

# Holding the vision of what it is to be a whole human being as we embrace the digital age<sup>\*</sup>

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The roots of Humanistic Psychology were vibrant and alive, with a sense of forging new ideas and new possibilities in the present, if we dared – and we did dare.

And highly energized by claiming this freedom, those new roots flourished and blossomed into an amazing array of creative approaches to our human development – and further fulfillment: ongoing development as opposed to the notion of curing our dysfunctional behaviour in line with a limited and constrained view of ‘normality’ (God save us from normality), and focussing on naming/labelling what was wrong with us rather than exploring and discovering whom we could become. Our very roots assumed the possibility of a dynamic flowering – an unknown flowering – a journey of discovery into something richer, more fulfilling, more whole than the person we had been; and they contained the sense of our future self. In other words, the real possibility of living our full potential.

And today, in this present, here, I want to affirm the potent reality of our Future – the future of Humanistic Psychology – which in some sense already exists if we hold firm to our vision; just as for each of us, as individuals, there is the real possibility of Humanistic Psychology actualizing our joint full potential. Why not?

Whatever I share today is from my own lived

experience. It’s really great being old – there’s a lot to play with, to re-see; new aspects of oneself to claim or release, travelling ever lighter but richer. And with startling new memories emerging as we see with fresh, newly informed eyes – exactly truthfully but unjudging and kind. It took some time to learn that. It serves truth. Heals shame. Each insight, each relaxation of ego, adding to one’s freedom, and thus joy.

None of this could possibly make sense without a holistic understanding of what it is to be a human being. My life certainly wouldn’t make sense. So let us nurture an ever-expanding vision as we go forth into the radically unknown; the exponential change in our rapidly developing digital world of the twenty-first century. The challenges are enormous, daunting, unknown and unknowable, and exciting. Intriguing. The new up-and-coming generations will have completely novel wiring of the brain now that the digital age has dawned. A new world with radically different problems, challenges and solutions will confront us. More than ever before in history – as Artificial Intelligence expands – we must hold on to and live our full embodied and inspired love-gifted nature and not let the brilliant inventions of the mind so intrigue and distract us that our other crucial faculties become dormant. The Association for Humanistic Psychology must hold true and firm

for dear life to its holistic vision.

Our future rests on the fullness and depth of our present awareness. Right now. It rests on our willingness, the willingness of each one of us, to access our multidimensional nature; to be open to experience the resources, the varied, many-layered richness of who we each are and are for ever in the process of becoming. The more whole we are in the present, the richer and more vibrant our future.

The question 'What is it to be a human being?' has always accompanied me. And my memory of early childhood is vivid, and still yielding new questions and new answers. I started off with a complete shock at what it meant to be a human being – what was involved in learning how to be a human being. All I had to rely on were what I came to call my 'knowings'. I have never been without them from as far back as I can remember and even when an atheist – a very reluctant one (it felt like the sun going out), but I value those years. I was drawn to let go of all religious faiths and not take on even the most appealing of teachings, so as to rely only on direct experience. And 'knowings' were direct experience, even if inexplicable. And I always obeyed them. I knew with my whole being that I existed before I was born. And I knew I was drawn to be born to my particular mother. The I, the essence in me knew that. I remember having no reaction or surprise when she shared with me when I was about 5 years old that she had attempted to abort me. She also told me she didn't think babies are conscious – not until they spoke. And that children weren't individuals.

We had minimal parenting. I had to rely on and trust these clear flashes of knowing from the source of knowledge itself. It was what kept me sane as a child – this access to the core of my being. It's what prevented my slippage into mental illness. I have no doubt that I would have been labelled, pathologized, as 'schizophrenic' – indeed, I was so labelled later by a keen budding young doctor who happened to marry my closest friend and overheard our conversation. But fortunately I had this inner reference point – my knowings – clear and compelling, arising from a place within me beyond

my remote and absent family and highly distorted, exploitative and ignorant society – South Africa in the 1930s before the term 'apartheid' emerged to at least give this set-up a name. An environment of radically exploitative unawareness to which those of all colours acquiesced. The media of the time – newspapers and radio – mirrored this state of denial. No digital world to aid us. Nor were such matters referred to at school – ever. It became clearer and clearer that grown-ups simply didn't know anything.

The point I am making is that I was alienated, at a very early age, from humanity itself. And this left me profoundly perplexed and riddled with fear. I felt helpless and alone and lost hope of any guidance.

