



SPIRIT OF
HUMANITY
FORUM

NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2021

The **'Narrative of Love'** conversation series, initiated and led by Dr Scherto Gill in preparation for the 5th the Spirit of Humanity Forum, is developing beautifully. A stream of wisdom based on the personal stories of experienced leaders is pouring forth. We are happy to present two more contributors, Lena Rachel Andersen, author, indie publisher, economist, futurist and philosopher and Bob Boisture, President and CEO of the Fetzer Institute, see below. More are on the way. [VIEW](#) & [LISTEN](#)



Spreading the seeds

With enthusiasm, we are beginning to share gems collected from the first four conversations and hoping that they will spread like golden seeds to germinate and bear fruits in the future.

Sister Jayanti Kirpalani

European Director, Brahma Kumaris

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"We have forgotten the spiritual dimension of life. Spirituality is part of human nature. We are spirit."

"Faith, hope and courage, all of these things go together. Together with that is the generosity of spirit, wanting good things not just for me but for others around me, that there can be abundance for all, not just for a few."

"Love makes me want to share what is precious for me; I want others to have the same."

"It's not external weapons or treaties that create peace. It's peace in my heart and love for the other as a human being."

Professor Lord Alderdice

A politician in Northern Ireland
Member of House of Lords of the United Kingdom

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On what is essential for politicians to hold dear in their leadership and work:

"Humility, holding dear the goal of making things better for people and not entering into politics for a position."

"You can still have a working, respectful human relationship with someone whom you differ very deep."

"When building peace, we need to address disturbing historical relationships between people in communities – then, new political structures or institutions can emerge that can help facilitate better communal relationships – not vice versa."

"We need to engage with everyone as human beings beyond politics. Then you can begin to make changes in the politics that are more humanising."



Lene Rachel Andersen

Economist, author, futurist, philosopher and *Bildung* activist

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About our education system today

"Beauty has been taken out of the equation and left is only the money. That is poverty"

"If we have an educational system that is so focused on science and technology only for people to get an education so they can go out and be producers and consumers, we end up losing all meaning. Only giving parts of education becomes meaningless data and we get angry, frustrated and anxious young people that don't know why they are learning what they are learning. I think that is what we are seeing."

"The one big lesson I have learned from the Nordic history is the importance of 'lifting from the bottom'. Everybody needs a fair chance and have access to the skills, understanding and meaning-making that allows them to thrive and make the most out of their lives for themselves and for others. This is empowerment, empowerment is the key. Empowerment is the idea that things can be different,

that there is hope and also skills, social skills and collaboration and respect for the individual.

"The choices we can focus on is life, breath and spirit. How we can enjoy and appreciate all the cultural and biological diversity, the riches that are around on this amazing globe that we have inherited. Nature is so rich, but we are exploiting it because we have a failed economic structure, system, idea, narrative. We have to change that narrative."

Bob Boisture

President and CEO of the Fetzer Institute

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"The challenge of opening our hearts and love to each other is fundamentally a spiritual challenge; love is at the heart of reality."

"I think love is the only thing that can save the world...it is the only human impulse that is possibly strong enough to overcome those things that are pulling us apart."

"We have a choice every day to work for the greater good...that turns every moment into an opportunity of love."

"Leadership development is all about virtue development, about spiritual formation."

Leaders in Small Dialogue Circles exploring love in leadership



As part of exploring the theme of the Spirit of Humanity Forum 2021, 'Towards a Loving World – Leadership & Governance for Wellbeing' SoH Forum is convening Zoom-based Small Group Dialogues. It is safe, loving and reflective spaces where leaders can share what it is in their experience that either leads to or prevents love from being a power in politics, business, education and other areas of society."

We have woven together the threads from our first dialogue. It was vibrant and striking, the participants expressed many profound insights.

Reflections from the first dialogue

For a group of leaders and change-makers to be in a safe space to express their inner feelings and, in particular, speak of the part that love can and does play in their lives and in the world, is a precious gift. Seven leaders and change-makers from a variety of backgrounds got together to do just that in December 2020, as part of the lead up to the fifth Spirit of Humanity Forum in Reykjavik in June 2021. Our theme: Towards a Loving World – Leadership and Governance for Wellbeing.

