The Dark Night of the Collective Soul

A Baha’i Perspective

On the Role & Purpose of Transformation in Society

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THE STORY OF OUR TIME

FROM DUALITY TO INTERCONNECTEDNESS TO ONENESS

Robert Atkinson

“...A must-read by the widest of global audiences...”
- Michael Bernard Beckwith, author of Life Visioning

~ A Baha’i Perspective on the Unifying Principles at the Mystic Heart of the World’s Sacred Traditions That are Guiding Humanity’s Conscious Evolution

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“All things are subject to transformation and change... Creation is the expression of motion, and motion is life...

Nothing is stationary in the material world of outer phenomena or in the inner world of intellect and consciousness.”

~ Abdu’l-Baha, SWAB, 157; PUP, 140
“The upheaval of our world and the upheaval in consciousness is one and the same...

We are only at the threshold of a new spiritual epoch.”

~ C.G. Jung
Overview
~ Unity is the Result of the Conscious Confrontation of Opposing Forces
~ Opposition as the Catalyst for Transformation
~ The Polarity Principle
~ The Necessity of Adversity
~ The Dark Night of the Collective Soul
~ A World Giving Birth
~ Reflection & Dialogue
The Nature of Transformation

“Far from signalizing the end of civilization, the convulsive changes towards which humanity is being ever more rapidly impelled will serve to release the potentialities inherent in the station of man...”

UHJ, The Promise of World Peace

Principle 4

Unity is the result of the conscious confrontation of opposing forces: We are built to confront and overcome difficulties and challenges; trials and tribulations are purposive, they are a bounty of divine bestowal meant to help us restore the dualities of life to their wholeness and facilitate the process of transformation.
Opposition creates opportunity, maintains the law of balance, and is necessary for ensuring cyclical progress within a linear process.

Transformation is necessary for growth and evolution; its pattern is carried out on the collective level, for humanity as a whole, just as it is on the personal, for the individual.
Change is happening at a perilous pace... the world is being reformed and transformed before our very eyes.

Greg Dahl has written,
“A relentless and accelerating tide of change has swept across the globe, transforming daily life... altering human and political relationships... but at the same time threatening us with the disruption of established social orders and the possibility of cataclysm and extinction.”
The Polarity Principle

Helping to guide this process is a dialectic involving a give and take that creates a dynamic of opposing forces that are with us every day of our lives.

Life is made up of an on-going series of conflicts and struggles meant to move us along the developmental path we were designed to move along.
An inherent tension to life forms the core of the pattern of transformation.

This pattern – birth/death/rebirth; separation/initiation/return; or, thesis/antithesis/synthesis – is built into traditional rites of passage, and is found at the heart of the sacred stories of the world’s myths and religions.
The Polarity Principle

Transformation is the nature of life.

The nature of transformation is destruction (breaking down) followed by construction (building up), or disintegration followed by integration. Transformation is how we access the higher levels of human consciousness, and the hidden mysteries of life.
The Polarity Principle

The key to transformation is a quantum-leap shift in consciousness where we are able to see that things aren’t simply separate or opposite but are rather necessary parts of the same whole.

This sense of wholeness, oneness, and unity is what enables their contradictions to be seen as complementary, allows for a merging of opposites, and completes the act of transformation ~ which becomes a process of uniting the polarities.
The Necessity of Adversity

Change is inevitable, but transformation is conditional upon understanding the intended meaning and purpose the transition has for us.

Transformation depends upon and incorporates adversity, which creates and amplifies a necessary opposition to be resolved.
The Necessity of Adversity

The goal of the transformation process is not the uncertainty or chaos that initially arises from the adversity, but the synthesis and union of seemingly separate parts when they are recognized as a whole ~ this is an essential oppositional process that makes up a sacred pattern found worldwide.
The Necessity of Adversity

Far from being an accident, transformation is essential to ongoing progress in the physical world.

“Change and transformation are necessities of the contingent world... (but) not of the Essence of Divinity.”

Abdu’l-Baha, TAB, 513
The Necessity of Adversity

The law of opposition is key to understanding the process of transformation.

“There is no balance, no system of self-regulation, without opposition... Nothing so promotes the growth of consciousness as this inner confrontation of opposites...”

~ C.G. Jung
The Necessity of Adversity

Opposition and adversity are catalysts for our continued growth and transformation, tests coming to us from the material world to teach us how to become more attached to the spiritual realm.

“Grief and sorrow do not come to us by chance, they are sent to us by the Divine Mercy for our own perfecting.”

~ Abdu’l-Baha, PT, 178
The Necessity of Adversity

Because this divine pattern is part of our inherent nature, we have an innate need and capacity to overcome and resolve the difficulties and adversities we encounter.

“Perhaps there is a pattern set up in the heavens for one who desires to see it, and having seen it, to find one in himself.”

~ Plato
The Dark Night of the Collective Soul

Does this pattern of transformation hold as true on the collective level as it does on the individual level?

Is humanity currently experiencing a loss of soul, a spiritual crisis? Are we in the midst of a period of confusion and chaos, leading to a symbolic death and rebirth of communities, nations, and society as a whole?
Civilizations and empires have long followed a pattern of rise and fall ~ Egyptian, Aztec, Mayan, Greek, Roman... yet, they all continued on after their death & rebirth.

