

# The Future Is Calling Us to Greatness

with Michael Dowd + 56 Experts



## Sacred Economics and the Rebirth of a Beautiful World

with Charles Eisenstein

Big ideas from this session:

- Money, Gift, and Society in the Age of Transition
- The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible
- Why our sense of self matters: What's dying? What's emerging? What's next?

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Michael: Charles, thank you for joining in on this conversation, *The Future is Calling Us to Greatness*.

Charles: Thank you for inviting me.

Michael: You and I share a lot of friends but I think this is the first time that we've interacted, so I have been look forward to this for quite some time. What I often do at the start is just invite my guests to share with the audience, people who are watching or listening to this who may not be familiar with your work, what you are known for and how you got to be where you are now.

If you would be willing to share some of your story and also don't be bashful, what are you best known for? What is your contribution to this whole movement?

Charles: I guess I am probably best known for my books. *The More Beautiful World Our Know is Possible* is one, *Sacred Economics* is another one. I am not really sure what I am known for or even how well I am known. Here I am, in front of my computer but I guess I'll say a little bit about how I came to do this work. Just how far back should I go?

Michael: Where you regularly pop up in my world is whenever the conversation around sustainability or how we move into a just and healthy future comes to the practical economic side of things. Invariably, people invoke you and say, "Wow, you've got to bring Charles into this conversation," or "I just read his..." or whatever.

Clearly, at least in the circles that I travel that's where your work is just deeply appreciated and what you bring to that. Basically, anything that you would be willing to share in terms of – and you can actually go back. Some people I guess have actually taken a good ten minutes or more just sharing their story, how they got to where they are.

There is no wrong way to do it, whatever you feel led to do it.

Charles: I'll go back a ways, maybe to being a teenager and having a sense that there is a great wrongness in the world, not really sure of what it is, even going back to childhood and having this kind of inarticulate feeling that it's not supposed to be this way, we are not supposed hate being Monday and look forward to weekends.

I didn't have an intellectual context for this feeling but I developed one in my teenage years as I started to read radical literature that confirmed my feeling of a wrongness. Ultimately, I became dissatisfied with the culprits that the radical literature identified, which could be capitalism or some other ideology or human greed, something bad in human nature.

I dug deeper and came to understand our situation of our civilization as a crisis that is arising from [inaudible 03:35] or a story that has developed over thousands of years that I call separation. It is embodied in all of our systems, money system, healthcare, politics, technology and education.

Everything is in one way or another an expression of this deep vein of separation that says essentially who you are is a separate being in a world of utter humanity separate from nature living in a universe that is just out there, doesn't have the qualities of itself, doesn't have beingness, purpose, intention and that kind of thing, so we are kind of alone in the universe.

Things change in the world when a force is exerted on a mass and the forces of nature are completely impersonal, indifferent to human well-being, therefore human well-being whether on a personal level or collective level comes through control, through insulating ourselves from these indifferent forces and hostile competitors out there, and so we built the civilization on that.

Our destiny we conceived in this story, our destiny is to someday achieve perfect control. The technological transcendence of nature or in your own life, something like financial security where you don't depend on the good fortune or charity of anybody else, you can take care of yourself.

My economics writing has to do with first identifying how our economic system embodies this myth, this story, how it separates us, how it destroys community and how it drives endless growth and the expansion of the realm of property and money.

Then, I observed that this money system is in a deep and irremediable crisis that we can only postpone and worsen by postponing it and that this money crisis parallels the other crises that are converging upon us.

Then I say okay, this breakdown is like a birth crisis, pushing us into first a space between stories, a space of not knowing anymore the answers and then into a new and ancient story that you could call inter-being or reunion.

So I say, what would a money system look like that embodied the new story? That is the underlying theme of my economics book. What would a money system look like that encouraged the healing of nature and the participation in ecology, not the denial of ecology? What would a money system look like that brought human beings together rather than tearing them apart? That is where I am coming from on that.

Michael: That is great. One of the things that I have been aware of for some time and you just touched on it is that we share an appreciation for Thomas Barry and Brian Swim in this articulation of both ancient and new cosmology and ancient and new narrative that helps us to live in a more intimate “I-thou” relationship with reality.

I wonder if you can share just a little bit in terms of how you see that story, what elements from the past do you see coming into the future and what elements you see science providing that perhaps no ancient culture had in the way that we do today.

