

Clarity and Hope in a time of sea change

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Two Waves; original art, Lonnie Hanzon

This article is excerpted from Jim Kenney's forthcoming book, Thriving in the Crosscurrent: Clarity and Hope in a Time of Cultural Sea Change, to be published by Quest Books, May, 2010.

Imagine an ocean moment: two waves converging in the same time and space. One is powerful but subsiding, the other just gathering momentum and presence but not yet cresting. At the moment of their meeting they are nearly equal in amplitude and influence. As they cross, who can say which is rising, which descending? In that moment only the chaos of wave interference exists. Now imagine modernity as a powerful wave of cultural values that crested half a century ago and is slowly beginning to subside. At the same time, a second wave of countervailing values rises equally slowly, building until its crest begins to rival the declining energy of the older wave.

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In Western culture the modern wave has long been dominant. Deeply rooted in classical antiquity and European history, the modern wave has profoundly shaped every culture in the world. In our own time, however, we have begun to sense the weakening of its influence and to recognize the growing strength of a challenging newer value wave.

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This younger wave represents positive change. It is the wave of future possibility in the present, the advent of a cultural evolutionary transformation. As the long-dominant older wave loses amplitude and the newer one surges, we cross the threshold into an interesting time. The cultural critique of patriarchy, the legitimacy of war, ecological exploitation and pollution, racism, injustice, religious exclusivism, and imperialism has arguably never been more pronounced. At the same time, we've begun to explore and even embrace emerging values including nonviolent conflict resolution, universal human rights, social and economic justice, ecological sustainability, and interreligious harmony.

Despite appearances to the contrary, things are getting better rather than worse in our era; that this is one of those rare times in world history where old values and beliefs give way to new values and beliefs; that we are in the midst of what I call a sea change, a rare dramatic acceleration of cultural value-shift. It's a

time to be embraced and cherished and engaged with.

But the passage is anything but straightforward. The interference of two culture waves unleashes both apparent chaos and emerging order. This dynamic creates the signature turbulence of a sea change: a profound alteration of cultural values toward a better fit with current realities.

What does it mean to live in and be engaged in a period of accelerated culture shift? How can one begin to cope? How can one take a leading role? How can we all flourish?

Buddha gave the world the Noble Eightfold Path. It addressed three modes of existence: the cultivation of the inner life, the proper relation to others, and the understanding of important aspects of the real world. The following principles for a time of crossing touch the same critical areas. Like the elements of the Eightfold Path and many other models for personal growth, these several areas of effort should be approached simultaneously rather than sequentially.

What does it mean to live in and be engaged in a period of accelerated culture shift?

I hope that this brief excerpt serves several functions. It provides a useful general summary of the key ideas in the book. It provides a brief compendium of inspirations and insights, a sort of Handbook for Yeasayers. Most important, however, is its role as a guide for cultural evolutionary explorers. It captures the essential vision of life in a time

of almost unprecedented culture shift. It's not the first word about sea change, and I hope it won't be the last.

1. *Say Yea!*

The quality of life in a time of sea change depends to some degree on whether we feel as though we're riding the old wave down and out or riding the new one in. While none of us is always in the *yea* frame of mind, we do need to cultivate the habit of saying yes to cultural evolution. At the same time, we should recognize our own internal naysayers and gentle them along. In short, we have to learn to live the renaissance.

Attend to the crossing and share the experience widely. Become a new storyteller. Communicate the stories of the waning and the rising. Become an adept in the application of the benchmarks of authentic cultural evolution. Remember that the real yeasayer is never the smug narcissist but always the apprentice and, at the same time, the journeyman.

In the Buddhist tradition, the *bodhisattva* is somewhat analogous to the holy wanderer found in other spiritual traditions. The bodhisattva seeks only the enlightenment of others, never his or her own. In that way, of course enlightenment is secured. Similarly, the highest calling for the yeasayer is that of the catalyst, the one who works steadily for the cultural advance of people at every level of adaptive understanding.

2. *Read and Interpret The Map*

Real explorers often have a dual relationship with maps. Lewis and Clark had a very poor chart of the

northwest portion of the American continent when they set off in 1804 on their journey to the Pacific Ocean. But they returned home with a much more accurate account of the route, its wonders, and its dangers. One of the most important preparations for voyagers in the sea-change crossing is a thorough acquaintance with the basic features of the passage: anomalies (fresh observations that contradict old assumptions), ahas (sudden cultural value-insights), eddies (angry whirlpools of cultural backwash), emergents (new patterns of thinking and valuing), and bygones (the fading assumptions of an earlier era). At the very least a rough map like this one is a must have.

