Peace Culture and the Divine Natural Path

A SELF-HELP BOOK FOR HUMANITY
### Contents

- DEDICATION 2
- QUESTIONS TO BEGIN 4
- INTRODUCTION 5
- THE DIVINE NATURAL PATH 12
- PEACE CULTURE 23
- A SELF-HELP MOVEMENT FOR HUMANITY 27
Allow me to begin with a few questions

Did our universe arise from a Big Bang that happened out of nowhere for no reason? Or was it created by an unimaginably huge and powerful, omniscient, omnipotent, infinite, conscious creator?

If there is a creator, who or what is that creator and what, if anything, does the creator expect of you?

If there is a creator, does that creator love each and every one of us? Or did the creator just get things going and withdraw to some other part of the cosmos?

Are you, as some biologists insist, a collection of dumb, mindless, physical particles gathered together by eons of random chance, mutation and natural selection? Or are you, as some spiritual teachers insist, a temporary physical incarnation of an eternal soul on a path of infinite growth and development toward unification with our creator?

If we are eternal souls, what happens when we die? Do we go to heaven if we’re good and to hell if we’re bad? If we go to hell, are we there for eternity? Or is there a chance we will see the error of our ways and, through training and good behavior, ascend toward heaven?

Is life fundamentally a competition to eat without being eaten? Are we here to see who can build the largest empire, win the highest approval ratings, and leave behind the most offspring? Or are we here to learn to love each other, expand our consciousness, encounter our creator, enter an enlightened realm of limitless joy, and make Earth a paradise?

Is human society just a straight-line extension of animal societies? Or is there a critical discontinuity, something given to us and expected of us that has not been given to our plant and animal relatives and is not expected of them?

Are we all separate and on our own? Or does our importance derive from playing a role in an integrated whole that is greater than the sum of its parts?

Which is the better country—the People’s Republic of China or the United States of America?

Which is the better people—the Chinese or the Americans?

Which is the best enemy—the Iranians, the Iraqis, or the Irish?

Which is the best race—white people, black people, brown people, yellow people or red people?

Which is the best animal—the lion, the rat, the cockroach or tyrannosaurus rex?

Which is the best plant—the rose, the tulip, clover or the Venus flytrap?

Which is the best food—wheat, rice, corn, casava or ice cream?

And finally, which is better—questions or answers?
I was six years, ten months, and six days old when my father died on September 26, 1954. He was on a ship heading from Hakodate City on the Japanese island of Hokkaido to Sendai City on Japan’s biggest island, Honshu. He should not have been on that ship. He was supposed to sail the next day, but he was hurrying to get to a YMCA meeting in Sendai. He was living in Japan as fraternal secretary from North America, helping to rebuild the YMCA after the war.

Dean Leeper (my father), Midge Leeper (my mother) and Steve Leeper (me) first landed in Japan in December 1948. We lived in Tokyo for five years, then went back to the US for a year-long furlough. During that time, my father finished his education at Yale Divinity School. He returned to Japan in early September as a newly ordained Methodist minister, eager to begin another five-year term in Japan.

Three weeks later, his ship, the Toya Maru, was caught in an extremely unusual typhoon. This typhoon was small and extremely fast. It came flying up through the Japan Sea, the body of water that separates Japan from the Koreas and China (also known as the China Sea). Everyone expected it to fly on out into the Atlantic Ocean. But, when it got near Hokkaido, it ran into a monster high-pressure air mass. That high pressure slowed the little typhoon down and made it much bigger and stronger. That’s what tricked the captains of nine ships into thinking it had gone by when they were still in its eye. Nine ships set sail from Hakodate in the eye of the storm. None fared well. A couple of them broke in half. One sank.

The Toya Maru was a large ferry boat. The stern of a ferry is essentially a giant door that lets cars, buses, trucks and even railroad cars roll onto the ship. This big door is normally quite handy, but it made the Toya Maru’s back end too vulnerable to the waves. When the eye of the typhoon passed, the fierce winds built waves into mountains. It wasn’t long before the engine room flooded. The Toya Maru lost power. Still, it would never have flipped over if the chains holding one of the railroad cars hadn’t broken. When the chain broke and the next wave tilted the ship, the heavy train car rolled over. That rolling train car caused the ship to flip right over, quickly. Very few of the passengers got out. More than 1,100 people died, the greatest loss of life in a shipwreck since the Titanic.

In those last few hours, as the ship was rocking and rolling, my father was going around helping people get their life jackets on. He met a woman who had no life jacket, so he gave her his. She lived. He didn’t. He went on to do magic tricks for the children to keep them from panicking. He was, according to some survivors, like a ray of gentle sunshine in the dark and frightening third-class common area.

His death and the reports of his helpfulness made him something of a hero in Japan, especially among Christians, and especially within the YMCA community. I grew up in the US after his death, but I returned to Japan and have lived half my life there, partly because my father’s status as a fallen hero paved my way. I have made hundreds of speeches in Japan, and whenever I speak to a Christian audience or one connected to the YMCA, I am introduced as Dean Leeper’s son. These introductions often seem to imply that my father knew, as he handed his life jacket to the woman who lived, that this courageous act would cost him his life.

My mother always assured her four children that he never thought he needed a life jacket. “He was a Navy man. He loved to sail. A rocking and rolling ship didn’t scare him at all. Still,” Mother said, “we can be proud of him. He was probably one of the biggest and strongest people on that boat. If he had wanted to save himself, he could have climbed up to the top deck, jumped into the water, and swum to safety. The ship was only 600 meters from shore. He was 33 and a strong swimmer. But instead of thinking only of himself, he stayed behind to help others. He certainly did not think giving away his life jacket would cost him his life. He gave away his life jacket because he saw someone who needed it more than he did. He was there to help. That was the kind of person he was.”

Grandfather said, “He had a family. He should have saved himself.”

My mother countered, “That’s not how you raised him.”

That quieted Grandfather at the time, but everyone knew he had begged Dean not to go. Grandfather had said, “Don’t go back to Japan. If you do, I’ll never see you again.” Everyone knows he said that, but no one knows how he knew.

