

A Vision

Are humans capable of creating a flourishing Earth: a global community in which all people can flourish in a flourishing natural environment?

We may endlessly dispute different versions of flourishing – which may be a good thing. But too often discussions of flourishing omit large parts of our nature. They are simply passed over as if they didn't exist. It is not unreasonable to say that complete flourishing for humans includes wisdom, and that wisdom cannot exist without self-knowledge. Does self-knowledge include knowing that “Nothing human is alien to me”? Does it include knowing that we create ourselves, and our world, by our thoughts? Recognizing that the body is a transient, and minor aspect of our complete self?



Does self-knowledge include knowing that “Nothing human is alien to me”? Does it include knowing that we create ourselves, and our world, by our thoughts? Recognizing that the body is a transient, and minor aspect of our complete self?

What is self-knowledge? Perhaps our complete self consists of the entire network of mutual influences of which the body is one result. If this is true, then while the body indeed dies, the body is only a part of who we are. We – you – are a multidimensional network of relations, awareness, energy, information, and matter. You are most definitely *not* an individual organism separate from whatever is not confined to the body.

The great twentieth century philosopher-mathematician Alfred North Whitehead wrote that The misconception which has haunted philosophic literature throughout the centuries is the notion of independent existence. There is no such mode of existence. Every entity is only to be understood in terms of the way in which it is interwoven with the rest of the universe.¹

Does self-knowledge rise to the level of wisdom if we share this misconception? If we never seriously ask ourselves whether the organism and its individual identity is all we are?

Albert Einstein wrote that

A human being is part of a whole, called by us the Universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison.²

And in a sermon given four days before his assassination, Martin Luther King, Jr., said We are tied together in a single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, and whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are all you are supposed to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.³

¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Essays in Science and Philosophy*. New York: Rider and Company, 1948. p. 64.

² Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*. Trans. by Sonja Bargmann, New York: Crown Publishers, 1954, p. 203.

³ Martin Luther King, Jr., sermon delivered March 31, 1968, in *A Testament of Hope*, New York: HarperCollins, 1991, p. 269.

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If this sort of self-knowledge does not form the core of our identity, are we wise?

To know ourselves, it is necessary to perceive how we create our world through consciousness, selecting certain aspects of the universe to attend to, and ignoring the rest. Our world becomes bounded by the small part we are aware of, and we call this fragment reality. We do not seriously include the unknown part, although we may pay lip service to it.

From this mind-created realm, over a period of millennia, the material world has arisen: the realm of the body and its external senses, the realm of separation, fear and desire, the realm of what we call birth and death.

To flourish fully, it is important to become aware of actual reality beyond the mind-created portion. That requires perceiving the world beyond concepts, without compulsive inner speech, roiling emotions, and fantasies born of the material body. It requires waking up from inattentive, drowsy automatism. Finally, it requires turning the eye of awareness within, to that which is currently unconscious. To primary awareness. To do this the mind must be quiet, still, and aware.

In the past two centuries, humans have revolutionized their exterior world. The time has come for them to revolutionize their inner world.

It should be a possibility for every human to flourish, in his own unique way. In order to know what her or his unique way of flourishing is, each human has to “know him- or herself”. Self-knowledge includes the ability to recognize how we are manipulated from external sources, as well as knowing our own motivations, and the ways in which our complete being goes beyond the boundaries of the organism. Gaining this level of self-knowledge requires time and education – particularly because the Self is not what it appears to be to the senses, to common sense reality, or to the consensus reality of global society.

In the past, this level of self-knowledge has not been necessary for survival. But in a world that is ever-more thoroughly intertwined as a single system, to the point of “interbeing”, in Thich Nhat Hanh’s term, human survival depends on learning the ways in which the so-called individual is thoroughly intertwined with this system. We have learned that we are not independent individuals even within our family or any close group: the behavior of any member changes the other members of the group, and the nature of the group itself. And that is only one small aspect of our larger being. Another example, of thousands: our coffee drinking negatively affects the survival of animals, insects, and plants. This is the network of mutuality.

It requires spending time for consciousness that is embodied to learn our complete identity and how to flourish fully as creatures existing in entwined interbeing with the world around us. It requires a great effort to learn the full extent of the inner world, and to perceive its messages.

This is a possibility only if a person is assured of his survival and security needs, such as food, shelter, and medical care. During the Period of Civilization, the great mass of the population were bound to the Earth, to the hard physical labor of producing adequate food for their society. Only a small part of the population could have the time and resources for education and development of their full potential.

In the Industrial Revolution this age-old limitation to human potential was removed, for the first time in human existence. Through technology, humans discovered how to produce enough surplus so that

Industrialization.... became a revolutionary force by solving the oldest problem of humanity: scarcity.

Maurv Klein, *The Flowering of the Third America*, 1993, p. 12.

every human could have the time and resources for discovering and developing his full potential.

Now the problem of distribution of those sufficient means must be resolved. Earth’s bounty is for all Earth’s children. It is unjust for a few to hold back those means, and thus hold back further maturation of the species for private benefit. If there are such things as oppression and injustice, then to prevent humans from their full development, when there is no justification for doing so, is oppression and injustice.

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Those who wield power have a responsibility for their use of that power that not even Ignorance can remove. Nor can ignorance of the unforeseen consequences of our actions negate the ineluctable karma of their results. Actions have consequences, and those with the power to act in ways that affect the well-being of other creatures are responsible for the consequences of their actions.