Moving beyond mastery of the map, develop the skills of crosscurrent cartography. In the years to come, we'll require better maps and journals of the first major period in human conscious evolution. Our own experiences along the way may seem inconsequential, but taken together in the creative cultural interaction they can help to shape the next generation's understanding of the crossing and its significance for humankind.

Recognizing and understanding the major anomalies of the older wave and the ahas that accompany the newer wave is essential. Bringing them to the attention of others is the next step. Appreciate the value elements of the older wave that are healthy and not anomalous. Perceiving the best values of the older wave in the good values of the newer is a critical skill; understanding how those older values may have matured

into slightly altered forms is even more useful.

A good cartographer knows how to read a map's signs and symbols and their implications for the traveler. No doubt, eddies are going to appear on a number of paths. Familiarity with these eddies keeps other voyagers from their swirling undertows; such familiarity also offers comfort and courage by indentifying dismaying phenomena as only temporary manifestations of the crossing, and thus easier to endure.



Complexity; original art, Lonnie Hanzon

3. Embrace Complexity and Interdependence

Embrace rather than avoid complexity and interdependence. To do so means differentiating between increasing creative complexity and simple complication. That's the first step toward appreciating the link between increasing complexity and consciousness and the connection between complexity and the self-organizing emergent systems that lie at the heart of cultural evolution.

Recognizing and relishing genuine creative complexity is a requisite crossing skill, one of the most important for life in the crossing. We develop it by employing a four-quadrant approach to every problem and engaging important issues from as many perspectives as possible.

Finally, we should note that interdependence is complexity's constant intellectual partner. The new interdisciplinary understanding means looking at the whole rather than individual parts. Once attention has shifted from parts to wholes, powerful new questions must be posed about the interdependent character of everything that constitutes those wholes.

4. Enculture Peace

Elise Boulding, the great Quaker peace activist, used to say, "Peace cultures thrive on and are nourished by visions of how things might be, in a world where sharing and caring are part of the accepted lifeways for everyone." Cultures of peace are those that promote and protect diversity. In contrast to warrior cultures, those committed to peace choose mutualism over adversarialism. They practice the morality of nurturance rather than the morality of old social and behavioral codes.

Evolutionary thinkers committed to the cultivation of communities of peace stress the complex interdependence of justice and ecological sustainability. Remove any leg from the peace-justice-sustainability tripod, and the others can no longer support the weight of a society.

Theologian Walter Wink offers an evocative “new story” flourish to the peace-culture paradigm. Human societies since prehistory, he argues, have most often lived by the myth of redemptive violence, the story, told in countless variants, of good overcoming evil. That victory, however, is always accomplished through violence. It’s a story that dominates the literature and imagery of our own modern society, the tale of the villain who just needs killing. Now, however, Wink and many others see a new myth taking shape, already emergent in some ways, still *horizontal* in others. It’s the myth of restorative justice, the powerful new story that recognizes the interrelated values of peace, justice, and sustainability and teaches the lesson that peace can often be secured by restoring the missing leg of the tripod.

5. Pursue Third-Generation Rights

Today, we can speak of three generations in the evolution of our understanding of human rights. The first generation sought and often secured individual civil and political rights. First-generation rights were foundational in the political experiment that created the United States. Over the next two hundred years, however, the country struggled to define and secure the rights of groups. Now freedom rather than liberty became the new watchword. This second generation was marked by four great struggles: for the human rights of women, blacks, workers, and the poor. Today, many of the bitterest political battles of our time pit liberty (individual rights) against freedom (group rights).

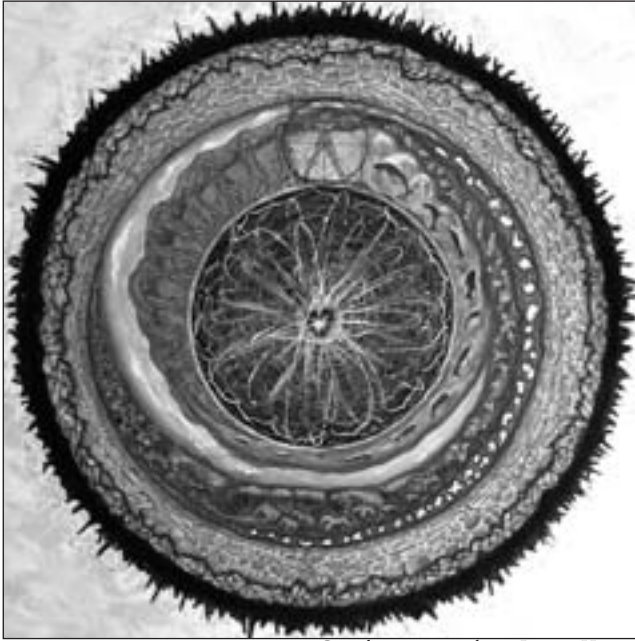
And now a third generation of the long evolutionary journey has begun.