We considered love in terms of the collective and the possibility of love as a catalyst for systemic change, yet acknowledged that it begins with very personal, individual experience.

Our opening question: what is the best gift that you've ever given or you've ever received? revealed moving personal stories. Some spoke of having gone through a severe illness, others of great humiliation, moments of vulnerability, encountering the limits of justice; others spoke of a deep encounter with God, receiving a great spiritual master, the love of one's parents, being with profound thinkers and leaders. It was very apparent that there had been a very deep learning and transformation in each of these experiences. Maybe it is only when we encounter our own mortality that we become aware of something beyond the material, or when we are humiliated when all dignity is stripped from us that we find the true and lasting foundation of our self-respect.

"Love is very often about pain and trauma. But if we harness that, and we understand our own trauma and the collective trauma that we're all carrying forward, there is great power in the transformation of that; there is an alchemy in it."

"I created for myself a situation where all the people I most wanted to impress saw me fail. ... And I then went through a process that's brought me to where I am now. So the thing I most feared brought me to this moment."

"... Also, connecting to collective trauma in the world, because of my own trauma, to this time, is a gift, even though a difficult one, but it's a gift."

Trauma in the form of humiliation and vulnerability had become a turning point in people's lives, resulting in the learning of who we really are and then to fully being ourselves. It is the destruction of the ego. **There is power in the vulnerability of being stripped back to the core of who we are, beyond the status, beyond our work in the world. It allows us to think differently about ourselves and our relationship with everyone and everything. Healing comes when we turn inside and look at the self.** It brings us to living in the present moment and to selfless giving, putting ego to one side and sharing, with as

many people as possible, about the beauty of life. This is itself an act of gratitude. What we have received, we naturally give.

We will return to the powerful aspect of collective trauma later on in this article.

We then did a deep dive into our dialogue questions: *What is the meaning of love and wellbeing for ourselves and for the planet? And, by putting love into practice, how can we as leaders collectively nurture this?*

We live in a rapidly changing world. Attitudes towards leadership have changed dramatically, as one of our participants expressed:

*“When I started doing empathy research in neuroscience, you could not use the word(s) empathy and compassion in science. And now you can use it. Now, something has changed. You have compassionate leadership programmes, you have empathy as a huge research field now, **but the word love is still totally taboo. The word love is taboo in all the big systems, the financial system, the economic system.**”*

People spoke of their work through the lens of love, which revealed an inner conflict when trying to bring care and compassion to a system that is devoid of love and compassion while working within it. The big systems in our world are mostly based on achievement, power and status, whereas affiliation, relationship and care are basically put into the private sphere of our lives. This is the challenge - to put back care and love into my daily practice as a leader while staying in a system which is very much about achievement and competition. Can I produce excellent work and, at the same time, always have a caring motivation with the frequency of love behind it? Can I really check whether, in each decision I make as a leader, these motivations are balanced out, or is one dominating? Once we have figured this out in ourselves, we can also figure it out for the big systems. **There is a significant opportunity for notions of responsibility, empathy and care to be embedded into our governance practices across the world.**

Just as trauma on an individual level can lead to a deep inner transformation, so the global crises we find ourselves in now in 2020 and going forward may lead to some dramatic changes in our systems. The notion of inclusive capitalism or stakeholder capitalism is really starting to get traction. And at the heart of this is the concept that we are all in this together and we need to share the resources and the love, and not just reward the few.

“COVID-19 ... has demonstrated the fragility of many of the systems that we have assumed would continue to grow. And that has demonstrated that very, very, very large and dominant organisations can be brought to their knees by a very small,

new virus. It's also shown the inter-relationships between the environment and society, and how our physiological, biological and social controls can be both barriers and enablers to the situation we've had this year."

There is some perceived evidence of a behavioural shift and a recognition that things need to change. **Some of the world's largest corporations have publicly said that they will continue to pay their staff and ensure that those most vulnerable in their supply chains are being looked after. This was considered a very tangible demonstration of a form of love in the context of leadership.**

Younger generations are more discerning about what they do with their lives and with whom they will work and also demand that our systems are more accountable and transparent.

