

CONSCIOUS CONNECTIONS:
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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CONSCIOUS CONNECTIONS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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AbstractCONSCIOUS CONNECTIONS:
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Human beings, traditionally, lived connected to the environment; however, a historically recent change in perspective caused our species to dominate and pillage our planet and resources without consideration of the long-term effects. This change in worldview and behavior, exacerbated by technology, has been devastating to the planet and threatening to human existence. Drawing from Buddhist and shamanistic practices and philosophies, this project proposes a Conscious Connections Model involving a dynamic and cyclical process, through which conscious connection is advanced to respond to modern dysfunctions. The cycle includes the following elements: consciousness, perspective, behavior, and the environment. Awakened consciousness through study of self and mind allows human beings to connect with the energy of life experience, leading to reconnection to a cooperative perspective that changes behavior from destructive to supportive, and, in turn, creating a reconnection with the environment.

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Introduction: Conscious Connections: Past, Present, and Future

Currently, the world is facing a crisis of climate so dire the life on the planet Earth is disappearing at an unprecedented rate of “10,000 times of that...before humans” (Adams, 2006, p.114). While various factors contribute to this dilemma, the greatest impact has been from the present day unsustainability of human behavior. Many have focused on altering this type of conduct through education for change; however, educating the masses has been largely unsuccessful, perhaps, because the message has left individuals with a sense of shame instead of the empowerment, which is required to take on a new way of being. Unsustainable behaviors, such as overconsumption, pollution, deforestation and others, persist most likely because the true source of the crisis lies beyond the outward expression of behavior and is found within the source of thought itself (Rao, 2002). Ultimately, the pervasive imbalance found throughout issues of climate and society fundamentally mirrors the growing fragmentation within the mechanisms of self that generate one’s perspective on life. Due to the power of perspective to shape and color the way the processes of the world occur, the expression of collective behavior can be seen as a representation of an individual’s inner system of self, and, as modernity has distanced human beings from the natural world, a sense of separation of the individual from the interconnected nature of life has occurred for many. As such, in order to transcend the barriers within perception that limit and define the human way of being, a reconnection with pre-historic ways humans lived in relation to the world must be made in human consciousness and the profound sense of awareness and respect they possessed must be re-ignited. Toward that reawakening of human consciousness to the interconnection of all life, this paper examines the perspectives of

ancient Buddhist and Shamanic healers, and their potential to inform dominant Western cultural norms in the realization of a sustainable society.

Modern Day Conditions

Presently, human beings are living within a time on Earth vastly different from that experienced by their ancestors. Yet, the primary difference does not lie in a change of the fundamental elements of life, instead it resides within the ways human perspective has altered in relation to life and the natural world. Instead of living as a part of the Earth, human civilization is functioning as though it is a separate entity, meant to hold power over a lifeless, external realm (Adams, 2006). As such, this way of thinking has resulted in societies that “burn rainforests and fossil fuels, dump toxic wastes into the air, soil, sea, and use chemicals that devour our planet’s protective ozone shield” (Macy & Brown, 1998, p. 15). Ultimately, acts such as these reflect dangerously unsustainable threats to the Earth and the survival of human beings; yet, they persist because, in the realm of growth and industry, such behavior is perceived as progress towards greater goods and innovations, rather than the greater good. As this guise continues to drive behavior, the Earth is mercilessly stripped of its resources and “treated as both supply house and sewer. The planet’s body is not only dug up and turned into goods to sell; it is also a “sink” for the poisonous by-products of our industries” (Macy & Brown, 1998, p. 16). As a result of this action, the fundamental integrity of the Earth is being compromised in a way that is steadily losing the ability to sustain life, and presently, the planet is witnessing destruction in magnitudes never before experienced. Adams (2006) explained, when human beings impoverish the world in which they live, they are equally diminishing their

own life, and, “with over 30 of our kindred species being killed off every day” (p.112), the rate at which life is being compromised simply cannot continue.

The Environment

While human beings are becoming increasingly aware of the environmental threat to their survival, there is also a need to recognize the significance of the land itself and the importance of protecting the wisdom and integrity inherent within it. While knowledge of the Earth’s sentience was once apparent to human beings in ancient and indigenous cultures, today entire societies have become blind to this perspective. Only now, through advancing technology, are people returning to explore the possibility that non-human organisms contain something greater than basic awareness and motor skills. In addition to the many ways human beings are connected to the natural world for survival, the reasons for protecting the vitality of the Earth stretch far beyond the implications it holds for human life. Ultimately, this is because the realm of non-human life is just as dynamic and fundamentally important to the world as humans hold themselves to be. The capability of flora and fauna to participate in the balance of our interconnected world, and research is demonstrating non-human life to be “living, breathing, communicating creatures, endowed with personality and the attributes of a soul. It is only we, in our blindness, who have insisted on considering them automata” (Tompkins & Christopher, 1973, p .xiv). As such, it is from this understanding that new ground can be forged in the way human beings allow themselves to relate to other entities on the Earth, including the Earth itself. As Macy and Brown (1998) elucidated, when the chemical equilibriums of the atmosphere were studied, it was discovered that each component was, “maintained within the narrow limits necessary for life, by self-regulating processes. These are the hallmark

of a living system” (p. 44). In addition, it is increasingly being shown that this green machinery, much like that of human biology, is, “incredibly intertwined with all of life, down to the cellular level they maintain awareness, memory, and volition” (Tompkins & Christopher, 1973, p. 11). As a result of this awareness, there is a new realm to consider in which a “cellular consciousness” (p. 11) may be common to all life and play a factor in a global, unified consciousness including all plant, animal, and human life.

As such, the planet itself ultimately represents a living being that dynamically interacts with and supports all other life that exists within its domain. Humans are beginning to recognize that they cannot hold onto the belief that the Earth is “a dead rock we live upon, [rather] the Earth is a living process in which we participate” (Macy & Brown, 1998, p. 44). Therefore, when we recognize the planet is no longer the backdrop for life, but a critically important and interrelated aspect of it, an entirely new perspective can develop in which individuals have a new way of relating to the surrounding world. Subsequently, it is human interdependence with all life on Earth that has profound implications for the way resulting behaviors affect the wellbeing of the system as a whole. The harm human beings are inflicting upon the planet by maintaining this unsustainable perspective may be far greater than ever imagined. For, “if the flora, plants and trees surrounding us, are so interconnected that they are sensitive to the death of even the smallest bacteria, then we can only imagine the amount of suffering we are causing” (p. 10) when we are destroying entire organisms, their habitats, and the whole Earth. Thusly, the implications of this realization are significantly important to consider because they hold the potential to restructure the way individuals relate to their behavior and the way it impacts the world around them. Resulting from this, people have access to begin

reconnecting to the powerful wisdom and clarity found within expanded awareness, an awareness once present in nearly all human action. Therefore, it is within this consideration that, “Earth, as a home for life, is a being that we can both harm and help to heal”(p.44), the outcome ultimately lies in the conscious human choice as to which perspective we collectively accept.

Technology

At the dawn of human history, mankind exuded an awareness of the natural world that reflected the presence of nature within the very building blocks of human existence (Conttrel, 2008). Living in harmony with plants, animals, and systems of the Earth was an inescapable element of survival, and sensitive states of awareness were cultivated in response to an uncertain world. As the tools of awareness developed, they grew beyond their reactionary beginnings and into a new sense of understanding and wisdom about the environment of life (Shojai, 2014). As understanding of the world grew, and challenges of living called upon the creation of external tools and methods for support, technology began to develop and provide human beings with new ways to live in relation to the environment. Ultimately, it was the discovery of fire that catapulted the evolution of human beings to a new stratosphere of interaction with the world (Shojai, 2014). With the ability to cook food, harness heat, light, and alter materials into forms more usable by humans, an entirely new realm of possibility was revealed in which humans began to take control over the elements that affected them. As one of the most profound and perspective altering discoveries, a progression of technological development was set in motion that has affected human life in almost every way imaginable. This collaboration of both nature and technology has enabled human beings to reach far beyond the

limitations of their physical being to create a world rich in objective complexity; however, as innovation has continued to expand, so has the distance between the human experience and its roots within the natural world. Consequently, as individuals continue to adapt to a technological world at the expense of the natural systems that support them, the corresponding behaviors and cultural norms of society at large begin to threaten the balance of the natural world on a much larger scale.