Some forty years later, my mother’s sister (Aunt Ginny) and her husband (Uncle Bill) moved from their house in Hacienda Heights, near Los Angeles, to a retirement neighborhood in Cloverdale, near Santa Rosa. During that move, Uncle Bill found a wire (literally, a copper wire wound around a spool) that my family in Japan had sent in 1951.
He got it transferred to cassette tapes and distributed those tapes to our extended family. Thanks to that tape, at the age of 64, I heard myself singing at the age of three. I heard my mother talking about our life in Japan. But most movingly, I heard my father speaking English for the first time since I was six. (I had seen one video of him speaking in Japanese.) I heard him describe his passion for education, healthcare, justice and freedom. He believed that lifting the standard of living in Asia and around the world was essential for world peace, which was his top priority. He wanted to do whatever he could to prevent the coming war on the Korean Peninsula. As I listened, I realized that my becoming a peace activist was determined by my DNA. My mother was a peacemaker as well, so I got it from both sides. I was doomed from the start to this cause.

Incident One

A year or two after my father’s death, Aunt Ginny said, “Arthur Ford’s coming to town. Let’s go see him.” At the time, in the late 1950s, Arthur Ford was the most famous psychic medium in the US. He was known for helping people contact loved ones in the spirit world. My mother wasn’t particularly interested but said, “If you can get us in, I’ll go.”

Aunt Ginny got an appointment, and the two went. When Mother and Aunt Ginny met Ford, he asked, “Who are you trying to contact?”

“Dean Leeper. He died in a shipwreck on September 26, 1954.”

After asking for a few more details, like time and place of birth, he said, “I will try to contact him.” With that,

Ford went into what appeared to be a meditative state. A little while later, he announced that he was in contact with Dean Leeper. He proceeded to tell my mother some things that she and Dean had experienced during their honeymoon in Mexico. She never told me exactly what those things were, but she did say that they were concrete details that no one else in the world knew or could have known. These honeymoon things convinced my mother that Ford was, indeed, in contact with Dean. Then, Ford said that Dean had some things he wanted her to know. One was that he had no intention of dying. He didn’t think he would. The second was that he did not drown and did not suffer. He was crushed when the railroad car rolled over. The third was that he loved her very much.

My mother accepted this information as true but was confused. My father’s body was discovered only months after the accident. When it was recovered, the general secretary of the YMCA, Mr. Ikeda, went to identify the remains. He reported that Dean looked calm and peaceful. The new information she had just gotten from Dean through Arthur Ford did not square with this report from Mr. Ikeda. She checked again with Mr. Ikeda, and this time, he admitted that the remains he identified were barely recognizable. The body had been in the water for a long time, and it had obviously been crushed. He had lied the first time to avoid causing her pain.

“If you can get us in, I’ll go.”
Incident Two

When I was thirteen, my mother went to a theater with a friend to see a movie. She had no husband, so if she wanted to go out, she had to hire a babysitter. On this occasion, I was promoted to babysitter. I was in charge of my younger sister and two younger brothers.

We were outside playing kick the can with kids in the neighborhood. My sister was running. She was looking back at whoever was chasing her, not where she was going. She ran into the sharp fin of a parked car. She fell to the ground, holding her eye, blood oozing way too rapidly from behind her hand.

I was terrified. What should I do? Do I call 911? Do I run up the street and get Mrs. Falcone? I was still standing there undecided when my mother showed up. She took over. She took my sister to the hospital where she got stitches to close a gash above her eye. Problem solved. But why was my mother there so soon?

She and her friend were watching the movie when, all of a sudden, she stood up and said, “Something happened. I have to go home!” She and her friend left the theater immediately, walked to the car and drove home to find me wondering what to do about my bleeding sister. But what happened in my mother’s mind that caused her to suddenly stand and leave the theater in the middle of a movie?

One more point. Our house is at least fifteen minutes from the theater. It took at least five minutes to walk out of the theater and to the car. But Mom arrived no more than two or three minutes after my sister got hurt. That means she stood up in the theater BEFORE the injury took place.

Incident Three

When I was sixteen, my mother married a physics professor. His wife had died leaving him with five children. My father had died leaving my mother with four children. Now, we were a family with nine children. This new family loved to go camping, so we often left for the woods on Friday night and returned Sunday night. When I was seventeen, I decided not to go on one of those family camping trips. I had a lot of homework, and I wasn’t feeling very well. Besides, I was sixteen. So the family went without me.

On Saturday night, they were sitting around the fire when Mom suddenly said, “We have to go home. Something’s wrong with Stevie.” (I was always Stevie to her.) This was highly unusual, and I have no doubt her declaration was met with much mumbling and grumbling, including from my new father. But Mom was determined. She got the whole family to pack up and come home a day early.

When they got home, I was feeling a bit worse. I had a stomachache, but it was no big deal. I was certainly not about to call a doctor, but Mom immediately called Doctor Ylitalo, a good friend of the family who lived nearby. Dr. Ylitalo arrived in a few minutes, felt around on my abdomen and said, “Let’s take him to the clinic.” I went to the clinic and was in surgery before I knew it. According to the doctor who performed that surgery, my appendix was on the verge of rupture. If Mom had not come home and not called the doctor, I might have died. A ruptured appendix is dangerous. I might not have been able to call an ambulance.

How did my mother know I was in trouble? How could she be sure enough to make the whole family come home early? What made her call the doctor even though all I had was a mild stomachache?

Incident Four

One late summer’s day in 1984 a friend called and said he wanted to test my ESP. Happy to oblige, I invited him over that afternoon. Out on the back porch, I lay down in my hammock and began guessing regular playing cards. I got some, missed some, and was probably right around chance when suddenly I said, “Wait a minute! I believe in ESP. My mother was good at it, and I’ve done it myself. I am going to lie here until I know what the next card is.”

So I did. I lay in my hammock waiting to know the card. After a few minutes, I went into a sort of dream state. In that dream I saw myself playing Frisbee golf. At that point, I knew the card was a 3, 4 or 5 because those are the pars on the course, but I didn’t know which. Finally, I said to myself, “It must be a 4 because that’s in the middle.” Just then I saw a large, flashing red five. I woke up and said, “It’s a red five!” My friend turned over the five of hearts.