Charles: I think that a lot of what you could call new paradigms in science, they are another aspect of our transition into a story of inter-being in which we are no longer alone in the universe or in which the qualities of a self no longer inherit human beings alone.

For example, the tendency toward organization which in the past could only be understood as kind of this magical teleological principal but that now through systems theory and non-linear dynamics we are starting to understand that this emergence is a property of matter and not something that we have to impose upon matter.

Quantum mechanics would be another example. It’s not exactly a new paradigm but it’s something that we still haven’t wrapped our minds around. When we talk about what is real, was the World Trade Center masterminded by Jihadi terrorists or was that a secret plan of some part of the US government?

People can debate about this but they agree on one thing that there is an objective fact of the matter that doesn’t depend on our perceptions of it and that’s just like the basic understanding of reality that we take for granted that it exists outside of us.

I am not going to go too deep into that philosophy of intersubjectivity, idealism and all this kind of philosophical things but what I'll say is that the idea that something exists and occupies a point in space-time (X, Y, Z x t) that doesn't make sense in quantum mechanics. That only happens when you take a measurement and come into relationship with that field of potential.

In every field in science, it's either new paradigms or paradigms that haven't been accepted yet that are emerging that in my mind they suggest that our basic mythology or basic anthology that we've lived with for thousands of years as one and some of them are rejected by the scientific establishment.

For example, something like Rupert Sheldrake's idea of morphic resonance. It says that a change that happens in one place induces a field of change, making it happen in other places whether or not you can identify a causal mechanism and that's not to say that the causal mechanisms do not exist that aren't important but it is to say that they are not primary.

So instead of saying the change happened somewhere else because so and so heard the story and decided to try it themselves that's a causal mechanism and it is saying that whether it's that causal mechanism or some other one that it is going to happen, so what's primary is the morphic field, so it's kind of a reversal not even what's primary is the causal mechanisms and so therefore, Michael, if you don't make sure that lots of people find out about your good deed, your active compassion and care, your time spent taking care of a dying loved one then it's not going to change the world very much. You have to broadcast it.

That is kind of the old story that has an assumption essentially of forced space causality but in the new story, what I am calling the new story but it's also ancient story, we know that anything that we do has cosmic influences, any act has cosmic significance.

I think that even when I am talking about economics or politics, there is an understanding that the transition that we are going through or you can even say the evolution that we are amidst has to go down to that level.

Michael: It is interesting. The way that you were just talking about the quantum mechanics and some of the things at that scale, one of the things that I've sometimes cautioned people in doing, especially people who had seen the movie *What the Bleep Do We Know?* is that there is often a conflation or collapsing of scale.

What is true at one scale of reality doesn't necessarily follow that that is true in the same at a different scale. For example, at the subatomic scale, yes you can't say with any precision that the particle is there or there, or there, but at the basketball scale, the basketball is either there or there, or there and so I feel a little bit cautious for at least myself, a little bit reluctant to say that the World Trade Tower, I sort of agree with the commonplace reality that

the Trade Tower went down but I guess personally, I am a little uncomfortable of making what is true at the quantum level, using that not in just a metaphorical way but in sort of like that's also true at this level.

I am not saying you are saying that but somebody hearing you could think that.

Charles: Yes. I am usually pretty careful to say that I am not claiming that quantum superposition of states proves that the basketball was both here and there and therefore it depends on what you believe about it and all that kind of New Age stuff, but what I say is that it offers a different source of metaphor and intuition because you can no longer say at bottom reality is just like that.

Now, I think that we are still going through all kinds of intellectual calisthenics to incorporate quantum mechanics into our worldview. One way to do it is to simply relegate quantum phenomenon to the micro level and say that on the macro scale all of these effects cancel out. Schrodinger was basically saying that's not good enough. He said, "Sorry, but we can easily construct a device that magnifies the quantum and brings it into the macro level."

That's really what the point of Schrodinger cat experiment was and now there are people who speculate – I would have to call it speculation – but grounded scientists who are speculating that this kind of magnification or utilization of quantum effects happens routinely in biological systems.

Roger Penrose thinks that, Johnjoe McFadden thinks that, so I don't know where it is all going to lead but I do think that this kind of crack in the base of our understanding of reality is significant.