Throughout the technical revolution, no culture has embraced the transition from nature to nurture as deeply as Western society. As “the largest and most technologically powerful economy in the world” (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015), the United States has yielded immense power over the progression of society, as well as the individual and collective perception of its participants throughout the world. Essentially the conjoined effects of both modern science and industrial growth, Western society generates greater innovations that further separate humans from the world in which they live. The resulting scope of human ability has been extended so significantly that individuals have been physically and emotionally removed from the natural world. Consequently, an entirely new perspective of life has been cultivated in the process, which has developed into an all-consuming model of the universe that has altered a once organic and holistic perspective into a purely analytic and mechanical one (Macy & Brown, 1998), with the Earth, if not the Universe being interpreted as existing solely for the benefit of mankind. Essentially, as Watkins and Shulman (2008) described, the separation that has manifested from the rise of industrialism and secularism in the West has contributed to a rapid replacement of values associated with being, to those associated with having. The authors suggest that such values have ultimately plunged society into endless violence, war, and

genocide, in order to protect the disillusioned concepts of necessity and identity that often accompany this orientation towards having. As such, due to the objective orientation of these values, and their growing presence within individual's genesis of identity, the collective response to living has become dominated by things instead of thoughts or experience gained with interconnection.

Consequently, as Western society has developed within the throws of increasing technological associations, the collective denial of subjective reality has resulted in silent symptoms of emptiness that "prompt addictive consumption [and] churn a mighty global industrial machine in an attempt to forge a sense of fulfillment" (Watkins & Shulman, 2008, p. 71). For those who profit most from this way of being, there is an insistent need to maintain these values, and for those who remain blind to the source of their own suffering, there is a persistent need to continue pursuing the fulfillment of having more and consuming more, which they long for to fill the emptiness. As a means of maintaining this reality, Western industries organize themselves in a way that progressively removes individuals "from the production of the goods they accumulate, the food they consume, and the communities in which they live" (Macy & Brown, 1998, p. 50). Subsequently, the systems that produce the technology and goods of modern day society are fueled by a perspective all their own, in which the element of profit is held as more important to the process of innovation than the outcome of its creation. When one holds no concept of the environmental cost of the goods they command and the actions they take, it breeds a lack of care and absence of responsibility that, paired with a diminished awareness, has resulted in an abusive relationship between human beings and the natural world. Furthermore, due to the power and influence of such systems to

influence society, individuals can easily become trapped within the imbalanced and unsustainable values that appear as a fixed reality in which no other options for living are available. As such, it is from the industrial perspective of profit that issues of the technological world appear as unavoidable costs of the innovative life human beings desire. Therefore, while it may seem logical to ascribe accusations to the technological mechanisms that have seemingly facilitated the human transition away from nature, it may be that technology itself is not an issue or enemy of the natural world but instead the way in which it is perceived, related to, and utilized within modern society.

Perspective

Thusly, the element of human perspective is one of the most fundamentally important aspects to explore regarding the issue of environmental and social sustainability. Defined as “point of view; [or] A particular attitude towards or way of regarding something” (Perspective, 2015), the power of perspective colors and shapes how the entire world occurs for each and every individual. As meaning making machines, human beings are constantly ascribing events with various judgments and emotions that give rise to corresponding behaviors. Endowed with a sensory laden form, human beings are inevitably caught in processing, understanding, and classifying the surrounding world. As a result, there is a vast array of signals that each individual must receive, assess, and act upon in order to survive (Rao, 2002). Because these components are so numerous, a true objective state of life cannot possibly be experienced resulting in each individual collecting slightly different interpretations of the same visible reality. As such, the perceived experience of each human being is not a true depiction of an objective world, as much as it is an amalgamation of selected components and the set of beliefs or

“cosmologies” (Huguelit, 2012, p. 20) it creates. It is in this sense that such worldviews are ultimately “a map of reality, or realities, relative to a culture or an individual” (p. 20). These maps serve to process the immense detail of life, reducing it to a simplified representation that creates greater understanding and manageability. As cultures, families, and social groups develop, certain expressions of these maps are formed and shared among its members. Effectively, this predisposes each individual within the assemblage an inherited cosmology and set of constraints that influence how the world occurs for that person (p. 20). As Huguelit (2012) explained, it is through the incremental formation of reality in which various factors are incorporated into “a scale of values and beliefs that, in turn, influences every person’s way of perceiving the world, understanding it, and acting within it” (p. 20). Every individual, as part of the experience of being human, possesses a lens of perspective that filters his or her experience of life.

Due to the prevalent nature of one’s perspective to influence and direct one’s opinions, viewpoints, and actions, I must also be forthright in exploring my own perspective in writing this paper. Living within a perception predisposed by Western culture and White heritage, I experience the environmental crisis from within the very systems that have perpetuated its existence, and, with a significant separation from the natural world, my position and understanding of this predicament endure as largely conceptual. As a result, I remain shrouded by the conditions of my culture and rely a great deal upon technology such as modern medicine, motor vehicles, and material possessions, which, ultimately, represent elements of modernity without which I do not wish to live. However, despite the perspective these elements have generated for me, they have not been influential enough to blind me entirely from the myriad of consequences

that have been generated and are clearly griping society and the Earth as a whole. Ultimately, it can be seen that in the midst of modern exuberance, there is a significant gap within the individual's ability to examine the systems that fuel the ease of technological life and the resulting breakdowns, which currently threaten the continued existence of all life, including human beings themselves. While the technical realm of innovation and obsessive progress has constructed a world of greater access and ease, from which I regularly benefit, it has become clear the current paradigm that drives this innovation has resulted in the environmental degradation that underlies the ecological crisis of today and undermines all of life.

As such, in pondering a resolution to these issues, I have inquired into the history of human beings and the ways in which individuals once lived in harmony with the land, long before the maps of modernity were generated. Throughout this investigation, I have fundamentally expanded my awareness of the natural world and the true symbiotic nature of life. Despite the mostly conceptual nature of this exploration, it has inspired a passion to grow this experience and achieve deeper levels of awareness in relation to the planet, as well as myself. It is in this sense that I seek a means of greater connection to the natural world in a way that can be embodied and serve to reorient the perspectives that produce action in the world. Due to my inherently Westernized perception and growing natural awareness, I argue for an integrated partnership between modernity and the wisdom of ancestral methodologies. In light of the various contributions both realms have made to the progression of human ability, it is fitting to utilize the very principle of life itself and integrate the knowledge present within each domain. Ultimately, it is through a model of integrative action that currently holds conceptual ideologies of the natural

world, I can become better defined in experience and embodied within my own behavior. Perhaps, in my living an expressing that integration, the perspective of society can become integrated as well.

Accordingly, the possibility of redefining modernity in light of sustainable action arises from the understanding that perspective has a great deal of influence over one's performance and action in the world. As Robbins (2013) explained, "identity, which emerges from [self] ascriptions, is directly related to motivation and directs behavior" (p.173). Thusly, perspective can be understood as the lens through which the world is filtered into meaning and reason, and where conscious energy is molded into the form it takes when expressed outwardly into the world. In addition to the powerful ways perception influences subjective considerations and corresponding actions one takes in life, there is also a great deal of influence such orientation holds on the objective state of the world.

Through conducting research on the structure of water and the development of ice crystals, Emoto (2004) discovered evidence of a new pinnacle of cognitive possibility. When the water sample being observed was exposed to positive words, sounds, and intentions, beautifully intricate designs appeared; however, when exposed to negative expressions of the same events, dark and misshapen formations began to develop, instead. Such results support a conclusion that, with the human form primarily existing as water, "the mind has a direct impact on the condition of the body" (p. xvi). With this understanding of conscious perception, it is more clear how human consciousness and the perspective we hold possesses a significant ability to influence the surrounding world, not only in a subjective and figurative manner, but in a concrete and objective sense as well.