The relational dynamic is of huge importance. **Love in leadership is expressed in listening and appreciation - listening to someone's need rather than focusing on their behaviour, especially if they are different or may bring some tension to a group.** They may be insecure or need to be heard. Understanding makes it easy to love that person and to find a way of expressing appreciation in a genuine way. Once we understand why the other person is the way they are, then everything changes. Humility is needed to understand the self, others and the natural world.

*"I have tried to use the respect that I have cultivated for my children, for my students, and also see them as individuals. ...The young people [I teach now] think very differently from young people 20 years ago. ... And the young generation realises that there is a huge problem in the world and they want to be a part of the solution. So, therefore, in my teaching, I invite them to be a part of the solution. I tell them I don't have all the answers but you can find the answers and they really enjoy that. **Bringing respect and love into the work that you're doing gives the people you're working with the opportunity to flourish.**"*

There is a connection – an important common, human dimension - between the leadership of groups and the question of love in individual relationships, families, and so on. How we engage with people we've chosen, to be with, or to whom we're related, is quite different from engaging, for example, with a whole country or a community of people with whom we're at war. Love is the understanding and acceptance that, as individuals or as communities, we may have very different perspectives, wishes and reactions to situations. We don't see the good as being the same thing.

"And accepting them as they are, rather than what I would like them to be, or what I would like to believe that they were, and to understand how they are who they are and to care about that. For me, I think this is what love is in the context of leadership in the wider sense of community."

Love in leadership would move us away from fear-based decision-making. So the question was asked: What is the root of fear that controls so much of society currently?

We would usually consider love to be the opposite of fear, but, as we heard from the Lakota, the indigenous perspective would be that generosity may be more fitting. The reason is that the word 'generosity' is a verb-based language, as indigenous languages are - it's about action and movement - it is about how we *practise love*. For the Lakota, the highest expression of courage is an act of generosity. Most indigenous languages have no word for love. By not having the word, they tend to focus more on acts of generosity, of hearing the song of a bird, learning from the patience of an ant or feeling a cool breeze on a hot day. Rather than trying to give it a label, just experiencing the sense of reciprocity, of caring and of respecting the interconnectedness of all.

We heard the story of the 'Trail of Tears' when the Cherokee were forced on a march out of their homelands. It was a horrific journey of over 5,000 miles and nearly a quarter of the Cherokee population died. We were told of the lyrics of the lullaby that the Cherokee mothers would sing to their children each night: *"Did you see my child, the beautiful animals in the clouds? Just when we went? ... Did you see the grasses and the prairie dancing? Dancing in the wind? Did you see the beautiful colours of the trout in the brook when we crossed it? Did you feel its cool water? Did you hear the music of the mockingbird?"*

There are many fears, and each person will have their own unique way of investigating or helping others to investigate the source of behaviours that are not loving, which may come from early childhood trauma. However, **it was put forward that it's in our DNA to be loving creatures without fear, whereas our current culture is based on fear.** 'The dominant world view' has prioritised competition over co-operation and self-centeredness, over interconnectedness.

Research into the brain and psychology shows that care and compassion become inhibited when there is fear – it is almost an evolutionary biological imprinting. Trauma can leave a chemical mark on a person's genes, which can then be passed down to future generations. This mark doesn't cause a genetic mutation, but it does alter the mechanism by which the gene is expressed. This alteration is not genetic but *epigenetic*.

Therefore it is useful to focus not only on individual fears but also on collective trauma. In this sense, we are genuinely walking the experience of our ancestors and so we are far more than just our lived experience. One participant, being half German and half French spoke of the layers and layers and layers of trauma in us. **Trauma is not just 'in your head', it leaves a real, physical imprint on your body, jarring your memory processes and changing**

your brain. By disconnecting from the body and our emotions, we go into the head, we become super-intellectual and think that we control the world, because we are afraid of the emotions that would come up, if we allow ourselves to feel this. And eventually, we don't even feel the fear anymore, which is even more dangerous.