Michael: Coming back to the practical area that you really have contributed so much on and focused on, can you outline or would you be willing to outline just the contours of what you call sacred economics? What is some of the contours of a steady state way of doing economy, way of doing economics that is more nourishing of individual and community well-being?

Charles: Two things have to happen. One is that the realm of money has to shrink and we have to start doing things without money that we used to do with money.

Now, I am not someone who thinks that we need to abolish money or that money is a bad thing, so the second thing that needs to happen is that in addition to shrinking the money realm is to change the nature of money and that's mostly what the book is about, although these two things are linked because the design of money today, not that anyone consciously designed it but the way that money works today only works in the context of growth.

Contrary to shrinking the money realm, what happens is that it inextricably grows and the reason for that is essentially the way that money is created in burying debt? There is always more debt than there is money, so in order to keep pace with debt the money economy has to expand too, and I could go in a lot more detail about that. I do it in the book.

Part of the picture of a regenerative economy or sacred economy would be to change the way that money is created. My proposal that I have drawn on various thinkers to develop is essentially to have negative interest built into the system through a liquidity tax on bank reserves, which is actually very simple to implement.

In fact, the ECB already has a very tiny one now. The Bank of Japan has done it before. The Ricks Bank of Sweden has done it, like just a negative fraction of a percent and again, I can go into the details of that more if you are interested but that is just one piece of it and it allows the economy to work, for credit to flow in the absence of growth.

Michael: I think you are onto something. I may want you to go more into that because I think ever since 1988, I was pastoring my first church in Western Massachusetts, a little church in Grandville. It was the only church in a town 1,500 people. So I married and baptized everybody who wanted. I was the town parson in the old New England sense.

One of my parishioners, he is still alive and he was this amazing geek who was very widely read and he gave me a copy of probably in 1990 or 1989, Margaret Kennedy's *Interest and Inflation Free Money*, I think it was. That was the first time I had ever been exposed to a radical different thinking on the nature of money and interest, and that sort of thing, and growth.

Of course since then I have read some other things but in this interview series, one of the people I interviewed early on was Richard Heinberg and his book *The End of Growth* really was the introduction. That book – I read a number of his books on peak oil over the years but that book opened me up to somebody I had never heard before, John Michael Greer, who has now become my favorite author, I've read like eight of his books.

Your work in terms of re-thinking how we do economics in a world where growth itself has become pathological, growth itself is leading us to have a detrimental impact and so our way of doing economics is really relatively recent in terms of the scale and the way that we've done it and so having a way that doesn't cause us to rape the earth, to extract the wealth of the planet and guarantee that future generations are going to suffer, everything that we are doing economically is so unsustainable.

So yes, feel free to lean more into some of the problems that you see in the current system and especially, outlining a path through.

Charles: Like you said, growth has become pathological and so we are caught in a bind. On the one hand, growth is pathological and on the other hand, the systems stops working if there isn't growth because no growth then there are no lending opportunities, credit stops flowing, unemployment grows, concentration of wealth intensifies, everything that we are seeing today happens.

All these problems would go away if economic growth could be turned to the fast rates that it was during the 50s and 60s, and politicians know this. That's why left, right and center they are all like, "How do we restart economic growth?" and at the same time, understanding what economic growth means.

It means turning more of the oceans into a catch, more of oil in the ground into gasoline, more of forests into board feed and less well understood is that it also means turning more and more human relationships into commoditized services, which explains the disintegration of community because community basically means people doing things for each other without getting paid for it.

My neighbor will help me fix my roof. That is community. Now, I am paying a roofer to do it. The neighborhood watches out for the kids. Now, we send them all off to daycare. We used to cook food for ourselves and each other. Now, we buy it at the supermarket deli.

Whether it's the ecological fabric or the social fabric, growth is destroying it, so we are caught in a bind and politicians and liberal leaning economists will talk about sustainable growth. Let's have green growth but it doesn't address the fundamental problem, which is that there is a limit to the amount of nature that can be converted into product and the amount of human relationships that can be converted into services.

You could have growth in affordable things but unless that is displacing fossil fuel combustion you are not going to help the situation and so far, that's what's happening. We have a growing percentage of renewables in the energy mix but we are not burning less fossil fuels.

Michael: Exactly.

