

THE HUMAN JOURNEY

By Duane Elgin

We have come to a pivotal time in the human journey. In this generation, the human species is being challenged to respond to climate change, running out of cheap oil, the mass extinction of species, weapons of mass destruction, and much more. These challenges are global, with no place to escape. We are being pushed to take a hard look in the mirror and ask ourselves where we are on the human journey.

To see where we are, let's stand back and look at the human journey through a story that has been recognized through history by people throughout the world. Called "the hero's journey," it has three major stages. They are: separation, initiation, and return.

In the first stage of separation, we depart from our familiar home and go on a demanding journey. This is a journey of discovery where many lessons are learned about ourselves, and about life along the way.

The second stage emerges when, after many difficulties and much learning, we encounter a supreme test—a seemingly insurmountable challenge, a trial by fire, a time of collective initiation into our early adulthood.

If we are successful in meeting the supreme challenge of this stage we will move into the third stage of return. In this stage, we make the journey home, discovering a conscious relationship with the living universe and with a sense of empowerment for ourselves. In the words of poet T.S. Eliot, "... the end of all our exploration, will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time."

Here is how I picture the human journey in terms of these three stages:

Separation

The first stage of humanity's heroic journey began with our initial awakening roughly 35,000 years ago. Before then, humans were largely unconscious of themselves and were immersed within nature. Then, about 35,000 years ago, there was a rapid increase in cave art, figurines, necklaces, burials, evidence of trading networks, and more. With the evolutionary edge

of an awakening consciousness, nomadic bands were able to adapt flexibly to changing conditions and we spread rapidly throughout the world.

Roughly 10,000 years ago we took another major step in our journey of separation from nature by learning to stand back and to observe nature's changing seasons. With that understanding, we learned to farm plants and to produce extra food. In turn, with a food surplus came small villages and, eventually, cities and empires.

Then, approximately 300 years ago, humanity made another dramatic advance in our empowerment and in our separation from nature. Combining the power of the intellect with the penetrating power of consciousness, we looked into the realm of atoms and created the scientific and industrial revolution. With these revolutions, we took a further step away from nature and began to view the universe as essentially dead or non-living at the foundations.

Initiation

Looking back over the past 35,000 years, it is clear that our path of growing self-consciousness combined with separation from nature has been a time of tremendous discovery and creativity. But it has also placed our collective future in grave peril. This brings us to the second, major stage on the hero's journey: Initiation. A time when humanity confronts a seemingly impossible challenge—the “perfect storm” of a world system crisis. We are wounding the Earth with climate change, resource depletion, species extinction, pollution and more. We are being pushed to change or else we will cause lasting damage to the Earth. We have already begun to enter this second stage of initiation. We can now see the possibility of either pulling together in cooperation or pulling apart in conflict.

Return

Looking ahead, if the human family combines the power of love with the power of mass communications along with the ability of people to choose more sustainable ways of living, then it is clear we have the ability to create a promising future. For example, with the combined power of television and the internet, we can, for the first time, observe ourselves and communicate with ourselves as an entire species. The world is becoming transparent to itself—able to know itself. In consciously seeing ourselves as a species, we

are taken beyond the narrow confines of the past and can begin the third stage of our journey toward a more sustainable, compassionate, and creative future.

So, as we can now see, the human family has been on a heroic journey of learning, of developing our many potentials. So far, this journey has taken us from awakening hunter-gatherers to the verge of a planetary civilization. We are now moving through our rite of passage as a human family, moving from our adolescence and into our early adulthood. We've come a long ways. Let's not stop now. There is a future of great promise ahead.