner. In simple terms we create a world of over

production and consumption because of an inner feeling of scarcity. We create hierarchy, division and oppression because we don't feel good enough ourselves. We create institutions based on power and control because we feel powerless. But also the outer world shapes our inner reality. Our belief that the world is unsafe is confirmed if we watch the news and see stories of rape, murder, child abduction. Our lack of self worth is confirmed by adverts designed to create the feeling that our lives don't match up to the perfect people on the bill boards, or by work cultures that give status to those who work long hours disregarding family or home life, or health.

- The absence or slowness of response from many people and institutions results not from apathy or indifference but from feelings of overwhelm, disempowerment or psychological numbing in the face of terrifying information about the state of our world and present dangers. As well as holding a positive vision the transition process needs to help people to get in touch with, and express in a safe and holding environment, the feelings of grief, fear, despair, overwhelm or rage that arise as we understand of the scale of the problems and the dangers we are facing become clear.

- The transition process gives an opportunity to vision the society that we really want, to speak out our dreams and deepest wishes. This may also feel very difficult; feeling the depth of my longing for a just, sane, spiritually and ecologically

connected society to belong to brings to the surface my awareness of how problematic our current society is.

- The seriousness and urgency of the collective situation brings an unprecedented opportunity and motivation for change if we can find effective ways to harness it. As a society we are at the place that an addict comes to when he or she faces the choice to end their addiction or die.

- 'You cannot solve a problem at the level at which it was created', as Einstein said. We won't solve our problems by thinking in the paradigm of technological solutions because this way of thinking is part of the problem. We need to look outside our industrial growth system and its beliefs to find ways to live in harmony with each other and other species. This does not mean 'going back' to an imagined historic past, but integrating enduring wisdom from culture who know how to live in a sustainable and healthy way with our own present consciousness to create something new.

- Psychological understanding of the unconscious and its effects creates a possibility of understanding some of the sabotaging and shadow effects which have disrupted previous attempts to create lasting beneficial social change.

- Parallel process across individual, group and wider interactions is everywhere. We can expect the Transition process to reflect our culture's tendency to produce splits, burn

out, competition, exclusion – and all the shadow elements of a movement that aspires to embody values such as inclusion, cooperation, harmony, respect and reciprocity.

The field of consciousness surrounding the Transition process is understandably powerful, and standing in a place such as focalising the Heart and Soul aspect of such a project has stretched me in my capacity both for feeling grief – for those things we are losing, and for feeling the deep longing I have to help create a world of peace and sanity. If I envisage the collective consciousness as something all around, like a sea which in which I swim, I imagine the areas relating to transition containing both the highest aspirations and visions of human possibility – that we might live in a truly sane world – and the deepest fear: that if we cannot turn the tide of our social structures and economic systems we will destroy not only our own way of life but the extraordinary, intricate and exquisite web of life that we are part of.

### **Moving from the Bad to the Good Reality**

I came across the concept of the good and bad reality in the book 'The Fifth Sacred Thing' by Starhawk. I strongly recommend this to anyone wanting an exploration of possible futures. She extrapolates two social movements clearly visible today and poses a future where they live side by side and inevitably come into armed conflict. One side is the fundamentalist, racist, patriarchal system, based on domination of people and control of the resources necessary for life. The story is told from their opposition – a place

which could be the end result of a Transition process! A society that has managed to create an inclusive earth based spirituality that respects all faiths and traditions, has participative democracy and holds the four elements of earth, water, air and fire as sacred and therefore not to be owned by anyone. The fifth sacred thing is Spirit, permeating and guiding all.

In this book some of the characters explore their own inner good and bad realities – holding the idea that both the good and bad reality exist within each of us and are just a hairsbreadth apart. If we understand how these realities work we can consciously move between them, increasingly able to choose which reality to be in.

In the good reality the universe is abundant, supportive, welcomes all of each one of us in our entirety. There is pain and suffering but enough love and support to hold this. Each of us has the opportunity – and even the obligation – to be all that we can be, holding nothing back.

The bad reality is based in fear – the universe is a place of scarcity and competition, I watch out for enemies and need to be ready to fight. I feel unacceptable and judge others, I must censor what I say and often do what doesn't feel right in order to please others or be accepted.

I have found this model useful in my work with clients. I would often ask – to myself or directly to the client – 'What makes the shift from bad to good reality?' And conversely, 'What trips you from the good place to the bad?' I see the individual journey of therapy as a process of steadily building more and more good reality, through the experience of a

safe holding relationship, and through the conscious process of understanding how each client's mind is triggered into perceiving a bad reality and takes up residence there again.

### **The Many forms of the Collective Healing Journey**

One way to view the process of transforming our society to a sustainable, just and joyful paradigm is that we collectively need to make a similar journey, from the bad reality in which we live – based on fear, scarcity, competition, relationships of domination and exploitation – to the good reality. Thus we could say that the job of the Heart and Soul of a Transition Town project is to help the entire community undergo a healing journey.