Charles: Then of course the argument is there are some tricky details to it. We can talk about ephemerilization, miniaturization and all these things, so it takes a bit of work to really establish the case but yeah, my economic thinking really is how could a zero-growth or de-growth system work that doesn't have unemployment, concentration of wealth and so on?

Michael: There are going to be quite a few people, probably the vast majority who are watching or listening to this series on their iPods who get that growth is a huge problem. If you could share just a little bit in terms of what a de-growth or a steady state system would look like,

feel like and sound like and then obviously, if they want more information they would go to your book and other resources as well, but give us a sense of taste at least of something in that direction.

Charles: Yes, maybe I'll mention a couple of things. One is the negative interest. If you are a bank and you have \$10 billion in excess reserves parked to the FED, today there is no penalty for that and you can invest them in a risk-free investment which is maybe a treasury bond or if you have enough money it is anything because you know you'll get bailed out, so why would you lend it to the people who are actually going to spend it when you can just keep it risk-free?

What if your ten billion dollars were subject to a five percent fee to keep it at the FED? Then in a year it's only going to be worth 9.5 billion dollars. So it is now to your advantage to lend it out at zero interest which means that you can lend it to something that isn't going to bring a high return, which means that essentially I am skipping some details here but it means that credit can flow in the absence of growth. That's a key piece.

It also makes money like everything else in the universe. It decays and cycles, it's not preserved growing endlessly, linearly or exponentially so it's no longer an exception to the law of return.

Another proposals that I've become – since I wrote *Sacred Economics* I've become even more enthusiastic about is the universal basic income, which Switzerland is now considering through the citizens' initiative and basically, it is kind of an annual stipend paid to everybody that's enough to meet basic living expenses.

Now, a conventional economist would say this would be a disaster because you would no longer have an incentive to work, but really underneath that is an assumption about human nature that says, Michael, you don't really want to work. You are just doing this because you have to, because you know that if you don't then you are going to suffer scarcity, you are going to suffer hardship because I know you.

You are fundamentally self-interested. That's who you are because you are a separate self in the world of other and more for you is less for me. We are all in competition, and if you had your drudgers you wouldn't be doing this show. You would be sitting on the couch eating chocolate bonbons and playing World of Warcraft.

Fortunately, we have this scarcity based money system that forces you to work and forces people to push the mops, drive the garbage trucks and do the menial tasks that run society. I think that this view of human nature is backward.

I think that people have a natural desire to contribute to something greater than themselves that they carry a gift, because I see so many people choosing life paths that offer no financial security

and working really hard at it. So it's true that people would be less willing to do degrading, dangerous, oppressive, so there would be then a design incentive in the economy to minimize that kind of labor.

Probably people would have to make less garbage. Probably people would have to clean their own toilets more. We would have to have a system that would minimize degradation and tedium and so it would be a huge change and there are lots of other ways to look at it but it all comes down to a different understanding of human nature, of who we are.

Are we competing individuals in a world of other or are we interrelated, interconnected, interexistent beings for whom more for you is actually more for me. That is ecology. Scientists used to think that if we eliminated the harmful species the rest would be better off, but now we know that you eliminate any species and the whole system is weaker because each has a gift to give to the whole. That's an ecological understanding and I think that to have a truly sustainable economy we have to bring that ecological mindset into our economic thinking.

Michael: Yes, amen. I don't know how much you know about the work that my wife and I do but we travel all over North America. We spoke in about 2,000 groups in the last 12 years. Basically, where science, inspiration and sustainability intersect is what we are passionate about.

I often say that ecology is the new theology and in that way also, ecology needs to be at the heart of the new economics that as our best scientific understanding of the relationship and what you call inter-being but this interrelationship of beings in a community and playing to each other's strengths.

You were talking before about a basic, a baseline income. I remember back 20 – 22 years ago, I was on the board of the North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology and Bob **Schutz** was also that is called *The 30-Thousand Dollar Solution* and basically suggesting a whole paradigm, a way of thinking about economics where there was a basic income, everybody got \$30,000.

I remember at that time thinking that was brilliant and really hadn't heard much along those lines in a couple of decades, so I am delighted to hear that this is something that you also have a lot of enthusiasm for.

Charles: Yeah.

Michael: I am curious, tell us, you've got four boys, I think?

Charles: Yes.

