

The Big Picture

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Good morning. This is August 13th, 1999. That's the Day of Destiny, according to John Mini who did a lot of interesting research on it in Mexico. It is purportedly the day-sign at the very top of, and in a very special position in, the Aztec calendar. Here we are meeting in the north. Why don't we pause to think for a moment about the south, the southern lands that are not so often considered by us. Of course Sergio [Sergio Lub -- see www.sergiolub.com] is in the front row as an Argentinian-born South American. Let's think of the culture that generated that calendar now, with all its ancestors, the Olmecs, the Mayas, the Aztecs, and the Meshika. In honor of that, I'll introduce myself as Atlan Xalli (pronounced Shalli), which is my Meshika name and means Sands of the Seas.

We had a very interesting discussion over breakfast about the meaning of shifting boundaries. The sands of the seas connect the waters of this water planet with its lands, and they are ever-shifting boundaries. As we all know we are in a time of tremendously shifting boundaries.

In fact I think we're on a major roller-coaster ride at the moment, don't you? Yesterday morning Kansas decided Darwinism didn't have to be taught in their schools any more. And I thought for a minute I was in a time-warp, because when I lived in Canada in the mid-sixties my daughter's fourth-grade teacher in literal biblical language said she'd rather a millstone were hung around her neck and she be cast into the sea than to teach the little children they were related to the monkeys.

So here we are, 1999, coming around *that* circle again. Of course though I am an evolution

biologist, I'm not a Darwinist and I'd actually *love* to go to Kansas and talk to them about creationism. I think I can call myself a creationist. How about it? Aren't we co-creationists? Aren't we creating this world as we go? So maybe the boundaries are also *dissolving* as they shift. Very interesting times we live in.

Last night we talked about economics, ecology, physics, spirituality -- I love all of that -- because one of my big interests in life is worldviews. How do we come by them? I love giving workshops on cultural and personal worldviews in order to show people how we create our cultural realities *and* our personal realities. And that this is the first time in *history* when we can recognize that *our* cultural story, the official one -- in our case, the scientists get to write it -- the official story is *not* any longer taken as the ultimate and absolute truth.

Philosophers of science explained decades ago that science was *not* in the business of proving truths, that all *theories* were testable stories, and could *only* be tested for their *usefulness*, *not* for their truth. I thought that was *the* most profound sea-change in western culture for this century. Bigger than the bomb. Bigger than the Internet. That we *knew* that no one person and no one culture has a corner on the truth.

However we're still doing a lot of arguing in the world about who's right and who's wrong, aren't we? But we *understand* now that this *is* a creative, living universe. Not an accidental universe. Not a mechanical universe. In April at the Science and Consciousness Conference in Albuquerque, *all* the speakers had western Ph.D's. We were all properly "credentialed" scientists. And *everyone* agreed that consciousness precedes the material universe, rather than that consciousness is a *product* of material evolution.

That's an *enormous* cultural change in story. No longer are we caught helplessly in a running-down-through-entropy universe that has no meaning, that gave rise to Dadaism and Existentialism and other depressing philosophies. At least the Dadaists laughed. I used to hang on my mirror the motto, "*Life is too important to be taken so seriously.*" I think it's a good motto.

It's a very serious situation we're in, but we'd better have fun living it because otherwise we're going to be very miserable as this roller-coaster ride continues. *Huge* changes everywhere in the world.

As we recognize the universe to be conscious, intelligent, alive, and all of us co-creators, what is our role? Are we not the creative edge of God? *We are* the universe inventing itself. And that intelligent Cosmos, or God -- whatever you call it; doesn't matter which word you use as long as we agreed that it's alive, intelligent, conscious, and creative -- that is looking through *your* eyes, working through *your* hands, walking on *your* feet. *Isn't that exciting?* How *does* the universe get to know itself? Through all of us and what we're doing.

Norie said last night [Norie Huddle, see www.bestgame.org], we can change the rules of the game -- we can play a new game. I've often asked groups, 'How many of you know how to play Monopoly? Would you raise your hands? Ok, when's the last time you played it?' It's the trick question, right? But in many audiences they'll respond, eight, ten, sixteen, maybe occasionally someone will say, 'I played it five years ago.' And I say, 'Wrong, we're all playing it. That is the world game, isn't it? We're playing Monopoly.'