This begs the question, what is the nature of that journey? What kind of processes could we use or develop to create a collective version of what has largely been undertaken as an individual process? It also brings a question about how the possibilities for therapy or healing work might be evolving during this time of rapid change and shifting collective awareness.

Many different people have become part of the Heart and Soul group. As well as those interested in Joanna Macy's 'Work that Reconnects' we have therapists from many traditions, energy workers and healers, people trained in indigenous and shamanic practices, constellators, body therapists, dance and movement practitioners; and people from many different spiritual traditions. We have run a number of events including an Open Space day where about eighty people attended and held discussions and ran a variety of mini-workshops.

For the two of us holding the group our principles have been to encourage what wants to happen, while trying to ensure a balance that represents the different areas of the field.

### **The Evolving Field of Psychological Healing**

I am fascinated by the sense of an evolving path of western psychological practices and how this both reflects and shapes what is happening in the collective consciousness. The image I have is of Freud starting about a century ago on a completely new kind of journey – of working with human psychology. Because there was so little awareness and so much damage in the individual and collective system the work was slow, required intense effort and a great commitment of time. Perhaps it felt like the hero who comes to Sleeping Beauty's thick forest - dense, thorny and at first impenetrable. Over the years the paths into the dark thickets became more well-worn and established, more are created, they cross and interweave. As a result there is more light in the forest; it becomes easier to see what is here, to find new ways.

As thinking about the nature of our psychological structures and wounding have clarified, new ways of working with them have also evolved. I believe this has three strands. One is that as more and more people have undergone the journey the collective consciousness itself evolves – where it might have taken several years of sessions five days a week to work through an issue in 1930 the same journey could happen quicker in 1960, and much, much faster in 1990. Hence the number of therapies that involve sessions once a week, or that require just a few sessions. In the energy

training I have done (Light Body) the teaching time has reduced dramatically over the ten years or so I have been learning it. Emotional Freedom Technique, breath work, cognitive processes enable clients to access and release trauma very quickly. This process seems to me – like many other processes of evolution – to be exponential. That is, the early gains are slow and painstaking and the rate of change accelerates over time. So there is now the potential for many people to reach high states of awareness, even enlightenment, where this used to be an extremely rare event.

The second is the diffusing of psychological awareness into the general field. Ideas about human psychology have emerged from the specialist field into the wider consciousness – for example ideas about the unconscious, Freudian slips, projections are now in the mainstream vocabulary.

And third, the development of new tools from increasingly sophisticated understanding of the territory. As with all evolutionary processes the next generation stands on the shoulders of the previous and sees and reaches further. I would argue that currently there is a trend towards integrating energetic and transpersonal methods with psychological – either within a single method, or within a person's journey. Many of my clients were also meditating, or started meditating while in therapy.

My sense is that we are now seeing an explosion in healing techniques as all the different pathways interweave and recombine into more complex and specific methods. In the table opposite I map some of these out in terms of the levels they work at and their methodology:

<b>Type of system</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Direct transmission of higher states of consciousness	it is possible to change an individual or group's capacity to be conscious at higher levels by transmitting energy frequencies allowing direct experience of Oneness	Light body Deeksha Some healing practices
Spiritual practice	Practices such as meditation, presence, awareness, to evolve consciousness towards the oneness, Atman	Buddhist, Zen, Taoist, Sufi, Qabballah and other spiritual traditions
Healing, celebrating, embodying the relationship with spirit through nature	To be whole as humans we need to experience ourselves as part of the wider web of life. We need rituals and practices that reconnect us to what western culture has broken	Pagan Shamanic Work that reconnects
Linking Oneness and the authentic self with psychological traditions and practices	To be really effective it is necessary both to hold a view of the real self as part of the oneness, transcendental, and work with super-ego, ego structures that distort the experience of our true nature	Psychosynthesis Ridhwan (linking Sufi systems with western psychology) The Power of Now (E Tolle) Osho
Energy healing	Using energy techniques to heal trauma in different aspects of the energy body – physical, emotional, mental, spiritual	Barbara Brennan and other energy healers, NFSH Colour light therapy
Working with trauma	Energy work or other techniques to access, release and heal trauma directly and quickly	Breath work, re-birthing Emotional Freedom technique EMDR
Systemic therapy	Understanding how the soul works through relationships and systems; viewing dysfunction as an expression of a whole system rather than the individual	Constellations and orders of love. Collective rituals for healing – Wicca, Pagan, shamanic
Family therapies	Healing whole family systems; mainly at the level of emotions and relationship	Family therapy
Human therapies	Work with healing the splits in mind, emotion, body, intra-psyche. Some include several levels of human existence some focus on working through a specific aspect	Humanistic therapies Body approaches – Feldenkrais, body psychotherapy, movement work Mental approaches – NLP, CBT, Byron Katie
Work with splits in the psyche	For those with profound damage to the self and extreme difficulty in maintaining boundaries and relationships a system which preserves strong levels of separation	Psycho-dynamic, psychoanalytic

(Of course this is my map and only one of several ways to lay things out I could have chosen – and I'm sure there are dozens of rearrangements you might make, overlaps that should be shown, as well as things I have missed (she hasn't put Jung on anywhere!!!). The general picture I am trying to show is the breadth of levels at which humanity is trying to heal itself of its wounds both individually and collectively.)