Michael: How do you stay inspired in the face of some really scary stuff in terms of economics, in terms of politics, some of the insanity of where we are, where basically money is running the show, peak oil and climate change, the growing gap between the rich and the poor? There is some really scary stuff and clearly you stay inspired to be in action, participating in what my mentor Thomas Barry called the great work.

How do you do that? What allows you to stay inspired to be in action?

Charles: I guess there is three things. One is that I have an understanding of the dynamics of transition, where the old pattern has to fulfill all of its variations and reach an extreme. As that happens though it begins to hollow out.

We have the super structures of our society are stronger than ever, the surveillance state, the military industrial complex and all of that stuff but underneath it, there is this kind of void, this cynicism, this lack of fervent ideological commitment to it.

Even something like patriotism in America it's become this brand that isn't for most people as kind of deeply unquestionable as it was when I was a kid. I like to compare it with the Soviet Union, where in the 50s and 60s, the elites of that country fervently, authentically believed in the superiority of their system.

Khrushchev said, "We will bury you!" and it wasn't bravado. It was obvious, our system is superior. By the 80s, the structures of the Soviet state were still in place but none of the elites really believed in Marxism anymore. The core had hollowed out, leaving just a shell which disintegrated with a little tap.

I think the same thing is happening now to our whole civilization. We just don't believe as fervently anymore in the project of civilization, for example in the conquest of nature and the coming technological utopia. We don't really take for granted now that we are on the right track moving forward into this golden future, so the core is hollowing out. That is one reason I am optimistic.

Another reason is that the kind of logic of despair draws on some of the same assumptions, the same worldview that our ecociatal system draws on.

Michael: Say more.

Charles: Our system is based on our separation from nature and our separation as individuals from the world outside of ourselves. From that viewpoint, your power to create change depends really on the amount of force that you can exert or that you can marshal to your cause because you are just one little person.

That means that you can't really do very much, besides the powers that be have a lot more force at their disposal than you do. You see how that helplessness comes from kind of the same story of the self that underlies our civilization.

In my life, I've had experiences that showed me that our force based understanding of causality is incomplete, experiences of synchronicity, of things that I can only call miracles which doesn't invoke a supernatural external agency. A miracle is something that's possible from a new story but not from an old.

Michael: That's fun. I like that. I'll steal that but I'll give you credit.

Charles: Yes, go for it. So a miracle is an invitation. It says, "Reality as you knew it is just a small part of what is real. What you thought of as possible, practical and real is much too narrow." It's an invitation. It's an invitation that I received repeatedly and just by small steps have dared to stand in a little bit more firmly because still, I am like you, I am living amidst the structures, the ideologies and the internalized habits of separation.

So this is a long journey to really act from what I know on some level deep down and what everybody knows, which is – as I said before – that every action has cosmic significance. So I imagine what would be possible if everybody understood and could stand in the technology of being at the right place at the right time, having just the right resource come in just when you need it, that kind of super-effectiveness that isn't something that you can contrive but you've had these experiences, I am sure.

Michael: Yeah.

Charles: So, those kinds of experiences they give me an unreasonable hope because I know that the world doesn't work the way that my despair tells me it does.

The third reason I am optimistic is that I meet young people who are already standing in that who are born into what took me 20 or 30 years to imperfectly arrive at and I am like, wow, what are they going to be doing when they are in their 40s?

I'll meet one of them and not just young people but especially young people, I'll meet one of them and I'll hear their story and I'll be looking at them and I'll be like, how could I be pessimistic knowing that you exist? That's really human beings that it's not that I've worked out some plan that I can say if only everybody would agree to my plan and see things my way then the world would make it and if they don't, then we are screwed, no, it's kind of trans-rational.

I guess you could say that I am in a way held in my optimism and positivity by people and events that come into my awareness.

Michael: That's great. The last piece, the third part of what helps you have optimism, hope or inspiration leads me to want to ask a question that Connie and I were talking just this morning and also yesterday.

I was doing a church service and she asked this young woman, I was at a retreat center and we are in Iowa right now and one of the things we are doing this year is we are speaking along the route of the great march for climate action, so we've got about 100 speaking engagements lined up between LA and DC over an eight and a half month period and right now, we are smack in the middle of it in Iowa.