We decided once was not enough, so he carefully shuffled the deck, and I lay back down to know the next card. I lay a bit longer this time but eventually did go into the dream state. In that state I was looking at the card wondering what it was. After a while, in my dream, I guessed, “It’s the ace of spades.” Then, still in the dream, I turned it over and was disappointed to see it was the king of spades. I woke up and said, “It’s the king of spades.” And it WAS the king of spades!

At that point, my friend made some amazed comments but had to go. We didn’t have time to keep going or even process what had just happened. He seemed flustered, actually, and when I talked to him a couple weeks later and mentioned what had...
happened, he had no memory of having been at my house that day to test my ESP. His lack of memory amazed me but did not in any way cause me to doubt my experience, which was absolutely, undeniably real. It confirmed the power of the entity behind that experience.

Meanwhile, right after he left, it occurred to me that I should hone my ESP talent, then go out to Las Vegas and make a lot of money. I got my own cards, shuffled them up, and lay down on my bed determined to lie there until I knew the top card. I lay for nearly four hours, part of which was spent in undreaming sleep. Then, I heard a voice. It was in my head, but it was not my voice. It said, “That was to let you know it’s possible. You need a teacher.” Less than a year later, with very little conscious involvement by me, I was in Japan studying the Divine Natural Path.

When the voice told me to find a teacher, I had no plan to go to Japan. And when I went to Japan, I wasn’t looking for a teacher. I was looking for money. I went to Tokyo with a new boss for a new job, but the job I was supposed to take dissolved the day after we got there. I went to Hiroshima to visit friends from Atlanta, but there, I was surprisingly offered a job to start immediately at the YMCA. (An English teacher had gone missing.) That was in December 1984. In the summer of 1985, I remembered I was supposed to be looking for a teacher, so I decided to fast until I found one. I had been fasting for about a week when a woman I met at a volunteer project on August sixth asked me if I would like to study “Japanese spiritual culture.” I said, “Sure.” She introduced me to my two teachers (one who lived in Hiroshima, one from Tokyo), and I have been studying the Divine Natural Path ever since. Sort of.

While my spiritual self has been studying the Divine Natural Path since 1985, it’s been hindered the whole time by my politically radical, secular self. My spiritual friends prayed regularly for peace, but they were focused on the spirit world and their own spiritual growth. My political friends were politically progressive activists who, for the most part, had nothing but disdain for the idea that prayer could make the world more peaceful. I lived in both of these communities for thirty years but kept them quite separate. Or maybe, I let them keep their respective parts of me quite separate.

My Spiritual Self

My teachers were working on a mission: to heal Hiroshima on the astral plane. It seems that so many people in Hiroshima were killed so suddenly and inexplicably that their spirits created a replica of 1945 Hiroshima on the astral plane, and, in the 1980s, many were still living there. Apparently, people who die suddenly come only gradually to the realization that they are dead to the physical world. In Hiroshima, this realization was inhibited by the huge number of souls confused at the same time in the same way.

Maintaining a fiction in the spirit world requires a great deal of energy and leads to suffering there, as it does here. My teachers were working with these 1945 spirits, helping them accept the situation and move on to higher dimensions. They and several of my spiritually oriented friends spent a great deal of time performing rituals to awaken the spirits. Both of my teachers and most of the friends who participated in those ceremonies now live in the spirit world themselves, but before they passed, they all expressed great satisfaction that Hiroshima was now quite clean and healthy at that level.

I have never visited Hiroshima on the astral plane, so I can’t describe it from my own observation. However, if I know anything at all, I know that my teachers and friends were not liars. I listened carefully to their reports and have no doubt that they were working on something they considered to be extremely important that had to do with the spiritual effects of the Hiroshima bombing. They said they were working to clear up an astral projection of 1945 Hiroshima, and I have no reason to doubt them. They spent substantial time, energy and money on this effort, and they never did anything to enrich or advertise themselves. The only thing they did in the physical world was hold meetings on the 6th of every month to pray for peace, which is how I got to know them. And, because I was interested, they told me as much as they could about this work. They taught me and trained me to the extent I could handle it, and all for free. They never asked for anything from me.

Soon after I met them, I learned that many of them were doing a certain kind of meditation called Chinkon. I told them I wanted to learn that meditation. They checked with God, and, to the great surprise of us all, God said no. I did eventually learn Chinkon, but only after waiting twenty years for God’s permission. God did not initially want me to learn this meditation partly because I was too interested in power and partly because my mind had been fractured to bits by the drugs I took in my misguided youth. Before meditation, I had to learn concentration. Though I was frustrated and insulted at the time, God was quite right to make me wait and to keep me, for the most part, out of the spirit world. My mission is not in the spirit world. My mission is between those who know the spirit world and those who don’t.
“My spiritual friends prayed regularly for peace, but they were focused on the spirit world and their own spiritual growth. My political friends were politically progressive activists who, for the most part, had nothing but disdain for the idea that prayer could make the world more peaceful.”

— STEVE LEEPER
My Political Self

My political friends were doing their best to persuade the world to eliminate nuclear weapons. I got to know them by editing their English and translating their Japanese articles and books. I wasn’t interested in peace or politics. I was in it for the money and was just biding my time until I could go back to Atlanta, where I was planning to open a branch office of the company that had flown me to Tokyo. I didn’t care about Hiroshima or peace or changing the world in any way. I was still somewhat interested in learning to control my ESP so I could go home and win a bunch of money in Las Vegas. If you had asked me at the time, I would have denied it, but with hindsight, I can see clearly where my head and heart were at, and it wasn’t good. In fact, if it weren’t for my wife, Japan and the Divine Natural Path, I’m quite sure I would have led an exciting but short life in the drug and porn industries.

Instead, my wife, two Japanese women, and I started a translation and consulting company that, in 1998, after India and Pakistan conducted their nuclear tests, turned into a translation and peace activist company. About ten years after that, thanks to my peace activist friends and the activities they led me into, I was appointed chairman of the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation. The HPCF is Hiroshima’s peace and international relations arm. When I was chairman, we had 101 employees and a budget of $18 million. I was completely incapable of managing an organization like that, even in English, but Mayor Akiba, who appointed me, told me not to worry about the A-bomb museum or the other facilities the foundation managed. I was to concentrate on Mayors for Peace, the NGO that Hiroshima and Nagasaki used to campaign for nuclear weapons abolition.