However, one day, when I was alone in our large garden, I entered an altered state of consciousness and experienced an extraordinarily comprehensive overview of the strange phenomenon of being human stretching through the whole of time and space, and I was puzzled that humans just didn't know how to be – these beings called 'human' were thoroughly lost, clueless, floundering, setting up all sorts of strange arrangements which involved lying to each other, to themselves.... And then suddenly I was in the garden again – and looked down – and saw my bare feet on the earth. And the shocking realization dawned: I was one of them – one of these lost creatures. And slightly to my left a brilliant stream of vibrating light stretching to infinity – and I thought, 'That is what I am, what I could be'. But then I looked down and there were my feet on the ground. And I knew – I must live my humanity, my containment, be one of these lost beings.

I was so fortunate to be standing on the earth because I then experienced, in that moment, that the earth was filled with energy of another order. I was given the gift of experiencing that the earth would support me and somehow see me through to the end. It was what I later in life had confirmed when I encountered American Indian spirituality in the New Mexican Desert. Earth as your Mother – Mother of the embodied soul, the soul itself the vehicle and expression of spirit.

If robbed of this holistic viewpoint, none of my

life, my world, would make sense – let alone have carried me from the desolation of my youth towards ever more joy-filled gratitude to be a human being, and especially to be here, now, at this momentous unfolding of consciousness with completely unforeseen and rapidly unfolding challenges. I'm so glad to be alive now.

But going to school was a living nightmare. I sat at the back involved in my own thoughts and never related to anyone. Teachers, being grownups, obviously didn't know anything so it didn't even occur to me to listen to them. How could I learn what I so desperately needed to learn? Then one day I was walking up and down my favourite grassy strip of the playground. And suddenly the realization burst upon me – I am alive at the newest moment of the universe, and the next newest moment, and the next. And I knew everything was emerging and would never stop emerging. I knew it in my body and in my mind and in my imagination. Such a relief. There was a Future – a Future for human beings. I could feel it. I could somehow live my way forward out of where I now was, however bleak it all appeared. It was an utterly transformational moment. The seed, the tiny seed, of my now irrepressible hope was born.

I could never have known, really known from the depth of my being, and so never to be lost, this transformative truth from information gained from a phone I would have been holding in my hand if I were a child today. I would have been utterly distracted from being aware of my body at all, of being alive, in the most beautiful area of the school playground. I would have been mortified not to have been tapping my fingers on some screen to demonstrate I wasn't a loser. I wouldn't have had such passionate ideas and quandaries and wonderings if I hadn't been in my body.

I tended always to travel forwards in life, leaving the past behind, because anything different could only be an improvement. And then I was blessed with a further knowing – again in the garden – 'Never mind if I'm not loved, I can love'. It was a wonderful gift and came with a flood of energy – knowing beyond doubt that loving was inborn in some way

– in some people it just got hidden or blocked or diverted. It was there in us. And this transformed my life. I became an ardent relater, hooked on intimacy at any price. Costly;... but love was worth anything.

Of course this gift of 'knowing' was incomplete, but perhaps it was all I could have coped with at the time. It does matter if we're not loved. I later lived a painful but enriching journey learning about that too. And it also matters if we refuse to love ourselves; not to be mistaken for humility. But as long as we have the commitment to go on learning, reliant on a commitment to truth, as it unfolds, and at all costs, we get ceaseless opportunities for transformation, gleaning gold from some of our worst errors and pain-filled mistakes. What a distraction technology and other digital temptations would have been to ease painful or stuck moments. I so want to live to witness a new form of holistic vision which will take account of both the gifts and temptations, offered by the rapid developments in the digital world. It certainly will involve the whole of who we are, though we cannot now imagine how that will play out.

One of my knowings later as an adult, and a most unwelcome one, led to my completely unexpected switch from studying philosophy, in which I was utterly engrossed, and ending up a few weeks later participating in the burgeoning of Humanistic Psychology of the 1960s and 1970s – a wonderful, bold, exhilarating time of experiential learning and experimentation, taking full responsibility for our choices to participate. 'Victim stuff' (Hall, 1993) just wasn't on, and of course some leaders and some people did take advantage of that, and there were some casualties; more refinement of the balance of awareness and responsibility certainly still needed to evolve. What was so transformative for me was a discovery during that time of transplanting my learned notion of being 'good' to that of being 'truthful', and especially to oneself – the relief of touching into one's truth, landing in it. And it grew to be the safest and eventually, after some processing, the least shame-provoking place to be. It was like coming home.