I spoke at a Catholic Franciscan retreat center called Prairie Woods, just outside of Cedar Rapids a few days ago and Connie was in a conversation with a young woman who is in her young 20s and one of the things that I would like to ask you is a question that Connie asked her, speaking as a young person how would you advise a young person who is trying to seek out what to do as a career?

We are in such transition times where the old system is clearly dysfunctional, so many people want to do good work that they really feel is benefiting the future and yet there is not as many opportunities as there are people who really would love to do that.

How would you coach or advise, or counsel a young person who is trying to feel out which direction to go in terms of their own career or their own work path?

Charles: What I usually say first and foremost is that your secret knowledge is true that you are not here to make a living that you carry a gift and a magnificent potential that is important for the world and that the most important thing that you can do is to find out what that is, develop it and give it forward, which is the opposite of what a guidance counselor tells you in high school.

"You are good at art. You can go into graphic design, you can go into advertising. Here is how to get money with your gift," but I am not saying to not get money but what I am saying is that what is first is the gift and the return is secondary. It will happen and it's important but it's not the focus of your life.

How to survive is not the focus of your life and again, that draws on this deeper story, part of the story of separation is that the purpose of life is to survive, that our genes program us to maximize reproductive self-interest and that nature is a word [indiscernible 39:49] a bunch of separate selves and competition with each other.

Again, that's a paradigm that is shifting as our understanding of symbiosis and genetic merging and stuff grows but anyway, yes, to a young person I would validate that

knowledge and also if you can really bring that in and trust it, it will be your compass. You will know what to do, you will know how to navigate these admittedly very tricky waters because we don't have an economic system that rewards the kinds of things that people want to give to you now.

That is different than 50 years ago. Fifty years ago, the project of civilization was still robust and an idealistic young person wanted to be an atomic scientist or an astronaut or something like that and contribute to the story that was still hale and hardy but now the really bright idealistic young people, they don't want to do that. They want to go into permaculture, they want to go into restorative justice or something like that.

The structures, the institutions don't support that, so it is – I don't want to trivialize the difficulty of this path, we are pioneering a new world but there are deeper principles at work that ensure that somehow you will be taken care of, not as a hundred percent guarantee.

Michael: Especially as you attend to the wealth that is currently not measured as wealth, which is quality relationships with your family, with your friends, with your neighbors, with your community, that wealth.

This is one of those areas, as I was reading your bio on your website, one of the things I resonated very deeply with is this place where Connie and I are now. I mean, for 12 years we have been effectively homeless. We don't have a home. We don't have an apartment. We don't have any place we cycle back to that we own or anything else, and yet we have a wealth of tribe of community, of friends and family, the friends that have become family that we feel like we are the richest people in the world that we get to do this work at this amazing time of the history, do it with each other, and we love doing it.

She is an acclaimed science writer and we are both at the top of our game in terms of what we do and how we do it, and the way we are received. So, monetarily we wouldn't be considered wealthy at all and yet, from a subjective emotional and mission stance, and community stance we feel like we are the richest people on the planet.

We often remind ourselves that we are richer than kings and I think you are right. Young people, my daughter – I've got three kids, my 31-year old daughter, she is in the Marine Corps. She is married to someone who is also career military. My son is an athletic trainer, 29, in San Diego and my youngest daughter is 24. She is a peace and justice, and sustainability activist. She is into permaculture, organic gardening and massage and restorative justice, the gifting economy and finding another way to do this.

One of the exercises that I have used now with audiences for a long time – I don't use it every time but I often do, I talk about create a piece of paper and a line down the middle so you've got two columns. On one side, list all the activities, the projects, the things that you love

to do that light you up, that give you joy, that give you a sense of energy and fulfillment and happiness, things that you are at, things other people tell you that you are good at, etc. Where is the juice, where is the joy? List all of that.

On top of that you put My Great Joy. On the other side, list all the things that you are aware of in your community or in the world where you feel the world's needs, not just where you intellectually know about what is needed but where does it hit you? Where do you feel it? Where do you get upset or frustrated, and especially where do you feel compassion?

Where does your heart just break open with something that is happening in your community or in the world, and you list all that? At the top of that list, you put the World's Great Needs or My Community's Great Needs as I Feel Them.

You've got two lists, My Great Joy and the World's Great Needs. Then I basically just invite them to pay attention to their heart. They don't even have to call a prayer or meditation if they don't want to. Just pay attention to this part of your body. There is wisdom and we are guided from the center of our chest in terms of where the intersections, where are the places where your great joy and the world's great needs intersect?