Third-generation rights (“solidarity” is the newest term) are those that might be extended to all people and all cultures. The focus is now on rights to the global commons, to advances in technology and health care, and to the same opportunities enjoyed by the developed nations. The third-generation conversation lies at the heart of relations between the wealthy North and the poor South of the planet.

6. Sustain Seven Generations

The concept of seven-generation sustainability asks that each generation of human beings live sustainability and work with a commitment to improving the lives of those who will live as far as seven generations in the future. The principle is based on the Great Law of the Iroquois Indian nation: “In every deliberation, we must consider the impact on the seventh generation . . . even if it requires having skin as thick as the bark of a pine.”

A major older-wave anomaly is its profound misunderstanding and mistreatment of the Earth. A strong newer-wave aha is the clear sense that long-term generational life on Earth is impossible without a harmonious relationship to the planet itself and to all life. Whether the present sea change succeeds or fails depends in no small measure on converting that desire into action. The successful navigator of the change will have a steadily deepening ecological awareness and commitment.



Complexity; original art, Lonnie Hanzon

7. *Facilitate Conscious Evolution*

Not every individual or culture occupies the same evolutionary level. Yet every one participates in the evolutionary ascent. The greatest obligation borne by those who realize the powerful and precious character of our time is to assist the process of cultural evolution. The key lies in esteeming each evolutionary level's healthy manifestations and accepting that different people will be at different levels. The conscious evolutionist seeks to assist others to recognize their own anomalies, create their own ahas, and enter the next stage of the adventure. Evolutionists like Barbara Marx Hubbard and Brian Swimme stress the cocreative role of human beings in an evolving universe. They stress the full integration of the

scientific, the cultural, and the spiritual in the shaping of humanity's future. Like Teilhard de Chardin, those who call us to full participation in conscious evolution share a compelling vision of collective awakening.

It's a heady prospect, but one that the committed evolutionary can hardly ignore. The bodhisattva's career begins with "the rising of the mind for enlightenment," a spiritual form of the realization that evolution of mind, spirit, and community is a fact. Once that experience has taken place, the bodhisattva strives toward the enlightenment of all. Similarly, once one has really grasped the radical truth of accelerating cultural evolution, there's no turning back. It's one of those things you just can't unlearn.

8. *Become a Global Citizen*

Global citizens are cosmopolitans. Their world-centric outlook is a powerful antidote to the familiar variations of egocentrism: nationalism, racism, sexism, and intolerance in general. The true cosmopolitan is not a moral relativist but one who understands that plural truths are possible.

The global citizen is the cosmopolitan first and the patriot after. Understanding that true citizenship in one's own country or culture is not possible outside the context of full commitment to the planetary community, a globalist serves both. To be a true global citizen, aspire first to be a committed bioregionalist, knowing that we meet and know the world first by developing a deep knowledge of the place, the watershed, the community we inhabit. Being at home in our own bioregion makes possible a much richer appreciation of the way such regions interdepend in the global ecosystem and in the social structures of the global village.

Finally, the emerging global consensus of values is the text of global citizenship. The rising global consensus celebrates many things, including the self-empowerment of women, the needs of the world's children, and the fact that the global challenge is not just one of resources but of vision.

9. *Celebrate Interspirituality*

Growing out of over a half century of profound dialogue between spiritual and cultural traditions and practices, interspirituality acknowledges and explores the very different but conver-

gent spiritual visions and practices that nourish all cultures. The late Wayne Teasdale, author of *The Mystic Heart*, coined the word "interspiritual." He expressed it as "the sharing of ultimate experiences across traditions." As he put it, "Interspirituality is not about eliminating the world's rich diversity of religious expression. . . . Rather, it is an attempt to make available to everyone all the forms the spiritual journey assumes."