As such, the chemicals within the human body, which carry the essence of that person, including beliefs held, there is power to fundamentally effect the physical form which, in turn, provides a basis on which decisions are made, philosophies are formed, and, ultimately, action is brought into the world. It is in this way that Huguelit (2012) boldly stated, “observation is, in and of itself, a form of creation” (p. 17), and, as a result, the power inherent within the maps generated from this observation hold the ability to create the surrounding world in their image.

Subsequently, while the present orientation of human perspective is currently permeating the environmental crisis, this expression of unsustainability is not inherent to the nature of perspective, itself. Instead, it is when a cosmology becomes “a substitute for reality, without being confirmed by personal experience, it turns into blind belief and dogma” (Huguelit, 2012, p. 21). Therefore, such limited modes of thinking only serve to reinforce habitual behaviors that can quickly become outdated and ineffective.

Throughout Western culture, the Christian cosmology represents a significant example of the power within these systems of belief. This religious perspective, adopted by over 2 billion people throughout world—roughly 33% of the world population in 2010 (Pew Research Center, 2011)—has served as a placeholder for personal experience throughout history. While this ideology has provided guidance in many ways, when adopted too rigorously, it has cost many their ability to remain open minded, adaptive, and critical examiners of life (Huguelit, 2012, p. 21). One such belief held by many Christians is that at the beginning of human history, God gave the Earth to humans. Ultimately, however, this reality exists in the other two major religious—Islam and Judaism, both of which include what Christians call the first chapter of the Old Testament

in their religions, as well. In the chapter of Genesis, humans were identified as the final creation of God, and the world was their inheritance to dominate. Scientific paradigms, born out of the Western Christian culture, carry this same concept of human domination, despite the fact that these paradigms see themselves as separate from religious perspectives. Essentially, all realms that have supported the human exploration and understanding of life have played a role in defining individual's experience and resulting perspective of the world. As such, that which can revive global sustainability lies within the ability to live beyond the scripts provided by reductive maps of reality and within a perspective defined by one's own discovery of life. It is in this way that individuals may recapture a well-balanced perspective of life in which they are present to the inherent interrelatedness between themselves and the complex ecosystem of life. Thusly, the main question is not whether a given map is more correct or true than another, but what is important is whether it is useful within present day society (p. 22). In light of the current social and environmental challenges that face the world, human beings must cultivate the self-reflection necessary to examine current ways of being and identify if the modern day paradigm of materialism is truly the most effective way to live in a world dominated by both technology and nature.

Fragmentation

Today, as behaviors throughout the world continuously compromise the integrity of the Earth, it is highly likely the influential power of perspective is at the source of the environmental crisis and, as a result, there is a growing need to reexamine the present ways of being that shape expression of this destructive energy. As Adams (2006) stated, "the primary responsibility for this catastrophe lies within human psychology, culture,

values, and lifestyles” (p. 113), and, as a result, “the most dangerous idea in the world is that humans are separate from the rest of nature. The greatest enormities against the Earth, stem from such delusions” (p. 117). As such, human beings ultimately exist as captivated by these views, values, and ways of being. The insatiable behavior that fuels systems of consumption has become such a fundamental part of both the individual and collective perspective that it has become similar to the air we breathe, in that little reflective thought is given to its cause or reason.

The extent of the separation between human experience and the natural world has resulted in a disconnection and fragmentation of self that has permeated individuals, societies, and the world. In the realm of isolated material objectivity, one does not experience the freedom to move between the interrelated spheres of life and, as a result, the full range of human needs cannot successfully be met. As Watkins and Shulman (2008) explained, human beings long to have the world flow through them like the air they breathe and are essentially hungry for something to fulfill the deeper need of self and being. Blindly aware of this necessity, humans grope the land for an answer, but the consumption of consumer goods merely baits this lust and only fleetingly satisfies. The transitory relief of physical consumption is insufficient in satisfying the deepest human needs of being that arise from an integrated, objective, and subjectively experienced rich life. As a result, when experience is constrained in this way, the boundaries of self essentially become fixed and unyielding to the world causing nature to become, “a domain to pass through on the way to where one is going; a resource to be used and not a landscape of potential relations” (p. 67). Thusly, as long as individuals continue to relate

to the world in this way, there remains little opportunity to achieve a fulfilled existence or sustainable way of being.

Consequently, the violent destruction that is persisting within the natural world reflects a fundamental “cognitive dissonance between the reality of daily life on planet Earth and the array of beliefs, prejudices, and other relative truths that form our cosmologies” (Huguelit, 2012, p. 23). As such, while the presence of selective reductionism and formation of individualized cosmologies is important for the rapid decision making of survival behavior, these mechanisms of perception can also be dangerous when isolated from the process of mindful-awareness. Without considering the mechanisms behind ones’ created meaning, the true complexity at the foundation of any reduction is lost, and the deeply interconnected state of the world is no longer reflected by individuals understanding of the world. Thusly, as Huguelit (2012) revealed, “it is fundamental that in the process of this reduction it is kept in mind that the map is not the territory - the reduction does not represent a literal image of the truth” (p. 19). However, as these maps have continued to advance, and technology has been allowed to blur the lines between natural and artificial reality, connection to the underlying representations of nature becomes consistently more difficult to maintain. Furthermore, it is the failure to maintain awareness of this danger that allows this sense of separation to become more pronounced and severe over time. When compounded across societies, the collective impact of human perspective is vast and powerful enough to alter the systems from which it arises. It is in this sense that human beings have the power to alter the reality within which they operate; however, when trapped within a restricted paradigm of reality, the option for change remains distant and unattainable, and therefore, hopeless.

Ultimately, it is within this enveloping sense of fragmentation that human awareness has been limited in relation to the world and, thusly, to the self. As Adams (2006) explained, because the interchanges between self and nature represent what is most real, and because we are losing the interconnectedness between these vital aspects of life, ultimately, “we are losing our very self, losing nature’s being, and creating a void in lived reality” (p. 120). As such, human beings exist with a sense of existential emptiness that inevitably causes a pervasive experience of impoverishment in personal wellbeing and functionality. Fundamentally, human beings are unable to satisfy their needs due to the mechanistic perspective of modernity that fuels a persistent denial of the subjective, metaphysical realms of life. As an entire realm of experience remains un-integrated and unexplored, the very essence of nature and life remains painfully vacant from resulting experience and corresponding perspectives of reality. It is in this sense that Adams (2006) declared, “our ecologically destructive behavior is a violent symptom of a pervious (and ongoing) psycho-cultural destruction of our whole selves” (p. 121). As a result, the source of unsustainable modern day behaviors can be seen as occurring because of an underdeveloped map of human reality that has become rigid in its expression and outdated in its applicability. Correspondingly, as individuals continue to engender their sense of identity and perspective from this disintegrated foundation, it becomes “increasingly clear that our ecological catastrophe is interwoven with a profound crisis of human culture and consciousness.” (p. 118), and it is in this sense that human beings must look to these underlying systems of awareness in order to understand their purpose and take control of their function.