You may or may not be able to make much money at that at this time but it will give you such joy and fulfillment. It's like Joseph Campbell talked about follow your bliss. This is follow your bliss bless. It's follow your bliss that is also simultaneously a blessing to others in the process and it sort of gets at what you were just pointing out as well, I think.

Charles: Yeah. I would endorse that.

Michael: Cool. One of the things that I am always aware of and you talk about it in terms of inter-being and this whole new story and I completely agree is that we are not isolated individuals. We are each shaped by our environment, we are shaped by our social environment. We are influenced by that as well as we influence, and I am curious, I haven't remembered to ask this question of all my guests but I sometimes do and it always gets a repeat response.

Who have been some of your most significant mentors and teachers on this path and who would you count as your closest colleagues and those who most deeply align with your sense of mission and purpose at this time in your life?

Charles: I've been asked similar questions before and honestly, the people who had the biggest impact on me are not people who are well-known. My motorcycle mechanic, when I was living in Taiwan --

Michael: See, this is more inspiring than just big name people because what that lets people know is that anybody can make a difference and they can ripple out in ways that are far larger than they would have any idea.

Charles: Yeah.

Michael: Say more about your mechanic.

Charles: Not only was he a fantastically skilled mechanic but he hired people who were out of prison, out of jail and stuff like that and held so much love in that little motorcycle shop that these guys would have probably ended up going back to prison, ended up being able to lead normal lives.

The logic of separation says that his impact on our world is much less than somebody doing big public things like me but interacting with people like that and there is many others who have impacted me, a preschool teacher, he would just kneel down, look the kids in the eye and talk to them with respect. A woman who spent ten years of her life taking care of her demented mother, like people who are doing those things invisibly, they inspire me because they don't have the assist of at least a subculture of people telling them how great a thing that they are doing.

They are not getting validated, they are not even getting money for that kind of work usually but they are doing it anyway and they are holding the field that more ordinary people like myself can step into, people who need that affirmation maybe.

Honestly, as soon as I think that the great souls have kind of stepped back and are occupying these humble positions. The dedication of my new book is something like that, to the humble.

You asked another part of that question.

Michael: The other one was who are some of the people that you feel are your closest colleagues and your intellectual or mission tribe, I guess?

Charles: I don't necessarily have extensive interactions with these people but there will be just like a moment of connection, it's almost telepathic and I keep wondering, are we meant to collaborate more directly somehow or are we just all swimming in the same field and helping each other through invisible paths?

I don't know. So I don't think I am going to name them.

Michael: That is fine. I will go ahead and answer the same question myself, just because I am noticing that if I ask a question I probably should be willing to respond to the same kind of question.

First of all, what you said touched my heart deeply which is there have been people that are not well-known at all, they just were in my life and yet they played a profound role. In fact, one of them was my second great teacher, Mrs. Atman at a little Catholic grade school.

Back six or seven years ago, when I was writing my book *Thank God for Evolution*, on Chapter 11 I have practical exercises on how to live just a thriving life and one of them was expressing gratitude to the people in your life who've made a difference that you've never actually taken the time to express gratitude to.

I had made a list and one of them was Mrs. Atman. The next time I was visiting my father in Poughkeepsie, New York area, I went by this school. I hadn't been to that school in 43 years or something like that, in a long time and it so happened that Mrs. Atman was actually retiring that week.

I was visiting on Wednesday and on Friday she was retiring. For me to be able to share just to eye to eye and just tell her what a difference her example more than anything else was in my life and that so much of the good that I have been able to do, and I gave her a copy of my book and whatever, quite well wouldn't have happened had it not been for people like her in my life.

It was just a deeply emotional moment for both of us, so I too have those people in my life, but my main mentors I think would be Thomas Barry, Brian Swim, although Brian has been more of an older brother than a mentor as such but Thomas Barry, Joanna Macy Shirley, Dolores LaChapelle, a deep ecologist and some of my closest colleagues now I think are Tom Atley, Peggy Hallman, David Sloan Wilson, the evolutionist, Joel Primack and Nancy Ellen Abrams, their View from the Center of the Universe, and Jonathan Height.