We're playing the game of concentrating wealth. And what happens at the end of the Monopoly game? You either re-distribute the wealth and start over or you play a different game. That's the choice. We can play a different game if we want.

We have people here representing all kinds of ideas on how to change the money game. How come our government gave away its constitutional right to *create* money? The government never should have been in debt, should it? There shouldn't be a national debt. The government, constitutionally, could create money as needed. I believe it was in 1913 -- where's Tom Greco?, he would know all this -- there you are -- was it 1913 when we gave that right away?[1] and started the Federal Reserve Bank which most Americans still think is part of the government. Just ask them to look for it in the blue pages. It's not there.'

Somebody changes the rules of the game all the time. We live in a *dynamic* universe. Not a static one. Life is not static, it's dynamic. And this is the first time in history when *anybody* can play in the big world game. It is the Internet that is largely responsible for the ability of a twelve-year-old, who gets upset about child labor in India or somewhere, to start a whole Save-the-Children organization, or whatever. Marianne Williamson can tell us all to meditate on a certain day and if it comes through in your e-mail there's a fair chance you'll pay attention to that. So we can do *group mind* around the world because we have the Internet.

The Internet is a very interesting phenomenon. It behaves a lot like a living system. As an Evolution Biologist, I spent years honing my list of the basic principles of living systems, abstracting them from nature. Trying to see, **By what principles does a cell self-organize and self-maintain?** These principles should be the same for a body, for an ecosystem, for a family, for a corporation, for a world economy -- one set of consistent principles for all.

I created a list of fifteen operating principles found in all healthy living systems and a few weeks ago I sat down with a corporate consultant to show it to him. I said, 'Let's look at the Internet in these terms, though they come from biology.' We went down the list one-by-one and saw that the Internet demonstrates every one of them.

The Internet *is* self-organizing as a living system, for better or for worse. We may not like everything that's happening on it, but it came out of a free, chaotic situation and it *is* operating by the principles of living systems.

What's happening today is that the Internet is dragging the corporate world into itself. Corporations tend not to function by the operating principles of living systems, so perhaps this shows the power of life over non-life. Corporations simply can no longer ignore the Internet -- in fact they are scrabbling to play on it.

The big corporations in the world are the only major human institutions that are still functioning -- still functioning for their expressed purposes. As VISA founder Dee Hock has pointed out, our educational institutions don't educate, our justice system doesn't dispense justice, our health care system isn't delivering us health, etc., etc. But big business is still making money. And it's doing it in spades. *Huge* amounts. Huge, huge discrepancies now between rich and the poor. It seems obvious that they're the entities with the power -- they're telling our government what to do. Perhaps they are the only institutions with the power to make needed changes in time. So I decided to devote most of my energies to trying to

consult in the big corporate world.

I had the opportunity a couple of month's ago to address the fifty brightest up-and-coming managers of the Siemens Corporation at Stanford University. They were there for a two-week training and are going around the world having these trainings (M.I.T. and Stanford were their locations in the United States). As it happened, they were very open and receptive to hearing about principles of living systems. I showed them the basic patterns of evolution. For example, how things always move from unity to diversity, which sets up conflicts, and then eventually there are negotiations leading to co-operation that brings unity at a new, higher level.

I call this Fractal Biology. Ancient bacteria, as I've told you in past years, organized the first multi-creatured cells as cooperatives. These cells are called nucleated cells and are the only kind of cell to exist on this planet other than bacterial cells. They are the kind of cells that you and I are made of. Those multi-creatured cells went on to form multi-celled creatures such as us, and *now* we're forming a new multi-creatured cell with the boundaries of the planet as we globalize. Fractal biology at work!

We may not like globalization the *way* it's happening, but I do think globalization is inevitable. We can co-operate globally, as we've shown with our Postal Systems, with our Air Traffic Control, with communications including our Internet, etc., etc. -- we *are* capable of global co-operation.

Now, consider that *all* living entities are embedded in other living systems. That's why I looked for the same principles in cells, bodies, ecosystems, companies, corporate bodies, worlds, etc. That embeddedness means that *every* level of an embedded system must be healthy for the whole system to be healthy.