As society continues to reflect a loss of empathy, compassion, and mindfulness towards self and others, consciousness becomes an increasingly important component of experience that calls for a greater understanding of its role within the interconnected system of life. Ultimately, to achieve this comprehension, conscious processes must be viewed from a new perspective unrestrained by compartmentalized categorizations in which integration is recognized not only throughout consciousness itself, but also within a marriage of ancient wisdom—not constrained by a human dominance perspective—and modernity (Tucker & Williams, 1997) that unwittingly adopted this same dominance perspective. While the origins of the present day ecological crisis can be traced down through human behavior and the dominate perception driven paradigms that guide them, ultimately, consciousness is revealed as a fundamental piece of the experience that fuels perception and the behaviors that have effected the world on an immense scale. As such, White (2011) revealed that, at a more fundamental level, such unsustainable behaviors arise:

Out of the dominant Western consciousness that lacks empathetic connection and identification with nonhuman nature. Research suggests that an individual's sense of connectedness with nature significantly influences environmental concern and behavior. Ecological consciousness is a form of consciousness that is characterized by a psycho-spiritual connectedness with nature. (p. 41)

Consequently, because the source of behavior lies within a fundamental part of human nature, attempts to alter behavior through education for sustainable action have fallen short because, as Adams (2006) explained, “information rarely fosters transformation [when] it remains un-integrated” (p. 115). Thusly, in order for individuals to become truly engaged in action, there must be an embodiment of the ideals that contribute to the formation of a sustainable perspective. When one is fully engaged with and invested in

the information, there is a natural amalgamation of intent and action that drives the fundamental changes required to achieve a reorientation of behavior (Adams, 2006). It is in this way that humanity must achieve an initial paradigm shift in relating to and understanding consciousness in order to unlock the essential aspects of self that are required to begin systematically producing paradigm shifts within all other areas of life, including the current ideologies that have produced the ecological crisis faced today.

In light of the myriad of ways consciousness integrates not only human experience but also the experience of all living systems throughout the world, the interrelated nature of the universe is ultimately comprised of something unique beyond the individual state of its components. As such, the inimitable beauty of this approach relies on the byproduct of integration. As Macy & Brown (1998) explained, each system in the surrounding universe, from atom to galaxy, represents a complete whole that in many ways is not reducible to individual components. Thusly, the elusive answer to objective inquiries has remained unattainable because “the true source of the world’s distinctive nature and capacities derive from the interactive relationships between its parts” (p. 52). It is in this sense that such interplay between components generates synergistic and emergent properties that transform the reality of individualized fragments into new unified representation of reality. As Macy & Brown (1998) demonstrated, just as “the wetness of water could not be predicted from oxygen and hydrogen before they combine” (p. 55), the unique power of integration creates an entire new world of possibilities. Thusly, approaching life from a view of unity and integration supports a fundamentally different perspective of the world and, ultimately, one that is necessary to overcome the fragmented and destructive behaviors of modern society. Insights such as these into the

basic phenomena of existence have the potential to reorient human awareness and behavior because they reveal an ancient, innate truth about the state of all things. Discernments such as these are critical because they represent a fundamental and far-reaching influence that has the power to reveal new perspectives and change habitual, destructive behavior (Feldman, 2006). It is in this sense that both Buddhism and Shamanism represent the abstract wisdom and tangible embodiment through which insights such as these are made, cognitive tools are refined, and reconnection can be achieved to the expanded awareness that lies interwoven within the living systems of the natural world.

Conscious Connections

The Model

As modernity continues to evolve and create new ways for individuals to connect and relate to one another, human beings are sharing, liking, posting, chatting, and messaging more than ever. However, despite the quantity of these connections, there remains a persistent lack of quality in the communications due to the fundamental loss of awareness that has resulted from today's pervasive social fugue. Therefore, as humans continue to reach out to one another and attempt to fulfill themselves at the expense of the world around them, there is a desperate need to provide individuals with a clear and attainable pathway towards achieving their wants and needs in a mindful and sustainable way. Ultimately, to achieve this, there must be a greater presence of conscious awareness brought to the manifestation of present-day connections and, it is in this sense, the Conscious Connections Model has been developed. As such, there are two primary interests inherent within the model. The first is concerned with providing an intellectual

understanding of the ways in which consciousness and perception are fundamentally interwoven with all of life, including the planet itself as a living breathing system. With support from ancestral philosophies, this facilitates the creation of a new social narrative that provides the space for individuals to explore novel realms of perception and reorient their values to support new ways of being in life. The second aspect of this model focuses on a more tangible, environmentally applied way of healing the schism of modern day fragmentation. Within this approach, methodologies from both Buddhist and shamanistic traditions provide exercises of prioritizing perception in which an individual may go about altering habitual behaviors and achieve new motivations for action that stand to create more sustainable individuals, communities, and societies.

Thusly, in order to support this healing, each practice is infused with a component of grounding and one of growth. This balance provides the ability for one to connect with the grounding forces of the Earth as well as the expanded intelligence of the cosmos. Essentially, the aspect of grounding within this model reflects the preliminary work of centering oneself in the distinctions of the physical and metaphysical states through which a new realm of possibility for growth is achieved. This understanding reflects that only when a firm connection is established to oneself and the Earth, can one begin to reach beyond the constructs of those realms. Correspondingly, the component of growth within this model remains true to its standard dictionary definition as “the process of developing or maturing physically, mentally, or spiritually” (Growth, 2015). However, within this approach, the definition is expanded upon to reflect the full expansion of the individual in a physical and metaphysical sense, developing and exploring consciousness in a dynamic way that carries the person into new realms of awareness, connection, and

understanding. As such, the Conscious Connections Model works at a fundamental level to support the individual within a personal journey of self-discovery and spiritual evolution which, ultimately, is facilitated by reestablishing connection to the four vital elements of life including, consciousness, perception, behavior, and environment.

Furthermore, the model presented here is based on an integrative framework similar not only to the indigenous framework, but also on the complex human systems of which it aims to become a part. Therefore, the Conscious Connections Model, as with all elements of human perception, is primarily based on narrative. Ultimately, in a video, Reinsborough (2013) explained that narrative is a story or, perhaps an account of events that the speaker presents in a sequence of events that take place over time and space; or, it might be a fundamental structuring process for our minds to make meaning of some event that allows us to and relate to the world. Perception and narrative are intimately intertwined and give rise to the world in which human beings experience their existence. According to Reinsborough, as narrative animals, it is clear that literally, we create a construct of our social reality together through story telling, or narrative, which is how we understand who we are, how we expect the world to be, and what our place is in that constructed world. As a result, the need for models of change to function within this domain of description is paramount to the success they seek to achieve. From this framework, the Conscious Connections Model functions within both the narrative constructs of human experience and the underlying realm of conscious awareness. Ultimately, the integration inherent within this model facilitates the exploration of a new narrative in which the quest for consciousness unites both ancient and modern knowledge in a framework of holistic interconnection, integrity, and awareness that can serve as a

more sustainable lens through which to view the world—past, present, and future—and oneself. Subsequently, the model itself is intrinsically based on precepts of shamanistic and Buddhist wisdom and seeks to apply this understanding to modern day approaches of sustainability.

Shamanism

Shamanism can be broadly defined as a perspective that essentially functions within the realm of conscious connections. Considered “the pilot of the soul through the circuits of consciousness” (Huguelit, 2012, p. 18), traditional shamans embodied the very expression of broad and integrative awareness without which present-day human beings appear lost. Dating back tens of thousands of years or more, shamanism ultimately represents the earliest known form of spiritual practice and healing (Peters, 1989). Ultimately oriented to the exploration and understanding of consciousness, shamans of old, as well as practicing shamans of today, cultivate the power to expand their awareness and include all states of experience. Altered states of consciousness are common to the world of the shaman. While the broadened experience of subjective awareness orients the shaman towards an inclusive and integrated way of being, it has been found that altered states of consciousness themselves serve to objectively integrate information from the whole organism, whether that is the whole person or the whole universe. As Winkelman (2004) explained, this specifically involves transmitting information from the emotional and behavioral preverbal brain structures to the personal and cultural systems mediated by language and the frontal cortex. Ultimately, “these biological conditions provide a basis for experiences of enlightenment, a sense of connection and oneness, and personal integration” (p. 199). As such, the shaman is a master of life and the amalgamated

experience of it. Not only do shamans' ritual activities involve "fundamental structures of cognition and consciousness and representations of psyche, self, and other" (p. 194), they are strategically utilized within human experience to facilitate "integration, personal development, and healing" (p. 194). Ultimately, due to the power within the cognitive understanding and practiced spiritual wisdom shamans possess, both subjective and objective realities have the potential to become unified in their understanding and embodied in their expression.