As the first non-Japanese chairman of this organization, I was asked to go around the world talking about the bombing of Hiroshima, nuclear weapons, the movement against them, and, of course, peace. I frequently found myself speaking to young audiences, certain members of which were required by their teachers to ask me questions. And the most common questions, which they had written into their notebooks even before hearing anything from me, were: “What is peace?” and “What is peace culture?”

These were actually very good questions. I took a look at the Peace Culture Foundation website and got no help at all. I did discover that the term “peace culture” (heiwa bunka) was probably invented in Hiroshima in the early 1970s, but I looked in vain for a definition or any sort of description. Hiroshima and its A-bomb survivors have long done an excellent job of conveying certain things. They are great at persuading just about anyone that the atomic bombing was a horror; that nuclear weapons are unimaginably terrible and should be eliminated; that war is hell; that peace is better. However, Hiroshima says next to nothing about what “peace” and “peace culture” are. If peace is better than war, how does human society have to change to prevent war and maintain peace? The answer to this question is not found on the website of the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation.

The other organization that talks about peace culture is the UN. The UN website defines peace culture as “a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations.” This definition clearly states that peace culture rejects violence, but no state members and precious few UN employees or even NGO activists are pacifists, so we are left to wonder what “values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life” we are talking about here. Nowhere have I found a clear, concrete, practical description of “peace culture”; that is, an answer to this question: how do human beings have to change in our minds, hearts, and socio-economic-political systems if we hope to avoid war and maintain a just and enjoyable peace? Since at least 2007, my life has been a fairly consistent effort to answer this question and persuade the world to move in that direction.

Integration

I have recently become quite convinced that, at least for my own growth, I have to bring my political (peace culture) and spiritual (Divine Natural Path) selves together. I am secretly hoping that by doing so openly on these pages, I can help you do something similar. Gandhi famously told us to be the change we want to see in the world, and I want to see no change more than a thorough, friendly, peaceful integration of the political and spiritual aspects of global society. I have political (strategic, tactical) and spiritual (growth, meaning) reasons for this, but I will spare you these for the moment. If you’ve read this far, I’m sure you have your own reasons and need no persuasion. But most of us are fragmented, within and among our “selves.” I may feel this especially acutely because I’ve been living in two countries, but recent events reveal that the societies of both the US and Japan are barely holding together. Long divided by race, gender, age, class, religion, ideology, occupational and political affiliation, geographic
As I write, global society is struggling with the COVID 19 pandemic. This struggle is revealing at high resolution the two primary directions we are considering. In one direction, the world draws together. We hear comments like, “We’re all in the same boat,” or, “We have to fight this thing together.” These are peace culture comments.

On the other hand, we see tensions rising between the US and China, among the countries of Europe, between native populations and refugees, and between those who think leaders need to be stronger versus those who think the masses need to be stronger. Given the myriad urgent global problems we face and our many profoundly different approaches to solving them, will we come together in a collective effort to make the world safer and better for all? Or will we persist in competing for the power required to assure our own security and/or inflict our solutions on the rest of humanity?

The daily news makes it seem likely that the human family will devolve. We seem determined to avoid doing what we need to do to save ourselves from the misery and likely extinction many of us see coming. On the other hand, human beings have tremendous untapped potential. We are certainly evolving toward peace and oneness. We are definitely expanding our Earth-consciousness. Young people today are incomparably more aware of themselves as Earthlings than I was even 20 years ago, so let’s assume anything is still possible.

In the pages that follow, I attempt to integrate the Divine Natural Path and peace culture to offer my understanding of what Earthlings will need to do to survive. My hope is that you will be inspired to seek your own internal integration and become a conscious, enthusiastic participant in the emerging movement toward global integration. Inspired by others working in similar ways on the same grand project, I’m hoping that, as an increasing number of us seek increased integration at ever higher levels of consciousness, we will naturally draw together in an effort to pursue truth and follow the will of our creator, regardless of the outcome. After all, at this point, it’s do or die.
Professor Nara and Mr. Sera both emphasized the importance of studying and learning from nature. What they taught has helped me in many ways. I hope it will help you and the rest of humanity.

When Tsuyoshi Nara was born, his mother’s spiritual advisor said, “This boy is special. May I raise him?” His birth mother accepted this request, so he was raised by an intensely Buddhist, rather famous, spiritually adept mother. His adoptive mother made her living offering spiritual advice. Believing her to be in close communication with the spirit world, her devotees listened to her talks, read what she wrote and consulted with her personally. When Tsuyoshi was 18, Heaven told his mother to stop giving spiritual advice. It was depleting her energy. She knew she should follow that advice, but she had so many people depending on her. They called her at all hours of day and night. She couldn’t stop helping them, and she fell seriously ill.

Shortly before she died, she told Tsuyoshi about his birth family. He got to know them, but he didn’t live with them. After graduating from university, he went to explore India, the birthplace of Buddhism. He ended up in an ashram where, through Hinduism and yoga, he achieved what the spiritual world calls “enlightenment.” He learned a number of Indian languages, became a linguist, and taught for many years at Tokyo Foreign Language University. In “retirement,” he taught for some years at Seisen, a Christian women’s college. Throughout his life, he studied religion, always seeking the resolution of religious conflict. He prayed in accordance with a variety of religious forms and with no form, to suit the occasion. And, he was instrumental in convening a group of people in Hiroshima who prayed from 7:30 to 8:15pm on the sixth of every month for 35 years. That prayer took place in a Buddhist temple, but in a room with no religious iconography, and the prayer itself was silent so anyone of any faith or lack of faith could participate without feeling uncomfortable.

This prayer on the sixth in Hiroshima came about through his cousin, Takenori Sera. Professor Nara had been coming to Hiroshima twice a year to work with spirits on the astral plane. Only after discovering Takenori did he start working with physical human beings.