And I only learned this – going for truth rather than being good – and experiencing the

transformations it can bring in relation to myself and others by throwing myself into the experiential world offered by the pioneers of Humanistic Psychology. However, developing ego as well as personality will involve lying, yet ego and personality are a *necessary* limiting factor, being structural tools of perception and consciousness, consciousness itself enabling choice and thus the freedom to actualize the inborn gift of love. No wonder we need aeons to fulfil the marvellous but shocking challenge of what is involved in being fully human. And every lifetime the individual must undergo the same necessary ignorances and then hone them from a different perspective. And so of course humans require Humanistic Psychology, an ever-evolving holistic vision, to keep the Light burning as we flounder afresh.

We must also release ourselves from the dualistic 'either true or false' mindset often reinforced by the pervasiveness of our computerized environment. It so limits our range of thought.

And the young – and not so young – seeing sex before experiencing it. None of that wonderful living exploration with one's first girlfriend or boyfriend. Sex claimed by the mind – the heart bypassed. Workshops on sexuality and loving relationship will be needed more than ever. Also the tragedy of hours and hours of furtive gambling, gambling away thousands or millions of pounds, utterly unrelated to anything but figures on a screen, and ruining lives and relationships. Our attention hijacked by ever-more compelling modes of camouflaging ego concerns and drives. Are we letting technology think for us? We've got to stand firm against technological determinism.

How often do we now relate with the whole of who we are? – the unique individual we each are. Fixated on phones and i-Pads in our separate rooms, the amount of attention we give to anything seems to shrink as we are confronted with more and more opportunities for distraction. We are losing depth. A strange combination of frenetic busy-ness and blanking out. Less conscious. And I believe it is the evolution of consciousness in the service of love

that is our true destiny.

I propose that the destiny of Humanistic Psychology is to hold faith in the actualization of this vision. Give reality now to our existence in the future as we devise fresh and refreshing ways of resuscitating real connection – in our personal lives and in the way we work with others. Focus on how to incorporate – embody – all that we are so that those we work with, sensing this, gain from direct interaction with us. Become whole human beings ourselves – with the courage to be. Let's hold this as our living future!

It is a relief to realise, for all our sophisticated generation of technology, that we are still very very young in our development as a species, and a vast future filled with increasing learning capacity stretches before us, as we each claim our creativity as we participate in creation itself.

This future, nourished by the optimal future of each one of us here today, can be more than a possibility, if we lend it our presence, which incorporates all the illuminations of our past, all the aspects and learnings and experiences of our lives that form and dismantle and reform, and thus contribute to the actualization of what we were born to explore and offer the world, augmenting our collective consciousness. A culmination of learning and awareness held in waiting – for we know not what.

We can explore and hold a vision of an Optimal Future for the Association for Humanistic Psychology and give it reality as a creative act – a living belief and thus a living possibility, continually updating it as the world goes through the monumental changes it is already struggling to keep up with. Ego imperialism is now exposed for what it is – Donald Trump its finest exemplar. The need to expand our vision, our collective consciousness becomes more obvious, more urgent. Adaptation is essential – it's an evolutionary tool – as long as we are still engaging as whole people. Creative adaptation rather than resignation or betrayal of our basic principles. Courage and humility are the key, so that we can stand as and for humanity itself as the beings in the universe who are designed for this

exploration and capable of enjoying its fruits.

And so I close with this to ponder as we explore together the expansion of the humanistic vision of the twenty-first century – explore our feelings, insights, inspirations and intuitions, our imagination and our ever-evolving beliefs – our prayers – so that our inborn capacity to love (which I am convinced does not depend on our parents either genetically or environmentally, or how we were brought up, although it can more easily flourish if we experience their love) triumphs in our lives and in our world. Again and again I have found that drastically neglected and abused children can love even if diverted, inhibited, waylaid or messed up with regard to other potentials; for I believe, a belief backed up by personal experience, that it emanates from soul and from our essence – which exists – within Existence. Beyond space time/time space through which it is expressed as Creation.

Nothing is fixed and nothing is lost  
 This is the song that in Silence we hear  
 This is the dance that in Stillness we feel  
 And know, in ourselves, if we dare. ⑤

\* This is the exact text of the talk that Jill gave at the AHP conference, London, October 2017.



**Jill Hall** was born in South Africa, and was always disturbed and fascinated by what it means to be human. Working as an actress until becoming a mother and philosophy student, she then discovered self-development in Humanistic Psychology's early days. Jill became an Institute of Biodynamic Psychology tutor; and now runs weekend residential groups in Norwich. A guest lecturer for various professional bodies and universities, Jill is author of *The reluctant adult* (Prism Press, Bridport, 1993).

## Reference

Hall, J. (1993). *The reluctant adult: An exploration of choice*. Bridport, Dorset: Prism Press.