Perhaps you're not a religious believer and have no interest in the existence of any transcendent reality. Not a problem, Wayne would say. You still have an inner life, and it can without question be broadened, deepened, and enriched. The exploration of interspirituality, as a matter of fact, sets aside the doctrinal disparities that separate the world's religious traditions. Buddhists do not accept the existence of a creator God. Jews, Christians, and Muslims do—though in appreciably different ways. But all can come together to share what their communities have learned about the deep inner workings of mind and the still deeper life of spirit. It's worth noting that humankind's earliest reflections on evolution were spiritual in nature.

10. *Find Your Kalyanamitras*

In Sanskrit, the sacred language of the Buddhist path, *kalyanamitra* means "good friend," but in that tradition, it has come to signify much more. *Kalyanamitras* are spiritual allies, companions on the evolutionary path, joined by a shared commitment to service to others. The companions provide

the journey's vital inspiration and energy. The spiritual friend can't be sought out. He or she has a way of happening along when the time is right and the need is real. The trick is to recognize and to cherish that person. But more is involved than just finding our own spiritual partners; we are also to learn how to be one.

All sorts of relationships are possible, and each of them offers the possibility of personal and spiritual growth. But the relationship between *kalyanamitras* is unique. It is grounded in a shared affirmation that life is rich and good, that suffering can be transformative, that evolution is a reality, and that existence has a purpose. The real heart of the *kalyanamitra* relationship, though, lies in the mutual discovery by two or more seekers that compassion is more than just a word. Only in the intimacy of genuine partnership do we begin to discover that "feeling with" another being is not only possible, but also powerful.

ADDENDUM: SEA CHANGE AS THE NEW STORY

She is the heart of her community. **S**As she sits on the hard earth of her desert home, her voluminous skirts spread about her, her spine straight and her head thrown back, she seems to the children who gather about her a sort of colorful mountain. And in a sense she is, the cosmic mountain, the axis mundi—the pillar about which the world revolves. The old woman is the tribal storyteller. She opens her

mouth and begins once again to chant the ancient invocations that bless her retelling of the myth of creation, the story the children have come to hear. Hesitantly at first and then with growing confidence, the older children repeat the familiar words and then begin to share the telling with the grandmother.

A few years ago, when Bill Moyers invited millions of Americans to meet Joseph Campbell, the response was astonishing. A master of lore himself but also a scholar with a compelling story about the nature of stories, Campbell struck a particularly resonant chord in his listeners. The conversation about myth blossomed. The inquiry into the relevance of mythic themes for theology, psychology, spirituality, and personal growth took on a new energy. And the phenomenon still shows no real signs of abating.

The great stories, Campbell maintained, have at least four basic functions.

- 1) *They orient us within our cosmos and disclose the mysteries of nature and of the times and spaces within which life unfolds.*
- 2) *They ground us in our social nexus, reminding us of the protocols, the limits, and the values that make our place and our time unique.*
- 3) *They aid us in the passages from one life stage to the next, recalling those first humans who walked the same path from birth into this world to birth into the next.*

4) *They arouse in us a sense of wonder, an awareness of the divinely mysterious character of all existence.*

Each of the dimensions of the sacred tales helps to shape, to support, and to guide the community; and the storytelling process itself is one of the richest expressions of the life of the group.

When we think about the role of myth and song and story in this way we can begin to understand what Thomas Berry meant when he suggested that the cultivation and sharing of stories about what matters most is the most sacred of the tasks of any community, and that our failure in this regard is intimately related to our modern dilemma. “It’s all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in-between stories. The Old Story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it, is not functioning properly. We have not learned the New Story.”

When a community’s relationship to its story becomes static, when the story no longer lives in retelling and embellishment at the hands of the storytellers and the children, its culture has begun to disintegrate. In a living oral tradition, there is no distinction between the old story and the new, since the telling itself is the process of renewal.

Lately, I think a lot about Tom Berry’s challenge. That’s why I find cultural evolution so empowering. It’s a story that needs telling, and it’s beginning to be told in a variety of powerful ways by committed and persuasive teachers around the world.

The new story is especially urgent in a time of sea change, one of the very rare periods of a potential evolutionary quantum leap. If the story of the evolution of human values over time is worth telling to the children around every campfire, how much more important is the story of an extraordinary time of crossing? And who needs to hear it more than those who are trying to thrive in a crosscurrent they may not understand?



Storyteller: photo, Cetta Kenney