Professor Nara trained Takenori, then they trained others in Hiroshima to perform ceremonies to awaken the spirits suffering on the astral plane, helping them proceed to higher realms. Both men were teachers of what they called Kamnagara no michi, that is, Shinto before Buddhism. Professor Nara spoke excellent English, and his English for Kamnagara no Michi was Divine Natural Path. Professor Nara and Mr. Sera both emphasized the importance of studying and learning from nature. What they taught has helped me in many ways. I hope it will help you and the rest of humanity.
Nature and Self

The name “Divine Natural Path” instantly raises the question, what is nature? When we hear that word, we tend to think of the sea or mountains or plants and animals, but nature includes much more than these visible phenomena. “Nature” in “Divine Natural Path” encompasses everything that exists, including the many elements, forms, and beings we can’t perceive.

In Japanese, the word for nature is shizen or 自然. The first of these characters means “self.” The second means “thus” or “as is.” So the literal meaning of “nature” in Japanese is “self as is.” To understand the Divine Natural Path, we have to know what is meant by “self as is.”

We begin by asking, “What is the self of a grain of rice?” Or, more relevantly, what does it mean for a grain of rice to actualize itself completely? If the grain is planted in fertile ground, and if it receives sufficient water and warmth, a sprout will appear. The stem grows longer and stronger. Leaves grow and increase in number. In a few months, it’s a rice plant that flowers and produces fruit. If this process goes well and to completion, a single grain of rice can reproduce itself a hundred times, and that would be the perfect or complete actualization of the “self” of a grain of rice. If the grain sprouts, grows a stem and leaves, but then dries up and dies, that would not be perfect actualization of the self.

One small acorn from an oak tree can sprout, grow, and mature into an oak tree. Over the next ten, twenty, hundred, two or even three hundred years, that oak tree can grow into a huge tree producing millions of acorns in its lifetime. That would be the natural, complete actualization of “self” for a tree. If it dies along the way, if it gets cut down to become a floor or furniture, or if it’s burned in a fireplace or forest fire, we can still say it had a good and valuable life, but the acorn did not achieve the perfect, complete actualization of its self. The Divine Natural Path is a way of life that increases the probability or speed of complete actualization. It helps individuals, families, companies, and other groups manifest their full potential.

Applying “self” to humans, the acorn would be the fertilized egg. The seed grows in its mother’s womb into a fetus. After about nine months, the fetus leaves the womb to start life on its own. The infant grows into childhood, matures into an adult, grows old and eventually dies. Dying is one inevitable aspect of actualizing the self, but if the seed miscarries or the infant dies at birth or the youth is cut down in war or accident, that life is not wrong or meaningless. Neither is it the full actualization of the potential carried in the fertilized egg.

Self-Actualization

Buddhism identifies four universal forms of human suffering: birth, illness, old age, and death. We will die. Avoiding an early death, we will get old. This is the natural human pattern. Professor Nara thought illness unnatural and unnecessary, but most of us do get sick now and then, so Buddhism includes sickness among the unavoidable universal human experiences categorized as “suffering.” It was these four forms of suffering from which the Buddha found release through enlightenment.

Though birth, growing old, and dying are universal, natural phenomena, they bring us suffering and sorrow, so we look around for some way to escape that pain. And here is where religion comes in.

Many religions, including the Divine Natural Path, assure us that all suffering will vanish if we do this or that. However, we need to be clear that following the Divine Natural Path or believing in Jesus will not keep us from growing old and dying. We can believe wholeheartedly in the ten thousand Shinto gods, and we will still get old and die. Regardless of our faith in any god or buddha, we will experience aging and death. These are problems that lie beyond the reach of faith. We have to begin with the clear understanding that faith will not prevent aging and death. However, our experience of aging and death as suffering is up to us. The aging and death are nonnegotiable, but the suffering can be transcended.

The question now becomes, how can we experience suffering without suffering? Some religions teach that no escape from suffering is possible in this world, but if we are good and get to heaven, we will be eternally free of all suffering. If that’s true, the afterlife will be great, but what can we do about suffering here, in this physical world? There are at least two ways to approach this question. One is resignation. No matter how much we rage against the system, we can’t avoid the suffering, so the mature course is to resign ourselves to it. The other method is to transcend it through full comprehension and welcoming acceptance. We learn to experience aging and death as part of the beautiful structure or plan for this world. We accept them as natural processes that we need and even want to experience to fully complete or actualize our true selves. This second method is often referred to as satori. The difference between resignation and satori is subtle but profound.
Self and Death

When we say that humans are born, grow old and die, that seems to imply a beginning and an end to someone’s story. For now, I am typing these words, then having a bit of tea while thinking about what to say next. When I die, I won’t be doing any of these things. What happened to the energy with which I was typing and thinking? What happened to the energy we usually refer to as “life?” We have a physical body, and when a certain energy or force is in it, it does things. When that force is not there, it stops doing things. But what happens to that energy? Is what we call life merely a product of processes in the physical body?

Certain experiences have convinced me that the energy we call “life” or “spirit” continues after death. Professor Nara affirmed this based on his own abundant experience of what he referred to as the spirit world. If you are completely closed to the possibility of a spirit world and life continuing after death, you may as well stop reading here. But if you accept the possibility that something about our “self” goes on after death in a different realm or dimension, then we move on to the next question.

What is our true “self?” It can’t be the physical body that dies. The true self must be the spirit that continues. The spirit that never dies.

As I type this, I’m wearing a certain set of clothes. If I take these clothes off, you may find me uncomfortable to look at, but you will recognize me as me. In fact, I could put on a whole different set of clothes, and you will still recognize me as me. In the same way, I can drop a physical body and take on a new one, but my spirit continues, recognizable as me to those who know me at that spirit level. And if this is true, genuine completion or actualization of the self is a matter of perfecting or actualizing the soul or spirit. Human spirits can take on physical bodies, but they can also exist without them. Thus, we can’t say we have actualized our “self” until we are expressing ourselves perfectly or completely with or without a physical body.

In India, Hindus believe, like Buddhists, that growing old and dying are universal forms of suffering. But in addition, all humans live in society, meaning we have relationships. We can’t live alone. We have to procreate and raise families or we will go extinct. Thus, human life inevitably involves suffering derived from relationships. Some people we like. Some we don’t. Even the ones we love make us angry, jealous, and sad, so as long as we keep living in society, we can’t avoid this suffering.