In addition, viewing the world as a living organism, shamans relate to the land in a far more connected and respectful way, and, in viewing human beings as a dynamic and interrelated aspect of the world, shamans understand the importance of an individual's connection to nature. Accordingly, the spectrum of awareness held by the shaman is just as present to the surrounding world of flora and faunae as it is to human history. Just as the environment is comprised of integrated and interdependent systems of balance, so too are the indigenous cultures that understand them, and as Huguelit (2012) stated, "without nature, there is no shamanism, no life, no humanity" (p. 62). Thusly, while human beings have continued to distance themselves from this reality of life, the role of the shaman becomes increasingly important in guiding humanity towards the reconnection it must find in order to achieve embodiment of these ideals once more. It is in this sense that, ultimately, "shamans seek to reestablish the link that connects us to nature" (p. 61) and, as a result, the shamanistic tradition embodies what White (2011) identified as "eco-consciousness" (p. 42). Such a consciousness is ultimately defined as, "an awareness of the intimate, spiritual connection of the self with all of nature and a reverential recognition of the sacredness and sentience of life" (p. 42). As an important

foundational element to the paradigm of sustainability, this connected awareness is also at the very heart of shamanism itself. As such, shamanism offers a valuable perspective to the modern world and one this is forged from a collective consciousness of all things.

Furthermore, while human beings currently display patterns of unsustainable behavior reflective of their own self-degradation, shamanism reveals an account of human history beyond the effects of capitalism and modern scientific paradigms, in which human perception has experienced a monumental reorientation to the world. In the beginning, ancestral humans are believed to have lived their lives with a greater sense of spiritual receptivity and within an ultimate oneness to others and the natural world (Conttrell, 2008). During this time, a global unified consciousness was present throughout all beings, which remained intimately connected to the Earth. Ultimately, it was a loss of this connection that occurred around the time of the last ice age when ancestral man was in need of the guidance offered by the shaman (Conttrell, 2008). As much physically as emblematically, the frigid darkness of a long lasting ice age encroached upon the life spirit of Earth and the scope of human consciousness. Thusly, over time, this intrusion became a complete “compression of consciousness, a massive psychic contraction, causing this natural openness, innocence, and fluidity to freeze and shutdown” (p. 14). As much as the ice withered the life of plants and animals, it stunted a once expansive human consciousness closely tied to the rhythms of the natural world. Essentially with such an intimate connection, one source of energy could not fully survive without the other and when the energies of the Earth retreated, the “ancestral mind blacked out, becoming oblivious to its own source, blind to the very ground of its being, and estranged from its own eternal self” (p. 15). While nature’s resiliency

facilitated a successful return after the age of ice, human consciousness has yet to achieve this healing.

Today, the modern experience of solitude, independence, and separation is very much a legacy of the spiritual malnourishment and imprisonment of this age (Conttrell, 2008). The impact of losing connection to the natural world still remains within the collective human psyche and represents a catalyst for the individualized, competitive, and self-centered lifestyles of modern society (Conttrell, 2008). Thusly, human consciousness has become increasingly bound up within itself, casting shadows over the dormant primal understandings that connect humans to all other systems of the universe. Conttrell explained that over time, this has resulted in the loss of instinctual ability to access the unbounded universe of spiritual energies that used to pervade everyday life. As the natural rhythms of the planet began to recede from human awareness, and their messages faded away, once tangible elements of life transitioned into distant fantasies of gods and goddesses, angles, and demons (Conttrell, 2008). Through fragmentation such as this, individuals experience little connection or concern for their surroundings. Nothing is considered as interdependent; therefore, there is little obligation to treat it as such.

Effectively blinded and misguided by ancient traumas, the human psyche has recoiled to become like that of a child (Winkelman, 2014). Aware of a primordial need for connection and fulfillment, a source of satisfaction was and continues to be thoughtlessly and intently pursued. Yet, with little sense of relation to others, or even to the self, this pursuit can yield harmful and unintended results in which individuals can often be found as inhibitors of their own success and wellbeing (Winkelman, 2014). In this sense, humanity has remained oblivious to the structures of collective consciousness

and traumas, which continue to diminish functioning throughout modern day society. Thusly, it is through not only a traumatic disconnection from the collective energy of the universe, but also a collective amnesia that has produced a confused and misguided populous in the midst of a global environmental crisis (Metzner, 1999). It is in this sense the human psyche requires a powerful guide to cultivate the conditions necessary for a reconnection to the unified force of consciousness. Humanity, therefore, needs the shaman.

Fortunately, many indigenous cultures are already working towards a more sustainable future for themselves and the world. As one of the most vulnerable populations to climate change, indigenous people who live in rhythm with the land not only see the effects of this crisis more rapidly, but also, they feel their effects far more severely, as well (Martello, 2008). As modern society continues to encroach on the land, and the environmental consequences of technological industries suffocate the environment, indigenous cultures have adapted themselves to a new world in order to stop it. By making contact and partnering with change makers in the modern world, indigenous people have generated a presence for themselves in foundations, such as The Pachamama Alliance (n.d.) that published, *Bring Forth A Thriving, Just, and Sustainable World*; with meetings, as exemplified by Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, 2014, marches as supported by Indigenous Peoples, and universities that offer courses in Earth responsibility, such as Saybrook University, all of which are focused on bringing sustainable action and greater awareness to the planet. Ultimately, by reaching out to the rest of the world, indigenous people and shamanic healers are taking monumental action towards saving their wisdom and way of life. It is in this sense that modern society stands

not only to learn from the indigenous connection to the world, but also from the incredible adaptability and passion they embody within their actions. As indigenous cultures continue to reach out, it is clear their hope is to engage the collective consciousness of humanity in action for change. However, the extension of indigenous wisdom to the modern world metaphorically reaches only halfway across the gap between present day human beings and the Earth. Ultimately, the hand of modernity must also extend, with attentive receptivity, to generate the collaboration and partnership required to save the planet.

While the terms “shamanism” and “indigenous” are utilized to represent a specific way of life that includes a perspective that holds a deeper connection to the natural systems of the planet, it is important to remember the wide degree of variability still present within such cultural approaches. Ultimately, due to the various elements that affect each group of individuals, there is an inherent presence of certain environmental differences for which there must be an accounting. Essentially, this represents the true attentiveness indigenous people have for the individual life that fills the natural world. As such, due to the innate nature of the indigenous and shamanic traditions to connect to the Earth, and remain flexible and collaborative in nature, there persists a unique set of manifestations for each group of indigenous people that arise in response to the space in which they live and the cultures to which they belong. Thusly, to avoid fixation on only one way of being, the shaman maintains deeply personal and open relationships with individuals and communities that essentially serve as the glue to the process of connection.

Ultimately, the ability to form and maintain genuine relationships not only facilitates more effective networks between people, but facilitates greater applicability across cultures and societies, as well. Due to the degree of fluidity inherently present within the design of the healer's perspective, it has been referred to as "a universal cosmology [that] has been used by shamans of all traditions" (Huguelit, 2012, p. 60). Furthermore, it is in this way that shamanism shares many commonalities with other ancient traditions, such as Buddhism. Stemming from these similarities, Peters (1989) stated, "both shamanism and Buddhism are transpersonal, transcendental, transformational and directed toward the level of human communities" (p. 127). As such, Buddhism presents a comparable methodology, worthy of exploration, that holds potential in contributing to the perspective of indigenous shamanism and modern society.

Buddhism

Buddhist philosophy and practices represent a powerful methodology for living that inherently reflects the importance of life giving elements such as consciousness, ecology, and the integrative matrix that gives rise to their function. Thusly, due to this orientation towards living, Buddhism has been valued from its inception as an important religious presence; while, due to a persistent exploration of the mind, has also been respected as a significant source of psychological science (Tucker & Williams, 1997). With an awareness of how these multifaceted systems guide life and yet remain vulnerable to distortion, the Buddha aspired to create a religious system "independent of dogma and priesthood, sacrifice and sacrament, which would insist on an inward change of heart and a system of self-culture" (Rao, 2002, p. 233). As a result, a unique methodology was born out of integration and a quest to overcome the delusions in life.