On the one hand this makes the world of healing and therapy bewildering – how to choose? It's impossible these days even to know everything that's out there, let alone analyse fully what might be the 'best' system for a particular problem. However the wonderful aspect is that healing is happening on a vast scale and at so many levels of human existence. Could it be that we are learning to heal our inner world at high speed just in time to create the shifts needed to prevent us from wiping out life on the planet? Will there be a 'tipping point' at which the shifts in awareness start to ripple out into the collective consciousness without the need for a conscious therapy or healing process? We haven't come up with an answer in the Heart and Soul group, but the questions and discussions that arise are continually fascinating. And it feels clear to me that whatever the shape of the social change movements that come into existence as a response to our planetary crisis, it will be crucial to give a central place to psychological and spiritual awareness if we are to create a reality in which we all want to live.

## **Final words**

We need to be aware of the evolution of therapies that is happening. Part of our western thinking model can be the belief that our environment, the ground beneath our feet is static and unchanging; this is absolutely not the case at the moment, and it will be moving increasingly rapidly over the next few years.

Within the psychological arena we need to keep looking up, to widen the field we are involved with. As can be seen from the table above most healing methods are still deeply rooted in our relationship with the human – first myself, then my family, perhaps occasionally looking at wider groups and communities. This reflects part of the old paradigm thinking of human separateness that drives our sense of isolation and the capacity for disrespecting other forms of life. We need to include an awareness of wider levels of belonging – the collective human experience and 'all our relations' – other life forms and even the entire ecosystem of our planet.

And the third is to look out for a transition initiative starting near you, and if you feel inspired to join or initiate some kind of heart and soul movement within it. Or start a transition project yourself. There is now a manual and people available to give talks to groups on how to get a transition project off the ground (see resources section below). We are the people we have been waiting for.



## Resources

[www.transitiontowns.org](http://www.transitiontowns.org) – for all transition towns and the national network, forums and so on. Manual on starting a transition project and other resources.

[www.transitiontowns.org/Totnes](http://www.transitiontowns.org/Totnes) for what's happening here, and the Heart and Soul – psychology of change group pages for the project I am involved with.

[www.transitionculture.org](http://www.transitionculture.org) – the website of Rob Hopkins, responsible for initiating the Transition model. Lots of information and resources about transition themes including the only existing 'Energy descent plan'

If you are interested in joining the Heart and Soul of Transition Town Totnes mailing list, please email me at [sophyb@btinternet.com](mailto:sophyb@btinternet.com)

**The Pachamama alliance** offer one day 'Waking the Dreamer' symposiums to inform and inspire – highly recommended <http://www.bethechange.org.uk/symposium.cfm>

### A Selection of Books

**Coming Back To Life**, Practices that Reconnect by Joanna Macy

**Limits to Growth** by Lester Brown

**The Collapse of Complex Societies** (New Studies in Archaeology) by Joseph A. Tainter,

**Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth/Healing the Mind** (Sierra Club Books Publication) ed. Roszac

**The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community** by David C. Korten

For more relevant books have a look at [www.greenspirit.org.uk/books/](http://www.greenspirit.org.uk/books/)

### Societies which live in the good reality

**Ancient futures**, Learning from Ladakh by Helena Norberg-Hodge

**The Other Side of Eden: Hunter-gatherers, Farmers and the Shaping of the World** by Hugh Brody

**The Continuum Concept** – in search of happiness lost, by Jean Liedloff

**The Healing Wisdom of Africa**, by Malidoma Some

### Peak Oil

**Powerdown** by Richard Heinberg

**The Last Oil Shock** by David Strachan

### **Websites:**

<http://www.crudeawakening.org/InformationSharing.htm> has a good list of resources including films, books, websites

### **Films**

If you want to be informed and motivated get a group of friends together and watch one of these.

**An Inconvenient Truth** – Al Gore’s film about the science and effects of climate change

**Crude awakening** – effective film about the oil industry, peak oil, oil and war

**The End of Suburbia:** Oil Depletion and The Collapse of The American Dream

**The Power of Community:** How Cuba Survived Peak oil inspiring film about how Cuba coped with the sudden halving of its oil supply

**Sophy Banks** - With a background in computer systems and later in Psychosynthesis, Light Body and healing Sophy's interests and work span outer and inner worlds. More recently she has combined ideas from family constellations and Joanna Macy's 'Work That Reconnects' to create 'Waking the Dreamer', a workshop that explores the process of transitioning to a sane earth based society. She co-focalises the Heart and Soul group of Transition Town Totnes. After twenty years of competitive football she's too old to be slide tackling in the Hackney marshes mud and now lives in Devon, cycling and walking on Dartmoor whenever she can.

### **Have your own details on the AHP(B) website**

For members who offer a humanistically oriented service (not only therapy) you can have your details on our Links page of the website, including links to your own email address and website, or your postal address if not online.

Details and a brief description of your services must be under fifty words and should be emailed or posted to

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