These are people who really have a strong grounding in our best scientific understanding of reality and yet are deeply committed to the practical side of that in helping us live more fruitful lives, more abundant lives, more joyous lives and applying that knowledge to help us have a sacred relationship to reality, whether you use secular or religious names for reality in such a way as I shared before that moves all of us forward in some kind of a healthy way.

Charles: Yeah.

Michael: This is the off the wall question that I purposely never let my guests know ahead of time and that is that if you could have dinner or let's say either one of two things, either a dinner party where you invite any three people in human history to join you for dinner, so all for of you have dinner together or a one on one over a beer, a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, or a meal.

So either a dinner party of a one on one, who would the three people in history that you would love to have that experience and why would you choose them?

Charles: That's a tough one. I am thinking about how much of these historical personas is our kind of projection from our own context of psychological qualities that we admire and stuff. Already, I am going to these metaphysical questions of who is this historical personage.

Maybe I shouldn't distract myself with that. Maybe this is just a delaying tactic.

Michael: Actually, I'll give you a few minutes because I realize that the most common response when I've asked this and I've asked this about 30 some odd times now is the person who says, "I have to give that more thought," or, "I'll wake up tomorrow morning and realize I should have said this or whatever."

Charles: Yeah. One person is coming to mind and the name is slipping my mind. A well-known African-American evolutionist, intellectual, Civil War era...

Michael: I think I know who you are talking about and I am also blanking on his name.

Charles: The number one guy.

Michael: Yeah, exactly.

Charles: I am just totally blanking.

Michael: Maybe three months ago, I was in a conversation about him. In any case, I think you and I probably have the same guy in mind and so let's go onto the other two.

Charles: I am thinking like it would be interesting to have a one on one with one of history's villains, like with Adolph Hitler or somebody like that. Maybe if I could go back in time and have a conversation with him in 1920 or something like that, maybe I could bring some kind of imprint that would have caused him to choose a different path.

Michael: You are actually the second person who suggested, for very different reasons but one of these brilliant people who were on the shadow side of history and did great damage, and yet they clearly were brilliant people.

Charles: Yeah. I am thinking one of these people who were so far ahead of their time that they were just disparaged and pilloried.

Michael: Yes.

Charles: I just read about a woman, I don't know about her name but she wrote like the first at least in her historical context, the first sex manual for married couples and it was written in a very discreet language but it basically gave sex advice to the husband and she was taken to court and charged with all kinds of crimes, and committed suicide.

Michael: Yeah, exactly.

Charles: So I think I have to get quiet and really think about exactly who but that's the kind of person who I would like to say hey, I am from the future. Thank you for what you did. Even if you never knew it, your work is important.

Michael: Amen. I love that. Charles, this has been great. Anything that you would like to say winding down on this subject that the past is rooting for us and the future is calling us to greatness? Then where would you advise people go to learn more about your work and go more deeply into it?

Charles: I think people can go to my website, [CharlesEisenstein.net](http://CharlesEisenstein.net). That has links to everything on my other work and I guess maybe my parting words would be pretty much the same thing I would say to the young people that you were asking earlier, that we have this innate knowledge of our magnificence as bearers of gifts and that innate knowledge that a more beautiful is possible. Possible not just in the sense of maybe it can happen if everybody gets it but possible in the sense that we have creative agency over it and in some paradoxical way where it doesn't matter what other people decide, like our actions are significant.

To trust that knowledge that what I do is important because that knowledge has been denied, suppressed and betrayed a lot, so in a lot of us it is kind of this shrunken thing or this amber that needs a bit of support so that we can dare believe it.

I guess we can help each other believe it and help each other do the stuff that other part of our mind says it's irrational, it is naïve, it is impractical and it will never work, pretty much anything really worth doing in this world is impractical and so ironically enough, it's naïve person who is actually more practical, the person who tries something that he's been told is impossible.

Things are always going to be this way, they are never going to really change, and that kind of cynicism, so I guess I would encourage you to be naïve a little bit.

Michael: Yeah. I've never heard a phrase quite like that but I love it. It certainly resonates with my own heart on that matter. Charles, thank you so much for taking the time to be part of this conversations series and just blessings on your work and your family, and I look forward to crossing paths at some point and just meeting you in person.

Charles: Yes, this was fun. I enjoyed it too.

Michael: Great. Take care.

Charles: Yeah. Bye-bye.

Michael: Bye.