Created by a living human being, from the exploration and reflection of his own experiences, the Buddha succeeded in creating a unique methodology well suited to the reality of human life (Feldman, 2006). Beyond the power of its religious affiliation, Buddhism is unique in its use of psychology, in which the aggregated elements of living experience are explored to better understand “the nature of consciousness, the variety of its states, and the methods of attaining them” (Rao, 2002, p. 232). When individuals are supported in cultivating an attentive presence to this awareness, they become able to care for themselves in an autonomous, yet, interconnected way. No priesthood is necessary to keep people in line, nor any sacrifice required in guiding them towards the truth. Instead, peace and understanding are achieved through the belief that one’s own truth is internal and lies within the power of self-guided, introspective journeys (Feldman, 2006). As such, Buddhism provides not only an effective science of psychology, but one of perspective as well.

Correspondingly, the Buddhist perspective of consciousness is multifaceted and varied as the phenomena itself. Contained within the various manifestations of life, reflections on consciousness are found influencing all shades of Buddhist methodology in subtle and profound ways. Framed within the concept of the “Six Great Elements” (Tucker & Williams, 1997, p. 76), consciousness is considered one of the essential building blocks of known reality. Between elements of earth, fire, water, wind, space, and consciousness, life is created and imbued with a “ceaseless interdependent and interpenetrating interaction”(p. 76). As a result, consciousness is principally seen as an element of unified reality, not only in the cohesion of conscious experience, but as an essential part of all life. Thus, throughout a myriad of different forms, consciousness

ultimately underlies and interconnects everything including both the physical and metaphysical realms of experience. This approach is valuable to explore because it changes the landscape of the so-called “hard problem of consciousness” (Russell, 2004), which details the struggle to understand how non-sentient matter gives rise to sentient experience. Therefore, within this change is a fundamental shift in perspective that prompts a different question, one that instead ponders how, in fact, consciousness manifests into so many diverse forms (Russell, 2004). Thusly, as with the shaman, the Buddhist approaches consciousness with a worldview comprised of respect for the material, objective as well as metaphysical, subjective elements of experience and the way they dynamically collaborate to produce one’s lived experience.

As such, Buddhists understand the current environmental crisis in terms of consciousness, in which the illusion of a seemingly identifiable permanence within existence causes an existential suffering that produces the misguided and unsustainable behavior of humanity today (Tucker & Williams, 1997). As such, it is this understanding that upholds the light of self-reflection as a tool that illuminates the world of suffering and egocentric behavior. Thusly, it is understood, in order to overcome the delusion that pervades automated behaviors, “we must learn to be still, to listen, and allow [the world] to reveal itself to us” (Feldman, 2006, p. 70). Buddhism has positioned itself to become one of the world’s foremost resources for understanding “behavior as it is experienced introspectively by the behaving person” (Rao, 2002, p. 234), including refinement of the cognitive skills required for such subjective analysis. As a result, the multidisciplinary methods of Buddhism provide not only a similar aura of ideas, but a cognitive and physical means of embodying this reality as well. Through yoga, meditation, and

practices of mindfulness, individuals are provided the tools required to evolve beyond the impulses of a non-reflective mind and access the realm of possibility it reveals.

Therefore, the Buddhist discipline is important to consider in today's modern world because it provides a timeless support to one's mind, body, and soul that can heal the fragmented self and restore the awareness required to live sustainably.

Therefore, the ecological perspective within Buddhism is marked by the concept of interrelated systems, such as consciousness itself. In many ways, the Buddhist understanding is based on the realm of consciousness due to the pervasive perspective of this component as a unifying source of reality. As such, it is understood that consciousness represents an integral factor within human relationships to one another, as well as the natural world (Macy & Brown, 1998). As complex creatures, human beings have created equally complex pathologies of dysfunction and, ultimately, in order to unravel the intricate systems of delusion, individuals must become motivated to deconstruct these dysfunctional maps of reality. When this is accomplished, a new ability arises in which one becomes attuned to the harmonious complexity of the interconnected relationships throughout the natural world (Macy & Brown, 1998).

Essentially, due to the belief that consciousness underlies all reality, to understand one's source of awareness is to better understand the world. To enter this awareness is to be enveloped by the reality of the surrounding environment and become one with it. Thusly, there are no true boundaries within the continuum of nature, and ultimately, "no distinct boundary between living organisms and inorganic entities; whatever differences there are, is a matter of degree" (Tucker & Williams, 1997, p. 82). Essentially, it is from a neglect of cognitive awareness and proliferating delusion that human beings destroy the

very habitat needed for their survival, and it is from a methodology of refining human perception that such behaviors can be reversed.

Resulting from the deep embodiment and awareness of the environment, Buddhists have been speaking out to protect the natural world throughout history and continue to do so today. Through spreading awareness, as well as the integrative tools that cultivate such presence, Buddhists, who exist within present society, reflect the beginnings of collaboration between ancient and modern reality. As Feldman (2006) described, in wake of the recent proliferation of Eastern Buddhist traditions into Western society, people throughout the world are now exposed to a new generation in which “spiritual aspirants attempt to find a life of awakening and freedom while living within the world rather than in the cloistered walls of a monastery” (p. 1). While there may be difficulties, such coupling is worthy of investigation in order to denote the ways in which traditional values can benefit modern practice and, furthermore, how modernizing these prosperous concepts can revive their use in application today. In this way, the religious and psychological integration within Buddhism is poised to provide a newly integrated paradigm for exploring consciousness and restructuring societal behavior towards compassionate and sustainable practices. Only through exploring the underlying basis of behavior, and those factors that influence it, can humanity hope to change the forms of dysfunction to build upon the innate forms of compassion and mindfulness present within all people. As such, Buddhism remains in the process of fighting the proliferation of fragmented perspectives and the unsustainable behaviors that are often generated as a result. In this way, the wisdom present within the Buddhist tradition offers a new realm of opportunity in which anything is possible.

Overall, it is through this radical reorientation of conscious awareness that both Buddhism and shamanism provide a new approach to compassionate, sustainable, and mindful-living. As a result, one of the most fundamental aspects of this perspective is the innate focus it holds on the interrelated nature of the conscious self, as well as the resulting sense of embodied spirituality that is cultivated to recognize the importance of this connection. Interrelation facilitates a heartfelt compassion for the wellbeing of others due to the camaraderie of shared experience, and spirituality creates a space in which to grow skills outside of current physical limitations. Essentially, it is through an orientation to the powerful workings of the mind that enables the success and positivity of these models, but also an orientation to the fragility, power, and importance of the natural world. Ultimately, without reorientation to the innate processes and influences of the mind, there is little opportunity to facilitate reconnection with the processes and influences of energy throughout the surrounding universe. Through the opportunity to begin cultivating the proficient systems of cognitive control, a greater sense of self-reflection, awareness, and reconnection to the world is possible. As such, while both Buddhism and shamanism offer great wisdom about fundamental processes of conscious life from ancient understanding, it is important to incorporate this insight into modern day society as well and facilitate a greater embodiment of this change.

The Conscious Connection Cycle

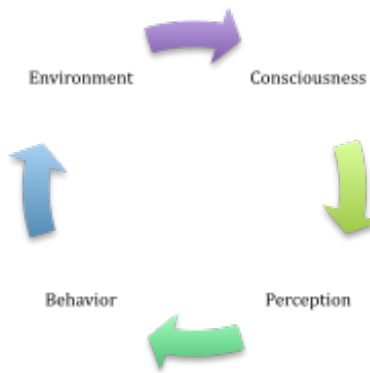


Figure 1

Essentially, the four elements of life, which include consciousness, perception, behavior, and environment, hold a fundamental role within the human relationship to the Earth and interconnectivity of life. To support the initial aim of the Conscious Connections Model, an efficacious understanding of this interdependence, the Conscious Connections Cycle has been distinguished from within the model itself to represent the association more explicitly. Ultimately, the cycle serves to provide a more complete understanding of the ways in which human thought and behavior affect the world, which is accomplished through elucidating the process of consciousness manifesting itself within the environment through human choice and action. As such, the Conscious Connections Cycle serves as an emblematic map of reality that represents a depth of complexity human beings struggle to conceive when lacking tools such as this. Thusly, through the creation of this cycle, individuals have access to a new perspective on life and a new paradigm for living. Within each element of the cycle, a greater understanding is achieved of how each component functions individually as well as collectively within life, and fundamental values are distinguished in which individuals gain deeper respect for the cycle of life itself. As a result, the Conscious Connections Cycle is comprised of the elements required to conceive a more sustainable future and a more fulfilled self.