In any case, hundreds of millions of people already do have their survival and security needs met to an extent that allows them to attain their full potential and self-knowledge. Here is a simple, although difficult, way to begin this journey:

A quiet, attentive mind is essential for perceiving ourselves and the world without the distortion caused by turning experience into conceptualizations and thought. With a quiet, attentive mind, look within and find the place where proto-thought appears: perceptions, feelings, images, insights and intuitions. The primary messages of awareness, which are without words, whose source is not the practical, everyday, material world. Practice direct, unmediated, intuitive perception. Thought comes after awareness.

The zone game

A way to quiet the mind in 20 words: Take one breath that is thought-free. It doesn't have to be perfect, just good enough. Then continue, observing what appears.

The first stage of mastering this practice is to unclutter the mind of intrusive thoughts. The second stage is to tune in to what appears in an uncluttered mind. This form of mental training can be practiced as a game, or a sports activity.

During the first stage of practice, it may be helpful to count the number of thoughts that occur in a meditation session, or game. A game can be of any length from a single breath to several hours. Fifteen minutes may be a good length to begin with.

A way to quiet the mind: Take one breath that is thought-free. It doesn't have to be perfect, just good enough. Then continue, observing what appears.

There are a variety of ways to count the number of thoughts. One that worked well for me was to use a set of prayer beads and advance one with every thought. Or, you can count up to one hundred on your fingers. At the end of each game, I recorded the number of thoughts that appeared as I sat trying to keep the mind free of thought. Keeping score made meditation a game, like golf, and motivated me to improve ability to focus and concentrate.

In addition to recording the score, you can make a note on the quality of the meditation, and the challenges, mistakes you made, and things learned during the game. Keeping score is helpful in increasing motivation as you try to improve your ability to quiet the mind. It also provides accountability: by having to score a point for every thought, you are forced to pay closer attention to what was going on in the mind, and not allow yourself to slip insensibly into unmonitored drifting daydream, or say to yourself "Well, *this* thought is okay."

You are changing the default mental mode, from generally not paying attention to what the mind is doing, to becoming attentive to what it is doing at all times, and reminding it to be present always, free from intrusive thought. The zone game is practice in learning to concentrate and remain focused for a long time. The focus is on a particular Spot: the spot, or feeling, between where direct, unmediated awareness, and discursive thought occurs. Discursive thought is mental activity that "goes somewhere" – that has a beginning and continues. Direct, unmediated awareness is intuitive: it is a knowing that appears all at once.

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Union (or *yoga*) is restraining the thought-streams natural to the mind: *Yogas chitta vritti nirodha*. “Yoga is the stilling of the mind until it rests in a state of total and utter tranquility, so that one experiences life as it is: as Reality.”⁴

I think it can be said that the essential point of all the great spiritual disciplines that the world religions have evolved is the letting go of thoughts.⁵

Not to be able to stop thinking is a dreadful affliction, but we don’t realize this because almost everybody is suffering from it, so it is considered normal. This incessant mental noise prevents you from finding that realm of inner stillness that is inseparable from Being. It also creates a false mind-made self that casts a shadow of fear and suffering.⁶

To become a complete human being it is as necessary to control the weak and unsteady mind, to find freedom from the cage of compulsive thought, as it is to learn symbolic speech and to walk upright. And this mental ability is as superior to talking and walking as it is more difficult to accomplish.

Our work is not done until we know the wellspring of thought and decipher the symbolic messages from this proto-thought realm – including those from the world of dreams. The language of primary awareness and its messages. This requires training a high level of empathy – and that the society actively values empathy and the quality of relationships.

All things are communicating. Our work is not done until we learn the languages of all things, and their messages.

The world of material possessions and pleasures is no more than the beginning, the first fruits of an awakening mind. There is so much more, treasure that cannot be bought. Humans are still just waking up. We are still at the threshold of true humanity, of becoming *Homo sapiens*.

Awareness is our birthright, free from manipulation from without or from within. Awareness well-

***We are all that has influenced us and all that we influence.
We love our neighbor as our self because our neighbor is our self.***

trained, reaching the same level of skill as any Olympic athlete. Or is it easy to become a truly human being – a wise human? Not all of us can be Olympic athletes. But to flourish fully, all humans can go beyond the prison of thought to perceive the world directly and intuitively. Then thought can be used for its valuable, but quite limited proper purposes of making distinctions, operating with them, communicating those aspects of the universe that we have abstracted from the whole, and using them to create a flourishing Earth..

Wisdom is to know one’s self. To know the complete Self is to perceive that the individual self, limited to the organism, is a fragment, a fictional abstraction useful for some purposes. *Yo soy yo y mis circunstancias*: I am the organism plus my context. We love our neighbor as our self because our neighbor is our self. We are our awareness – and also all that influences us of which we are not aware. From the Beginning, the cosmos has toiled to increase awareness. Now it is time for humans to pay the debt we owe for the miracle of life and self-awareness, by flourishing as a member of a flourishing world system that is our true self.



– Richard Hawley Trowbridge, PhD
Editor, *The Flourishing Earth*
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⁴ Aimee Hughes | August 21, 2019, “Yogas Chitta Vritti Nirodha: Patanjali’s Definition of Yoga, Explained”, <<https://www.yogapedia.com/2/8458/meditation/silence/yogas-chitta-vritti-nirodha>>

⁵ Thomas Keating. 2002. *Open Mind, Open Heart*. In Foundations for Centering Prayer and the Christian Contemplative Life. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group. [Originally published 1986], p. 76.

⁶ Eckhart Tolle. 2004. *The Power of Now*. Vancouver, B.C., Canada: Namaste Publishing, and Novato, CA.: New World Library, [originally published 1999], pp. 14-15.