I'm all for the localization that the opponents of globalization are talking about. But I don't do their either-or, because I know that my cells have to look out for their interest as much as my organs do, as much as my whole body does. When you have self-interest expressed at *every* level of embedded systems, that's when the negotiations must take place. That's when the co-operation starts to happen in a healthy system..

So there is a lot to talk about in the corporate world to teach them the principles of living systems.

Here's another interesting story. Remember when downsizing began in the corporate world some years ago? When all these people were fired I wondered what would happen? -- would our country be in serious disarray; would there be a revolution?

What actually happened was that many fired middle-managers went home to their PCs and founded their own businesses on the Web. Survival instinct is strong in living beings. They began businesses that met real needs. That was the only way a little person could create a successful business. To find *some* niche where some need wasn't being met and to meet it. To fill it or to do it better than someone else was doing it.

Many of these new little companies out-stripped the abilities of *their corporations* to meet

these needs. The book by Thomas Petzinger called *The New Pioneers* describes this process. See what happens? The corporation creates chaos and out of the chaos comes life. That's what we're *discovering* here.

Petzinger has been a Wall Street columnist for quite a while. Kim Cranston, who has been heading the Social Ventures Network pointed out to me a February 26th, 1999 *Wall Street Journal* article (front page of the B section) by Petzinger titled "A New Model for the Nature of Business: It's Alive!" I said, *Whoa!* -- this is exciting. The business world is starting to talk about *life!*

Over the past years I've been doing some consulting with a company in Brazil. It completely re-organized it's whole decision-making structure and added in two bottomlines in addition to profits. Those two bottomlines were community and environment, basically -- the people community and the natural community. I don't really like the word, "environment," because it's an us-them word, or an "us-it" concept. Here are we and here's the environment. The environment is nothing but all our relations, as the Lakota and other native peoples would say. We are a family. And that's the rest of the family.

So in this company's new triple bottom line, instead of only worrying about the interest of the *shareholders*, we included all *stakeholders*. Do you all know those two distinctions in business? The stakeholders are *everyone* who has some kind of a stake in this business, whether they are the people supplying the resources, or the people buying the goods, or the ones making, selling, distributing. It's a *network*. "Stakeholders" is a very broad concept of a business community.

It is important for businesses to talk more about accountability to *stakeholders*. We can argue that they should include the natural species in the ecosystem in which the company exists and all its human *stakeholders* exist -- so ultimately the concept of stakeholders will end up being the whole *planet* because of how very interwoven these systems are.

So that's what I see as the wonderfully encouraging new trend. It's not only Petzinger. There was another article last year called "The Cathedral and the Bazaar" [2], which came out of Silicon Valley. The author, Eric Raymond, talked about the cathedral as the top-down management structure, the *engineered* corporation, and the bazaar is where everybody negotiates. Again the Internet model.

The Internet is opening up, as Victor [Victor Grey -- www.openheart.com] knows, through Linux, which is becoming more popular and more usable, and other operating systems alternatives to Microsoft. So the monopolies of Microsoft and Apple are not going to hold for very much longer.

My new friend Clive Smith has designed NewDeal software[3], which bring old 286/386/486 computers up-to-snuff so you can publish, do brochures, get on the Internet, and what-all else with old "throw-away" computers. That can bring millions more people who have been disenfranchised onto the Web. People often argue that the Internet is still an exclusive club, an elitist club. It will not hold that way. It's getting into schools and into libraries and community centers. The public does have increasing access. Many third world countries will go into the computer age bypassing much of the heavy industrial age.

So I do think it's a very important phenomenon and one of the things I most love about it is that I can now talk to the "*total techies*" as I call them. These are the kids who grew up in front of a computer screen. Who are only interested in technology. And I can say, 'Hey, guess what? The principles by which *you* operate are the principles that exist in nature!'

Janine Benyus, author of a wonderful book called *Biomimicry*, pointed out that humans assigned one group of people called biologists to study how *other* species make a living, while a totally separate group of people called economists were to figure out how *humans* make a living. *Now* we have the opportunity to look at economics in terms of biology -- to look at the experience of four-and-half billion *years* of self-organization, to see how young species are acquisitive and territorial and grabby, and mature species co-operate, as in a rainforest. Where is the leadership? Distributed leadership. Everything shared and recycled. What a great economic model!