And we’re not just living with other human beings. We have to get along with all sorts of other lifeforms, including viruses. And since we live on Earth, we are subject to typhoons, earthquakes, floods, droughts and all sorts of natural disasters that can also lead to suffering. So we all have to be born, grow old, die, plus suffer the pain that comes from relationships and the natural environment.

The belief in India is that life is full of suffering, so the path to happiness is to die and avoid being reborn. Unfortunately, through transmigration and the law of causality (karma), humans are born over and over again. Being born is pain. Being born, you die, but then you can’t help being reborn. The goal is to break this chain.

There are two ways to break the chain, and suicide is not one of them. Of course, one way is to drop the physical body and avoid taking another, but that’s not so easy. We all have physical bodies on this physical plane, but at the same time, we have astral bodies, mind-spirit bodies, spirit bodies, spirit-god bodies and god bodies. Most of us on this physical plane believe that our “self” is our physical body, but the physical body is just a small part of our self. Our true self consists of concentric bodies that extend from the physical body all the way out to the god body.

If you believe your physical body is your “self,” you are convinced that your “self” dies with your physical body. However, when the physical body dies, the mind moves to the astral body. At that point, it believes the astral body is its “self.” After being in that realm for a while and, assuming some spiritual progress, the astral body dies, and the mind moves on to the mind-spirit body. There, it becomes convinced that the mind-spirit body is its true “self.” At that point, some souls with sufficient training...
...we can’t say we have actualized our “self” until we are expressing ourselves perfectly or completely with or without a physical body.

— Steve Leeper
move rapidly up to the god body. However, the vast majority spend a long time cycling through physical, astral and mind-spirit bodies. Typically, from the mind-spirit body they take on another astral body, then they take another physical body and show up again in this physical world. Some avoid the physical body and just shuttle back and forth between the astral and mind-spirit bodies, but that, too, involves suffering.

In the end, it’s only when we’re able to stay permanently in our god body that we have broken the transmigratory chain of birth and death, at which point we are completely freed from suffering. It usually takes an extremely long time to achieve that level, so what should we do in the meantime?

The other way to break the chain is to adopt a lifestyle or achieve a mental state in which, whether we’re in a physical body, an astral body, or under any circumstance whatsoever, we are always enjoying ourselves and not experiencing pain. If we want to escape from suffering, we have to adopt one of these two methods: either we concentrate on getting to the god body, or we develop a mental state in which we simply don’t experience suffering, no matter what body we’re in.

Enlightenment and the Divine Natural Path

But is there really such a mental state? Is it actually possible to avoid experiencing pain and suffering even while we have a physical or astral body? According to Professor Nara and many others, there is, and that is the whole point of the Divine Natural Path—to get us there. All we have to do is learn to “live naturally.” This sounds easy, but it’s extremely difficult. There are a few quite stringent conditions.

The first condition is to obey the laws of the universe in which we live. The absolute power that permeates the universe is no joke. It is THE LAW, so the first condition is to revere, worship and follow it. For example, many areas of the world have four seasons—spring, summer, fall, and winter. I could have started with any season, but the order is immutable. Summer comes after spring, winter comes after fall. This is a natural pattern, a natural law, and any attempt to change this will fail. In fact, any lifestyle that attempts to ignore this pattern will lead to suffering.

Summer is hot. During the summer, we do what we can to stay cool. Winter is cold, so we do what we can to stay warm. Living in harmony with the seasons is natural. Most people do this because it’s extremely fundamental to the Divine Natural Path. However, the laws of the universe are not always as obvious as hot and cold. Sometimes, for example, we might find some extremely valuable fossil fuel in the ground. We might become dependent on it, and we might use so much of it so quickly that our waste products pollute our environment. The people who first found oil can be forgiven for assuming it was an inexhaustible gift from God to be used without measure. But today, it’s clear that we are generating more waste than our environment can absorb and purify. Our failure to recognize and abide by the hard limits of our environment is causing billions to suffer already and will bring far worse suffering to everyone if we don’t mend our ways and live in harmony with nature.

The second condition required by the Divine Natural Path is honesty. As we all know, humans tend to use deception for our own benefit. We skillfully deceive each other, and, among humans, lies sometimes obtain the desired effect. However, nature cannot be deceived. You can say, “I watered the blueberries,” as much as you want, but if you haven’t really watered them, and if it doesn’t rain, they will die. Nature operates in strict accordance with truth, so we should, too, if we want to avoid suffering.

To live in accordance with truth and the laws of the universe, we must be absolutely honest. Anyone who is not honest soon finds it impossible to actualize his or her true self. This seems obvious and simple, but complete honesty is extremely difficult. An honest life is one in which we actually do what we say or even think. Anyone who really wants to transcend all suffering and live in the realm of absolute joy must first learn to satisfy the two conditions just mentioned: honesty and obedience to the laws of nature.

The third condition has to do with our relationship to nature. We can honestly plant a seed, water it, give it compost, and protect it from weeds and animals, but that is not enough. Despite doing our best, along comes a flood or a drought or a typhoon or some other disaster, and our efforts come to nothing. Many beings or forces can kill our plants or anything else we try to grow. However hard we work, we have to keep in mind that nature can step in and destroy anything else we try to grow. However hard we work, we have to keep in mind that nature can step in and make complete actualization impossible.

It is with this in mind that we pray. We need to stay in touch with nature, asking for nature’s guidance and assistance. When we get it, we have to offer our gratitude. We must never forget that no one achieves anything entirely on their own. Recognition of the absolutely indispensable, decisive role of other beings and of nature in all that we do is the third condition, which we recognize through prayer and gratitude. Those who fail to pray and listen and express gratitude are not following the Divine
Natural Path.

If we fail to observe and follow the laws of nature, if we are not scrupulously honest, and if we are not recognizing the role of nature in our lives, we will not escape suffering in this world or the next. On the other hand, when we achieve or actualize these three conditions fully, we will enter a realm of limitless joy that transcends suffering and pain. But to actualize the three conditions and enter the realm of joy, a fourth condition is extremely helpful.

