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Detail from **Chakras of the Subtle Body**, from the Nath Charit, attributed to Bulaki, 1823

RESILIENCE • PETER RUSSELL

## Natural Mind

E. F. Schumacher once said, “We are now far too clever to be able to survive without wisdom.” The question is, will humanity take the quantum leap in consciousness needed to create a resilient future?

Our global crisis has been a long time coming. Its roots lie not in the Industrial Revolution and the materialism of the European Enlightenment, or in the Agricultural Revolution, or even in the first use of tools. Certainly, each has played its part, but the root cause lies much further back in our evolution. When Homo

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*sapiens* first emerged, with its large brain, able to think, reason and process speech, and agile hands with which to mould the world to meet its needs, life on Earth embarked upon a most creative, yet most dangerous venture.

We sought to improve our quality of life, to free ourselves from physical toil and unnecessary suffering. And our efforts have certainly borne rich fruit: today, those of us who live in the Western world enjoy unprecedented comforts and opportunities. Yet it is also becoming clear that to continue along the path of unbridled consumption, with its consequent toll on our environment, now poses the gravest threat to humanity – and, more tragically, to the wellbeing of Gaia herself. Why, then, given our growing awareness of the looming dangers, don't we change?

The answer is in our own minds: in the beliefs and values that guide our decisions. Seduced by our remarkable ability to change our world, we have fallen into the trap of believing that the path to feeling good lies in getting the world to be the way we want it. If we are not happy, then we assume we must do something about it: obtain some thing we don't yet have, get others to respond as we would like, enjoy a new experience, or avoid some circumstance or person that is causing us distress.

There is certainly value in this approach. If the cause of our suffering is physical – if we are cold or hungry, for example – then some change in the world may well be called for. But most of us in the Western world can deal with our physical needs fairly easily: turning up the thermostat or going to the store usually suffices. Yet we remain far from satisfied. So, believing that the problem still lies “out there”, we continue seeking fulfilment in the world around, assuming that if we could only get enough of what we think we want, we would finally be at peace.

Throughout human history there have been those who have awakened from the dream that peace of mind depends on what we have or do. They are the rishis, roshis, mystics, saints, lamas and other ‘wise ones’ who have each, in their own way, rediscovered a timeless truth about

human consciousness: that the mind in its natural state is already at ease.

By ‘natural’ they do not mean the state of mind in which we spend most of the time, which clearly is not usually one of ease and contentment. They are speaking of the mind before it becomes tarnished with worry, wanting, analysing and planning. Time and again they have reminded us that we do not need to do anything or go anywhere to feel content. On the contrary, all our doing, all our seeking to change things, takes us in the opposite direction. We imagine something is missing, and with this self-created sense of lack comes a feeling of discontent.

And then we try to fill this discontent by getting what we think is missing. We live in what Indian philosophies call the world of *samsara*, meaning originally ‘to wander on’. We wander on, looking for fulfilment in a world that provides but fleeting respites from discontent, temporary satisfactions followed by more wandering on in search of that ever-elusive goal.

In the distant past, the repercussions of this approach left their mark mainly on the people themselves, giving rise, as the Buddha realised, to much of their suffering. However, as the power of our technologies has grown, the impact has become much more serious, and in recent times has escalated into a global crisis.

It is becoming increasingly clear that our existing values and beliefs are no longer working, and there is a growing call for an inner transformation – often interpreted as a shift to some higher, more exalted, state of consciousness. But the required shift is not to anything new; it is an awakening to a quality of consciousness that has always been available but is seldom glimpsed.

The shift is subtle, and at the same time profound. It is a shift in our being, in the quality of our consciousness. Our experience is no longer set against a background of lack, aversion, worry, desire, hope, or some other emotional attachment. Instead our being has the quality of freedom and ease.

This represents a true quantum leap in consciousness. When people first hear this term they often think it means some huge leap in consciousness. But in

modern physics, a quantum leap is the smallest possible leap. At the atomic level, a shift from one energy state to the next does not occur as a smooth transition, but as a discrete change – an instantaneous transition from one state to another. Similarly the shift from a tense mind to a relaxed mind is a discrete shift.

With that inner shift comes a vital shift in thought and action. No longer blinded by self-concern or caught in imagined lacks and wants, we are free to act in accord with the needs of the situation at hand. Whether it be helping others, righting injustices, working for some social cause, taking care of our health, raising children, earning a living, whatever we focus our energies upon, we can do so with greater commitment and deeper compassion.

Needless to say, such a shift is seldom permanent! We have been so deeply conditioned in the old ways of thinking that we easily fall back into the tightness of the clinging mind. For most of us, the challenge is not staying in a permanent state of ease, but developing the skill of relaxing the mind and returning to ease as often as we can throughout the day.

In the past this shift in consciousness was held to be crucial for individual salvation. Today it has become essential for our collective salvation. We have reached an inevitable moment in human destiny when we are being asked to wake up from our collective dream and reconnect with our true nature. As the architect-philosopher Buckminster Fuller put it, “We are facing our final evolutionary exam.” Is the human species fit to survive? Can we let go of our dysfunctional mindsets and see the world through the eyes of wisdom and compassion rather than greed and fear?

Those who have made this shift in past times – the wise, or enlightened ones – have been few and far between. Yet they were each heralds of how we all could and should be. Now the time has come for us to assume that natural birthright. Neither we nor the planet can wait any longer. 

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