Last year a group of Episcopalian Priests asked me to talk about "The New Leadership." I told them, 'I can teach you the principles of living systems. I can show you what happens in nature, in your own body.' For example, we say the brain is "in charge" of the body (that's just our western way of thinking -- the ancient Greeks thought the mind was in the heart). But the brain or heart are *not* in charge. Rather the body demonstrates distributed leadership all over the body, while the nervous system simply coordinates it all in some ways. Everything in your body knows what to do. Isn't it interesting?

If we had more time I would talk about consciousness. Because I know that my body wouldn't function if my cells couldn't talk to each other through something other than chemistry and electricity. I know that all my cells are in dialogue, all my molecules are in dialogue, all of nature is in dialogue.

Every indigenous culture I've ever *learned* from has known about The Great Conversation. First time I went into the Amazon with an Indian, I said (in my naivete), "Can you teach me how to talk to the animals and the trees?" And he said, "Oh, shut up Elisabet and *listen*. They have *always* been talking to each other. Your job isn't to *initiate* the conversation. Your job is to hear it."

So here we are. We need to hear The Big Conversation. We need to listen to our selves. We need to keep a *very strong center* knowing that we are spirit having a human experience, as is often said nowadays. Because otherwise this roller-coaster ride is going to be too much. And I think a lot of people *will* leave the planet, because it is just too much for them to go through such a *huge* re-organization.

It's *BIG*, people. We are in the sixth great extinction on this planet -- the first one caused by *one* species. We humans are causing an extinction that is proceeding more rapidly than the last one, which knocked the *dinosaurs* out and was caused by the sudden impact of a huge meteor. It's quite incredible. This is a sea-change, an *unimaginably* big change.

Yet *every* time the Earth has gone through an extinction there's been a unbelievable burst of activity, of creativity. We are seeing that burst of creativity in the *middle* of the extinction this time, *not* after it's over. That's why we're all here. We're all here because we know that this game can be changed. Paul Ray has developed a whole new wonderful cultural story

about forty-four million of us as cultural creatives.[4] Some people argue that his wasn't a proper poll. Never mind. The story is out! And now we see ourselves as forty-four million strong and growing.

That's what matters. Because in the end, it's *all* stories. No one has ever had any experience outside of their personal consciousness, or outside of the *now*-moment. Can anyone tell me they have *ever* had an experience outside that? Scientist or otherwise, that is the only direct experience available to us. Through inner senses, through outer senses, but always through consciousness now!

It's wonderful to see all the different stories and to know that we don't have to arrive at a single story. And yet we can look for principles that work -- that work toward health. You can argue that health is a natural ethic. How do I decide whether something is good or bad? Does it promote my health, my family's health, my community's health, my world's health? If it is at least harmless, and good at some of those levels, go for it. Creative edge of God. We're here to experiment. And this is the most incredible experiment that any of us could imagine. No matter how many incarnations we may have had, this is the big one!

In the eternal 'now' I see my incarnations as lotus petals, all there at once to dialogue with. It is *so wonderful!* -- *It's all wide-open now.* We can be *so creative* about the way we see things. That's what gives me hope. And whenever you're feeling really down, rise above it, look down, say: "I needed the bad guys in my game. I came here as a world transformer; there had to be something to transform. They need me -- I need them." We're all connected anyway. It's a game. And it's a wonderful game. And it's getting more exciting by the minute.

Thank you.

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1. See "Chapter 6, Money and the Constitution," from *New Money for Healthy Communities*, by Thomas H. Greco, Jr., 1994
 2. "The Cathedral and the Bazaar", by Eric S. Raymond, 1997
 3. December 2003: The company was called "NewDeal - Smart Software for the Rest of Us -- Turn ANY PC into a state-of-the-art office or classroom." Unfortunately its website (newdealinc.com) is no more. See the December 2000 interview with Clive Smith, "New Deal: Recycling Computers."
 4. See *The Rise of Integral Culture* by Paul H. Ray: *Noetic Sciences Review*, Spring 1996, pp. 4-15, and "The Great Divide: Prospects for an Integral Culture", by Paul Ray, *YES! A Journal of Positive Futures*, Fall, 1996.