Fear is all about low-vibrational energy. To get out of the fear is to learn to get up to the vibrational energy of the heart, where we have love, compassion and thankfulness. By practising breathing and meditating with thankfulness and love in our hearts, it completely changes the way we feel and how we live. We are energy. We each have an internal compass that can navigate us through these very, very challenging and sometimes life-threatening situations. Where is there safety? My compass tells me: where there is uplifting energy and the potential to share, so that we uplift each other, instead of being afraid and stagnant. Studies in the science of communication also show that, if you communicate something like climate change in a way that brings out fear, it isn't motivating. Either people don't act and try to ignore it, or they become hopeless. It is necessary to create a safe space where unpleasant feelings can be looked at and released but it also needs uplifting energy. Being part of a community that I trust, for example, increases hope that together we can make a change. It's an expression of love to draw people's attention to something uplifting.

Whether considering individualised fear or the collective trauma pattern of whole nations, individual and collective forgiveness will be necessary to free us from the layers of shame and guilt. For many, during the pandemic, is the first time they are feeling the fear. It was suggested that love is the best cure - being able to talk openly about collective trauma in a collective way in caring, nurturing and loving environments.

One participant recounted a visit from indigenous elders. When asked why they would want to visit him, a politician, the response was: ***“Well, our people suffered a very great deal from your ancestors. And we've come to the conclusion that one of the reasons we remain in difficulties is because we have not forgiven your ancestors for what they did to us.”*** There's a wisdom there of how love has to work in the world.

Being spiritual and dealing with fear must not take us away from the practical reality of the world we live in today. It is important to acknowledge that there is a side of humanity that is loving and caring and another side of humanity that gets pleasure out of making other people miserable. This brings another perspective that sometimes if you love enough, you will fear more. **You have got to differentiate between fear of something which is a problem in your internal world and fear of something which is a problem in your external**

world. Not to be afraid of war would be mad, not to be afraid of the consequences of the pandemic or climate change would not be loving; it would be failing to address the reality. That is very different from somebody who is living a life of anxiety in general. **In facing the reality of the world, I may be afraid of bad things happening to my children if they are in a difficult situation; it may not be so reasonable to fear bad things happening to them if they're not in a difficult situation.**

"Relaxation and yoga won't be very much use to you if somebody says there's a bomb - get out! You need to just be anxious and get out. And you can relax afterwards. So I think we need to be careful that, in our adherence to one very important set of understandings and principles, we don't ignore the fact that there's a wholly other, an opposite set of understandings and principles that also need to be attended to."

We all have a choice. It is about honouring my own choice and that of other people. Every single moment is a moment of choice. Perhaps, if we all hold the complementary energy of the possibility of light and dark, we can move the compass towards the light.

Finally a note about the term 'alchemy'. It's not about the motivation to be better or to have a position or to gain material wealth. **It's about love, compassion and forgiveness in the motivation. This is the energy that creates a new paradigm.**

We keep connecting in silence. Join us!



Fridays for Silence - has become our weekly spiritual practice of just connecting in real-time online without agendas, plans and work to do. We just sit in silence in the presence of each other for 15 minutes with a few words of reflection in the beginning. It has been very successful and supports the

foundation of the SoH Forum from inside-out. It started last year and the group is growing. [READ MORE](#)

A Moment of Silence - Meditation & Inspiration for the weekend - a 'Fridays for Silence' in Icelandic, 15 minutes every Saturday in collaboration with Brahma Kumaris Iceland. If you know Icelandic and have Facebook: [JOIN THE EVENT](#)

New book

SITTING BULL'S WORDS for a world in crisis

by Wahinkpe Topa (Four Arrows) aka Donald Trent Jacobs

Moving back into the future, Four Arrows uses Sitting Bull's words to begin a transformative journey for the reader on behalf of future generations. Using the meta-cognitive dehypnotizing strategy he calls the "CAT-FAWN Connection," Four Arrows combines scientific information, clinical knowledge and Indigenous wisdom.

[READ MORE](#)



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