This pattern is as true in our time, only now, what effects the part, impacts the whole; the transformation of the part will include the transformation of the whole.
The Dark Night of the Collective Soul

Global transformation will be a gradual, part-by-part process, in the long run resulting in the advancement of civilization as a whole.

All of creation is part of this divine pattern of opposition followed by progress; nothing escapes the cycle of opposites that defines the nature and process of change and growth.
This can all be seen as a “two-fold process” of “universal fermentation” in every continent and every sphere of life, as Shoghi Effendi describes it.

It is a dual process of “purging and reshaping humanity in anticipation of the Day when the wholeness of the human race will have been recognized and its unity established.”
The Dark Night of the Collective Soul

This collective pattern of growth is characterized by “a series of pulsations, of alternating crises and triumphs,” forming “a dialectic of victory and crisis.”

One aspect of the process is fundamentally disruptive, tending to oftentimes violently maintain the barriers that separate humanity, while the other is essentially integrative, serving to unify world systems.
The Dark Night of the Collective Soul

Humanity’s story has taken this turn toward chaos and disintegration because it refuses to embrace the spiritually-based principles meant to guide its evolution into a new global era.

At the same time, a vast process of renewal is underway; our suffering is serving to purify and bring together the entire human race.
The way forward may be through further pain and destruction; yet this is what will finally bring the differences into sharper focus.

“The winds of despair are blowing from every direction, and the strife that divides and afflicts the human race is daily increasing... adversities unimaginably appalling, undreamed of crises and upheavals... might well combine to engrave in the soul of an unheeding generation those truths and principles which it has distained to recognize and follow...” (Baha’u’llah)
The Dark Night of the Collective Soul

The promise of world peace has been out there for millennia; it is up to us – now – to bring it into reality.

As a glimmer of the light at the end of the dark night begins to rise above the horizon, we can keep our eyes on this coming dawn, and on the signs of hope and progress we are witnessing.
A World Giving Birth

We are at the end of one cycle and the beginning of another, witnessing the death of the old and the birth of the new.

As Jung noted some eighty years ago, “We are only at the threshold of a new spiritual epoch.”

And, as Teilhard de Chardin echoed, “We are watching the birth, more than the death, of a world.”
A World Giving Birth

We are at what Ervin Laszlo calls the “tipping point,” where we head toward mass extinction or a sustainable future.

Can we go any further along the “path to breakdown” before it is too late? Or, are we already far enough down the “path to breakthrough,” into the birth process that there is no turning back?
A World Giving Birth

The eventual result of this imminent birth process, as Laszlo describes it, will be “a consciousness that recognizes our connections to each other and to the cosmos...

a consciousness of connectedness and memory... that conveys a sense of belonging, ultimately, of oneness... a wellspring of empathy with nature and solidarity among people.”
Laszlo defines “planetary consciousness” as “the knowing as well as feeling of the vital interdependence of and essential oneness of humankind…”

This is put into action when an individual “recognizes his or her role in the evolutionary process and acts responsibly in light of this perception.”
Archbishop Desmond Tutu says, “The atomized homogenous groups that existed in the past are no longer the truth of our world...

We must recognize that we are part of one group, one family – the human family. Our survival as a planet depends on it. We are part of one family...”
A World Giving Birth

Profound changes have already taken place around the world in the century and three-quarters since the revelation of Baha’u’llah, including much pain, upheaval, and suffering.

At the same time, a new consciousness of oneness is laboring to be born, as the core principles from that most recent divine revelation are put into action.
A World Giving Birth

Though we are still awaiting the final shift in consciousness to bring this understanding into full acceptance and practice,

we can find motivation, hope, and renewed energy in witnessing the widespread change that has and is continuously occurring in the world.
A World Giving Birth

If we could see with the eye of the Creator, we would see this politically disrupted, economically paralyzed, and socially writhing world slowly breaking up, preparing the way for the birth of the new world.

The evolutionary shift rate is speeding up, yet we cannot say when the birth process will finally be completed.
A World Giving Birth

Nor can we know for sure whether the just and equitable global society sought for by so many for so long will be achieved only after further unimaginable horrors resulting from blindly clinging to old patterns, or more quickly and smoothly by consciously embracing and acting upon the newly revealed spiritual principles of our time.
What we do know is that the choice is fully ours.

“Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.” (Baha’u’llah)

A gradual and unfolding process of evolution guides our collective progress in taking on the responsibility required and actively carrying forward an ever-advancing civilization.
A World Giving Birth

The world is birthing a whole new way of seeing the world; this involves a transformation of consciousness never before witnessed.

Spiritual energies already released will ensure the renewal of individuals, institutions, and civilization itself.
As Baha’u’llah has assured us:

“The object of every Revelation” is to “effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions.”
Questions for Further Reflection

~ How do we understand the principle and process of transformation in relation to events and processes happening in the world now?

~ How do we apply this understanding to our everyday lives, and carry it out in our regular, focused action in the world?
THE ONENESS PLEDGE

“In all my thoughts and actions, I pledge to look on all things with the eye of oneness.”

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“Good news! Human consciousness is unfolding toward its essential unity... This lucid book both celebrates that evolutionary trajectory and guides our full and empowered participation.”
- Mirabai Starr, author of Caravans of No Despair: A Memoir of Loss & Transformation

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