

# Visioning a humanistic future\*

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There is a sense in which Humanistic Psychology is not so much a therapeutic model as a worldview, a set of values, and a practical way to explore and expand those values in our lives. So when we want to vision a humanistic future for ourselves, it need not necessarily be first and foremost about psychology, but about the principles of living that will expand us and help us find both our stable baseline and our direction of transformation.

Humanistic Psychology has been central both to my personal and my professional life. When I was coming up in the 1960s, it was part of a whole movement towards personal and spiritual development, openness and authenticity, self exploration, non-authoritarianism, community, social responsibility, even the magical world of imagery which became my life work. It moved away from a medical model to a democratic and holistic one, based on the idea that we are all constantly evolving; and it was intent on fostering open communication, creativity and personal development throughout life for everyone.

I am reminded of the way I never managed to do the formal dance steps that were around in the 1950s and early 1960s, and it was only when we could dance freely and on our own or with others that I felt liberated to find my true steps. Humanistic Psychology made that possible for me in the world of psychology and psychotherapy.

In the late 1960s, I was doing a Ph.D. at Brunel University, London, engaged in analytic style

therapy, and training in the Philadelphia Association, then headed and inspired by R. D. Laing. While the ideas were good, they often contradicted each other, and I couldn't find in any of them a community which resonated with my deepest sense of self. It was only in gatherings and groups to do with Humanistic Psychology that I felt truly at home, at ease in my skin.

What indeed is community *à la* Humanistic Psychology? We talk a great deal about the importance of community, but the traditional communities many of us come from offer the gifts of connectedness with the price tag of social conformity. Those of us who did not fit in the status quo of these worlds escaped to urban anonymous environments, only to find that individuality came at the expense of isolation and disconnection.

The kind of community we found in Humanistic Psychology events offered something that this generation needed, a place to celebrate at once our individuality and our connectedness. You could find recognition for the person you were and wanted to be, whether or not it fitted a conventional role. By having this mirror, you could settle into yourself so deeply that you could find a way to expand your possibilities exponentially,

Since in my view, in an inversion of a common phrase, I learn what I need to teach, I realised immediately that this was the kind of world I instinctively knew how to offer to others. Skyros Holidays, which we founded in 1979, was really

based on the principles of Humanistic Psychology, and it changed the lives of many people over the years. I believe this is above all because people found a place where they could be themselves in the presence of others, and could learn new skills as pathways to their own expansion.

The same is true of my psychotherapy and my imagery courses, and even, in a modified way, my personal relationships. You could say that the social world I create and live in, both professionally and personally, is the one that emerged for me from Humanistic Psychology.

And yet, we live in a world that doesn't value this.

It is hard for me to understand why people would want to live in boxes, isolated from others, seeking to heal out of the context of the world they live in. I don't think they do. But this is what often passes for professionalism in psychology and psychotherapy. It is for this reason that I joined the Board of the Association for Humanistic Psychology, for the express purpose of putting Humanistic Psychology, and all it stands for, on the map.

I have already mentioned a few values that I associate with Humanistic Psychology. In my conference visioning presentation, I asked members of the audience to call out the values that they find most central to Humanistic Psychology, and we made a list.

The values kept coming, and they included love, personal development, spiritual development, authenticity, self-exploration, mutual healing, community, social responsibility, self-responsibility, social justice, creative imagination, democratic non-authoritarianism, holism, evolution through life, self-actualization, open communication, transformation, intuition, awareness and expansion.

In my own mind, I just kept saying Yes, Yes, and Yes. These are values I aspire to live by, values which I am convinced would make for a better world.

I asked everyone in the audience to choose one value they would like to see increased in their lives and share it with someone else. Dear reader, why not do this now as you're reading this?

I then led us all through a visioning of how we can honour this value more in our lives. After a brief

relaxation I suggested that we travel in a space-and-time ship to a time five years from now when we feel great because we have expanded this chosen value in our everyday lives. This kind of visioning is a way of exploring the full sense of what this might mean, and how we got there, and to commit to it.

I give an example of my own experience below so that you can get a taste of how you can explore this for yourself. I chose social responsibility as my value. I did this exercise for myself in advance, in case I was too focused on leading the exercise to do my own personal work, asking myself questions and then sensing the answer.

Here's the gist of it:

It's five years from now and I feel great because I've expanded social responsibility in my life. What is at the centre of this feeling? I have a sense of knowing who I am and what I stand for, and that I give to others as much as I give to myself. I have stepped back from the question of what I want, knowing that I already have more than enough, and ask myself regularly what I want to offer.

What is happening in my relationships? I notice how much more I reach out to be there for others and how much less I worry about being abandoned or lonely because I feel connected spiritually to family, friends, partner and the world of Spirit.

The next questions in the visioning exercise are to do with our work or creativity, our sense of self, our feelings about life itself and about death. I won't go into my experience of these except to say that the vision I have of my own work at this future time is at least in part about offering low-cost training courses that enable people to work in the community. My feelings about myself? I am peaceful in myself because I am doing what I can. Moreover, life is bubbling with creativity, and I am delighted.

Then comes the opportunity to look back from this future in 2022 to 2017, and wonder how we made this future possible. I find that for me, one big step is having given up feelings of being wounded, so that I have been able to transfer more energy from self-healing to the world need.

The commitment to this vision comes next:

*I ask and intend for this to be, and I release it.* This means I commit to do whatever I have to do to get there, but I surrender to the fact that I am not in control and can't make it happen; and if it doesn't, I'll still be okay.

I put the picture of my future self into a bubble and blow it into the domain of potential, waiting to be actualized. I put that future feeling into my heart right now so that I can already feel that sense of expansion. *Thank you. It is already so.* I know what it feels like. I just have to get there.

If we are constantly evolving beings, part of that evolution is in the direction of the values we hold dear. Humanistic Psychology has held the torch for me of so many of the values I honour.

Dear reader, I hope this is true for you too. 📍

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