The Fourth Condition – Giving Up Desire

The Buddha taught us that desire is the source of all suffering and sorrow. If so, the question becomes, how do we get rid of desire? In what state are we free from desire?

Some say human desire is endless, but the desires of the physical body do have built-in limits. In fact, these limits offer a hint that helps us understand the key to success through the whole system. We have taken these physical bodies precisely to grasp this key.

To proceed from the physical plane to the astral plane, then on to the mind-spirit plane without having to take on another physical body, we have to eliminate entrapping desires at each level. However, if we, now, here, in the physical world, grasp the key to eliminating desire, we can use the same technique to transcend the desires that emerge in all the higher realms as well.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways to deal with desire. One is to say, “I have such and such a desire, so I’ll just satisfy it and see what happens.” If you want to eat, eat as much as you want. When you do, your desire for food disappears. Unfortunately, certain desires—for money, fame, and power, for instance—have no built-in limit. These desires, once activated, tend to strengthen. People rarely think, “Okay, I have enough power.” In fact, many desires can lead to states of uncontrolled addiction.

Here is where we need to use the other method. Let’s say you are just sitting down to a delicious meal, when suddenly, someone comes along and says, “If you leave that meal and come with me right now, I’ll give you $100,000.” You will naturally and easily abandon the delicious meal and go for the money, right? Then, let’s say you’re offered $100,000, but another person comes along and says, “If you go with me right now, I’ll give you the job of your dreams, and you’ll never need to worry about money again.” At that point, you will naturally give up the $100,000 for something even better.

This is the key. When desires arise, we need to be pursuing something else that is much more enjoyable or valuable. If we have a higher goal, lower desires can come and go without distracting us. We can avoid being distracted by food or money or fame if we are concentrating on your pursuit of something higher, something you perceive as better.

To eliminate desire at a certain level, we need to have a higher desire. If we can truly experience something that is so exciting and pleasurable that money, fame and power lose their allure, we have your best weapon against desire on any level. Of course, one of the complications here is the tendency to choose the wrong source of “higher” excitement and pleasure. That mistake is known as addiction. We can get addicted to alcohol, drugs, sex, and even our own adrenaline, so we have to be careful where we get the excitement and pleasure for which we abandon other desires.

Another complication is that to survive, we need to receive a certain amount of all the things we tend to desire. But if we really experience something that transcends all desires, we enter a state of mind in which we just take what comes. If it comes, fine. If not, that’s fine too. If we can maintain this state, we’ll be able to completely leave all things to nature.

“But,” you may say, “if I just sit here, I won’t get anything to eat. I won’t have clothes to wear or be able to pay the rent.” Luckily, you couldn’t just sit still and do nothing if you tried. After a while, you will move. You will do something. And even if you manage to keep your body still for a while, you will be thinking. Your mind will be moving, guiding you to do things. That’s the way we’re made.

Human beings were made to eat food, wear clothes, have shelter and live physical lives. Eating, clothes and all the rest of it can be a source of joy. And as long as the joy is given by God, that is, as long as it comes to us naturally, we can obediently and gratefully accept it. The key is to eat naturally and wear clothes naturally and do all things to the exact extent that they are naturally provided to us. And the...obey the laws of the universe in which we live.
This is the key. When desires arise, we need to be pursuing something else that is much more enjoyable or valuable.

key to that is to keep our minds pointed at all times toward something much more wonderful than all the pleasures of this world.

The wonderful thing to which I refer, of course, is the joy of experiencing the presence of God. The highest desire of all, the desire to end desire, is the desire to experience God. Without experiencing God, it is next to impossible to completely eliminate desire, but experiencing God is possible, even in this physical world. People who do so are usually given a special mission. That is, when they meet God, God usually asks them to teach others how to do so.

Some say you can only enter the realm of absolute freedom if you abandon all the desires of your physical body, your astral body, your spirit body, and all the rest of your bodies. To do this, you have to be born and reborn thousands of times. But even if we’re aware only of our physical body, we can lift our consciousness to the god plane. It’s possible to achieve the god-body state of consciousness even while living in a physical body. This highest of all joys, the joy of grasping the truth and encountering the presence of God, is possible for you. You can do it if you try. In fact, you may already have done it, at least briefly, and if so, you know that once you have tasted this joy, you will never trade it for anything that can happen to your physical body. Nothing anyone can say, no amount of money, not even threats and physical pain can touch it. The joy of knowing truth, the joy of knowing God, cannot be expressed in words. God is beyond it all.

God

Here we come to the issue of God. What is God? What is God’s relationship to nature? Some spiritual disciplines use names like Great Spirit or Life Force or Tao. Some philosophies refer to Truth or Law or even “It,” but ultimately all these refer to the same being. All spiritually oriented people refer by these names to something they consider to be ultimate, omnipotent, and omnipresent; some conscious being that is at work at all times and in all places. Spiritually advanced people often resist saying much at all about their ultimate being. They just say “God” or some word with which they indicate an absolute existence and the creator of all that is. So, for now, let’s say that God is a sacred being with unlimited power that exists in all times and in all places; a being that creates whole universes by acts of will. Scientists say our Earth was created four billion years ago. They differ more about the beginning of our universe, but most seem to think it’s 16 to 20 billion years old. Science has yet to prove it, but Professor Nara was quite convinced that we live in one of many universes, each with its own set of laws. The infinite and unlimited God he believed in can create or destroy a universe with a thought. Our universe is merely a cell in God’s body.

Have you ever let an ant crawl on you? I have, and I could see the ant quite well. I could even predict some aspects of its behavior. But what was that ant’s experience of me? I don’t think that ant had any idea what it was dealing with. That ant couldn’t even see me. It was clearly just seeing or smelling what was right in front of it. Similarly, we are completely unable to see God with our physical eyes. To see God, we have to look with spiritual eyes. To hear God, we have to listen with spiritual ears. We cannot see or hear God without employing something beyond our five physical senses.

Some people living today do have the necessary spiritual eyes and ears, but such people are rare. Professor Nara and Mr. Sera were such people. However, spiritually advanced people are not the only ones who can experience God. Anyone who asks with sufficient purity and intensity to experience God can do so, at least momentarily. God will appear in a form he or she can see or hear. God can easily shrink its infinite being into a form that physical eyes can see or speak in words physical ears can hear.