Consciousness

Consciousness itself has been understood to represent a vast presence within the cosmos and one that can be considered to underlie all elements of life (Rao, 2002).

Within the Conscious Connections Cycle, the understanding is very much the same; however, due to the broad applicability of the term, it is important to denote that within the cycle, the exploration of consciousness will, more specifically, be related to the way in which such awareness functions in the human being. Essentially, consciousness provides the space in which life takes place, delivering not only an essential awareness but also an energetic motivation to experience life. As a result, it is important to understand the cause and method of its function in order to better understand the way it affects human existence. As the primary energy of awareness, consciousness ultimately lies at the heart of all perceptions and behaviors within an individual's life, and within this model, consciousness is seen as the distinguishing source for self and identity within human beings. It is in this way that, through fueling the distinctions between self and other, right and wrong, safety and danger, consciousness ultimately serves as the energy of life, which gives rise to all emotions, motivations, actions, and perceptions. As such, due to the powerful energy of creation present within this phenomenon, society requires a renewed study of the self and of the mind. It is in this sense the distinctions that arise from conscious energy stand to achieve greater clarity when the underlying source of this perceived self is understood in greater detail and experience. This, in turn, will serve to continue developing individuals understanding of the part they play in the larger web of life, in addition to cultivating a new set of values such as collaboration and empathy that

support a new way of being as a result. Therefore, the element of consciousness represents a fundamental groundwork on which life and this model are based on.

Due to the importance of this component, it is equally imperative that each person be able to experience this understanding of consciousness, personally, in a tangible way. Within this model, one such strategy of embodiment to achieve this end stems from the Buddhist practice of meditation. Put simply, meditation is, “the experience of the limitless nature of the mind when it ceases to be dominated by its usual mental chatter” (Fontana, 1999, p. 16). As such, this practice represents a means by which individuals can actively integrate awareness of body and mind in an intentional, yet, unrestricted way. Ultimately, it is mastery of this cognitive power that dissolves the grip of biased ego references and allows for the expansion of self beyond normal limitations because, “when the mind becomes still in meditation, we come to a much deeper understanding of ourselves and of our true nature” (p. 17). Thusly, meditation provides a means of becoming directly present to one's own consciousness and the understanding that can only be achieved from a direct self-discovery of that experience. This process is inherently grounding because the quieting of the mind allows one to look beyond the chaos of mental noise towards the primary state of pure awareness that resides at the foundation of life. This essentially aligns the meditator to the natural flow of the surrounding world in an intrinsic and effortless way that facilitates a deeper sense of fulfillment and mindfulness. In addition, this process facilitates an element of growth in which individuals possess a clear and receptive space in which to expand beyond the limitations of previously constructed narratives and explore a new way of being. As such, it is through relinquishing the noise of what one knows to be true that life may begin to reveal

its deepest truths, and by relaxing dependence on objective processes of reasoning, the true malleability of the mind is free to display the realm of possibility inherent to life.

Perspective

As the second element of the Conscious Connections Cycle, perspective represents an important link between conscious awareness and human experience. Defined previously as “a particular attitude toward or way of regarding something; [or] a point of view” (Perspective, 2015), perspective imparts a lens on one's view of the world and represents an essential element of life that cannot be prevaricated. In other words, within this model, perspective is seen as the amalgamation of pure consciousness reaching the world through the biological lens of the human body. As consciousness motivates us to experience, the body receives stimuli from the outside world and naturally begins to probe for meaning, function, and purpose from its existence. Arising from the survival need to prioritize and judge the stimuli received from the world, classifications such as these represent the way human beings make sense of the world, delineate choices, and take action in their lives. Human beings even hold a perspective about their own perspective. As such, much like current society, individuals can become limited within restrictive concepts of their own ability, which can cause people to believe they have no power or influence over their environment or even themselves. When attitudes such as these arise there is little reason to face life's challenges or care for the planet when the actions taken are believed to make no difference. As a result, one important value present within this understanding of perspective is that of responsibility. When an individual is able to recognize the power they possess to influence the world, with both mind and body, there is an intrinsic sense of pride and responsibility for the

actions taken. Such responsibility ultimately breeds the mindful, compassionate, and sustainable behavior required to construct the healthy and peaceful world for which human beings consistently long.

Due to the pervasiveness of one's perspective, there is a critical need to not only understand the power it holds but also the ways in which one can come to control the color of their gaze. Ultimately, this is most effectively achieved through the Buddhist understanding and practice of mindfulness. Essentially, this component of mind represents, "a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences, on a moment to moment basis" (Mindfulness, n.d, n.p.). As a part of meditative experience, mindfulness is fundamental to the practice of deep personal reflection and is unique in its ability to pervade all expressions of behavior. Ultimately, when mastered, this insightful scaffolding can be present throughout all of life's decisions (Fontana, 1999). The practitioner of mindfulness can achieve full awareness of each moment by self-regulating attention on the immediate experience with receptivity to whatever it has to offer. Mindfulness has the potential to ground the individual by creating strength within to remain receptive to various elements of life, and as White (2011) stated, a person can confront situations with an attitude of acceptance while free from the domination of habitual cognitive routines that restrict behavior. In addition, the practice of mindfulness facilitates growth within the individual by integrating a cosmic awareness in which traumas and transgressions of past experience gain a translucency that allows new understanding of present and future existence. As a result, this offers a new way to understand the self as well as ecological crisis of modern

day and establish a successful resolution in response that is based within a domain of consideration marked by possibility.

Behavior

As the third element of the Conscious Connections Cycle, behavior represents the way in which one's perspective makes contact with the outside world and takes effect on the outcomes of one's life and the lives of others. As such, behavior essentially creates action in the world that can have a vast spectrum of influence and consequence.

Presently, the environmental crisis is a demonstration of the impact human behavior can have on a large scale over time. Therefore, behavior resides as a critical component of realizing change for the world in terms of climate and sustainability. Behavior, ultimately, represents the breadth of power within human ability to influence the objective, physical world and the subjective, metaphysical world in ways that can vastly exceed one's intentions or desires. This unintended scope of power can also be seen in the current ecological crisis as people have consumed to fulfill their needs, yet, in the process have compromised the health of the planet that, ultimately, is the source of all physical and spiritual fulfillments for human beings. Therefore, it is important to understand the ways in which behavior is powerful in the world and how to break from habitual, restricted ways of being that continue to generate harmful and ineffective results. Indigenous and ancestral wisdom plays an important part in modern day life. Through rituals and methodologies aimed towards the embodiment of this awareness, individuals are provided access to the space in which they can explore and cultivate new types of behavior that reflect a more sustainable way of living.

One such methodology is the Buddhist practice of yoga. With various manifestations, this practice is flexible and easily used to support the practitioner in the personal and collective journey we are all taking. Ultimately, yoga provides additional means of growing awareness and exists in many different forms across cultures and within Buddhism itself. As Fontana (1999) explained, Hatha yoga represents the yoga of the physical body in which intricate postures are assumed in the attempt to “gain control over the body’s vital energy and transmute it into spiritual enlightenment” (p. 117). Ultimately, manifestations of Bhakti yoga focus on the energy of devotion, in which an outpouring of love is made toward the divine so that, ultimately, “the separate self becomes one with the object of this love” (p.117). Furthermore, while meditation facilitates a connection between mind and body, the practice of yoga better defines the connection between the body and the Earth. As a result, this is an essential element of grounding because, as Huguelit (2012) explained, the facilitation of a physical tie between human beings and the planet creates the foundation for all extended realms of consciousness and experience from which to grow. As such, yoga presents an effective means of growth because without a well-established connection between the components of this symbiotic system, there is little basis on which to expand towards the higher dimensions to which life’s complexity gives rise. Therefore, yoga is the essential embodiment of expanding oneself through the integration of both physical and spiritual domains and creates the bridge by which such concepts of unity and interdependence enter the lived human experience.

In addition to yoga is the underlying power of ritual. Familiar to Buddhism and shamanism, as well as many traditions through the world, ritual is one of the most basic

means of orienting behavior. Ultimately, as Winkelman (2004) explained, the biological function of rituals involves facilitating the flow of information in order to synchronize individual behaviors into unified action. As such, coordination of social groups in this way constitutes a mechanism for socialization that represents “an evolutionary, ancient channel, or communication, that operates by virtue of homologous biological functions” (p. 206). Rituals hold the potential to provide a means of healing the fragmented and constricted state of human consciousness through tending to fundamental human needs such as belonging to meaningful relationships, maintaining a sense of wellbeing, and bonding with others. Winkelman suggested, “rituals integrate people by enhancing social-support systems, group identity, and self-development” (p. 207), and, as a result, support an integrative means to understanding not only consciousness but the embodied products of its functioning as well. Therefore, ritual is important because it serves to imbue actions with meaning and power in a way that is versatile enough to be applied by individuals throughout the world. Within modern day societies, the practice of bringing ritual to daily life can serve to ground individuals in the distinctions that recall the meaningful maps human beings generate to understand life and, in addition, it can facilitate an element of growth in which individuals can create more meaningful connections with others and expand their understanding of self and other.

Environment

As the fourth element of the Conscious Connections Cycle, the environment itself ultimately represents the physical space in which life, and the actions manifested within experience, take place. Essentially, the environment represents not only the living, breathing system of the planet and its ecosystem but the space in which one specifically

resides. For example, as humans have continued to retreat from the natural world, concrete jungles and climate controlled environments have become the normal spaces for the common individual. As such, all manifestations of environment provide a similar function and influence throughout ones life. Ultimately, the surrounding world is the space in which individuals live in relation to and by receiving stimuli from this external domain individuals are able to make the discernments necessary to live life.

There is a great deal of influence from the environment on human perspective and manifestations of human behavior. Further still, the environment provides the space in which consciousness comes into contact with other expressions of consciousness, including, as Rao (2002) theorized, the ability for consciousness to come into awareness of itself. Thusly, the environment plays a fundamental role in the connection between human beings and their experience of life. By providing not only the ideal climate to live within and the resources to flourish, but also the basis for experience and understanding, the natural environment is one of the most critical aspects of human existence. As such, one of the most fundamental values of life stands to be imbued from a relationship with the environment, the understanding that surroundings play an inherently important role within life, and space that deserves mindful attentiveness and respect to ensure its integrity and function. Therefore, there is a desperate need to establish a deeper connection to the global environment in which all life exists.

To support individuals in connecting to the natural world and creating a deeper connection with life, the embodiment strategy of environmental mapping is presented. Ultimately, the process of environmental mapping reflects the practice of entering the natural world with the intentions to observe it with open receptive inquiry, and in part is

drawn from White's (2011) concept referred to as "Mindful-Affective-Perception-in-Nature (MAPIN)" (p. 43). As White explained, this act of environmental investigation represents "a structured, experiential exercise based on mindful perception ...to induce deeper nature connectedness and explore heightened states of eco-consciousness" (p. 43). As individuals focus on bringing a renewed sense of awareness to the environment, a new world of understanding is revealed and an expanded way of being is facilitated.

Through integrating attentive sensory observation, rational and affective interpretation, and imaginal engagement such as practices of self-reflection, a new form of scientific inquiry is established that can provide the type of empirical knowledge and understanding required to process highly subjective phenomena (White, 2011). In addition, this process will be solidified by the recording of one's experience through various means of expression including, narrative writing, sketching, and painting, as well as meditation. Throughout these processes, in utilizing these tools, individuals are directly connected to their experience and the creative expression of its existence. By utilizing one's hands to manifest what occurs for oneself when attentively exposed to the flow of the natural world, a renewed orientation is found that naturally engages a new integrative narrative by which the practitioner can live.

One fundamental aspect of environmental mapping is an origination within the natural world and a progression into the current societal realm. Due to the blindness of fragmentation, human beings often lack awareness of the vastly artificial world in which they exist. Through applying these techniques of awareness and representation to the natural world as well as the societal world in which one lives, a greater understanding can

be achieved of not only the way human beings are living apart from the natural flow of life but also the reasons why. It is in this way that environmental mapping stands to elucidate the schism that persists between individuals and their environment as well as provide the tools to begin reconnecting this gap.

Application

When individuals are given the framework of a new narrative for their experience, and the space in which to live into it, there stands to be a far greater embodiment of the values in which one seeks to adopt. As such, this model can be utilized in conjunction with any work for change. This applies not only to organizational work, in which groups of change agents work to enroll and invest individuals in their campaigns for improving the conditions of the world, but also for individuals who wish to achieve a greater embodiment of the values they hold in life and make a difference with them. It is in this way, the Conscious Connections Model serves as a bridge that spans the gap between intention and action, objective and subjective, as well as human and nature. Ultimately, serving as a lens of perception itself, this model serves to illuminate the values of sustainability and integrative collaboration while aligning the individual with a strong sense of embodiment and passion. As such, a deeper sense of personal identification is founded with these moral elements resulting in greater natural expression of their influence throughout all behaviors. Such a tool, organized to reorient perception, is a vastly applicable tool that applies to all action for change because it facilitates the process in which individuals are enrolled in making a difference in their lives and the lives of others. Even for those who intellectually care about threats to the environment and peace, this model provides a tangible path for taking on this concern

with new vigor and power. As a result, the expertise of the Conscious Connections Model lies within its innate flexibility and elements of self-direction and discovery. The integrative and collaborative nature of the model reflects the very essence of the wisdom it seeks to impart and crafts this approach as a supportive tool for life. Thusly, the possibility present within this model is a future in which every individual lives as an embodiment of his or her values and the interconnected expression of life each truly is. Even more, the possibility present in this system is the future of a healthy mind and a flourishing planet. As such, the ultimate purpose of the Conscious Connections Model is to provide tangible access to a new and sustainable way to be in the world.

Presently, human beings stand at the precipice of an evolutionary choice: either to continue to delve deeper into the transient comfort of delusion within a fragmented modernity, or embrace an integration of past and present into a future of expanded conscious awareness, compassion, and sustainability. While the former view serves a perspective of voracity and pervasive individuality, the latter attends to a desire for expanding ones' experience of life into new realms of possibility and understanding. Ultimately, it is the desire to experience life that is bubbling up within human consciousness, urging humanity to take hold of its power and direct it towards the creation of a new narrative for living. However, human beings, communities, and societies throughout the world must take the step to once again connect with the systems that provide them life and cultivate the respect necessary to maintain sustainable ways of being. Ultimately, without a radical reorientation towards oneself and the world in which one lives, there will be little success in reclaiming the planet from the ecological crisis it faces today. As such, the Conscious Connections Model serves as a means of supporting

individuals in nurturing the inner voice of wisdom and compassion that must flourish in order to make a difference in the world. Through facilitating an intellectual understanding of the processes of fragmentation and environmental systems, this model seeks to free individuals from the guilt of their consumptive and destructive behavior and provide an accessible pathway to begin embodying a new way of being as a result. Therefore, true change will not be achieved until individuals reach across the gap between human and environment to realize the radically deep interconnectedness that permeates not only the expression of flora, flesh, and fauna, but also all life throughout the cosmos.

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