We have probably all heard or read stories about situations in which God appeared to physical eyes. A survey of such stories reveals that God only appears when someone has offered his or her heart purely and sincerely, often in desperation. Of course, there is no guarantee that just because we offer our hearts purely and sincerely, God will appear. If God were subject to any guarantee, our love would become conditional and instrumental. Only when we are offering profound, unconditional love, already filled with gratitude, with absolutely no cost-benefit calculation; only when God is touched by our sincerity and need does God appear to us in a form we can recognize as God. And living in that space—living in limitless, pure, unconditional love for God—is the ultimate actualization of self and is, of course,
the goal of the Divine Natural Path, the state in which we are released from suffering.

We are all now living on Planet Earth. Whatever we might do or not do, someday this planet will return to the void. This is nature’s law. Anything with form will lose that form. When the Earth is gone, we might just get ourselves born onto some other planet. However, any planet we go to will die one day. In fact, this whole universe will die someday. Then what do we do? There may be lots of other universes, but what if they all disappear? No matter what happens on the physical plane, we are all living permanently within the infinite being I am calling God. Whether we have a physical body or not, our soul will always survive within that infinite being. And those who learn, through trial and error, by overcoming millions of problems and circumstances, to live according to God’s pure will; those who maintain their awareness of being a part of God can live forever in a realm of joy. I am still unable to maintain that awareness all the time. I get distracted. I forget God and fall into fear or anger or desire, but the prayers, meditation, and habits of thought derived from my encounters with the Divine Natural Path help me recover, and when I remember God’s presence, I feel a grateful joy that keeps me going. The joy of God’s presence is not reserved only for those who achieve the final goal.

Method

All religions contain three elements: the object of worship, the forms of worship, and the teachings about how to live. In Buddhism, for example, Buddha is the primary object of worship. The method is the many rituals and forms for observing certain days or worshiping certain beings. The teachings are found in the Daizokyo (the Japanese name for the complete collection of Buddhist sutras, laws and treatises).

Christians worship the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The forms of worship are the services performed in churches, and the teachings are found in the Bible. All religions need these elements.

So what are the three elements for the Divine Natural Path? The object of worship is the supreme primal omnipotent, omniscient being I have been calling God. Before addressing the method of worship, let me describe the teachings. The Divine Natural Path has nothing like a Bible or Qur’an or the Buddhist sutras. Its teachings are the universe itself. Nature is a book, a text. We have to learn to read this text to see what God is teaching us. Those with spiritual eyes and ears can read the text with greater ease and depth, but even without special spiritual powers, we all have the ability to read the world around us.

The ability to read the world around us is what we call “intuition.” To walk the Divine Natural Path, we have to use our intuition, and the better we get at doing that, the more accurately we can interpret what nature is telling us. And what nature is telling us is always what we need to do next to best facilitate our complete actualization as human beings. The bible of the Divine Natural Path will be with us as long as the universe lasts. However hard humans try to alter or distort it, they will never be able to do so. It’s a book that has nothing to do with human language or the age we live in. It can be used by anyone any time and any place. We just have to look at the world around us with the intent to read it and do what we believe it tells us to do.

So what about the form? Forms of worship change from age to age, country to country, culture to culture, and even person to person. Some religions imply that their method of worship is the only true method, but the Divine Natural Path can be followed in the way most natural to each age, country, culture or spiritual persuasion. Personally, I enjoy Shinto ceremonies, Buddhist services, Christian services, Native American sweat lodges, and most forms I have experienced with those who believe in them. But what about people who don’t like any of the religious forms around them? Are such people unable to approach God? Of course not. God is available to anyone anywhere and anytime. We each have to select the form we find most comfortable. One form is especially simple. Most of us get up in the morning, go to the bathroom, wash our faces, eat breakfast, and go to work. Each and every one of those actions can be an act of worship. Any action, especially repeated actions, can be used as opportunities to recognize and worship God.

Another excellent form is breathing. God made us in such a way as to require breathing. We could be angry about being forced to breathe all the time. Or we can simply and purely accept the fact that God wants us to breathe, so we breathe with God in mind, perhaps wondering why God considers breathing so important. Air was created by God, of course, and, like everything else, is a part of God. As we breathe air into our bodies, we can think, “Aaah, God is entering my body. God is in and all around me.”

Human beings have a certain level of free will. When we think and act in accordance with God’s will, we produce no impurity. But when we forget God’s will and act according to our own ego, we inevitably create impurities. To get back to our breathing ritual, as we exhale, we can thank God for taking away our impurities. Again, we inhale and feel that we are taking in the completely pure energy of God; we exhale and feel that God is removing our sins and impurities. If we breathe in this state of mind, breathing becomes an excellent form of worship.
The ability to read the world around us is what we call “intuition.” To walk the Divine Natural Path, we have to use our intuition, and the better we get at doing that, the more accurately we can interpret what nature is telling us.

— STEVE LEEPER
Breathing transcends will. When we consciously submit our will to breathing, we can feel God working through us. God is continually working in, for, and all around us. God is living through us, and we are living in God. The unconscious act of breathing can become a conscious awareness of the Omnipotent God.

The Divine Natural Path is the effort to remain aware that our life and everything we think, say and do, whether sleeping or awake, comes from God. Our living is God’s living, and the expansion of this awareness of God is the path to complete actualization. This Divine Natural Path also happens to be, in this physical world, a path to peace culture; it leads to the peaceful, sustainable way of life we will need to achieve if we hope to survive the next few decades.

Sacrifice

Service and self-sacrifice are wonderful, worthy acts. However, we have to think deeply, using our own intuition, to discern whether or not a certain act of service or sacrifice is right for us. If we are doing it because we believe God wants us to, or our deepest, finest “self” demands it, we should go ahead. But if we are doing it to look good, if we don’t really want to but think we should, our sacrifice will become a mental and physical strain bringing suffering and possibly damaging our physical bodies. We cannot deceive our bodies, and we must obey our own intuition.

God wants everyone to be happy. God doesn’t want some people serving others to the extent that they damage themselves. The Divine Natural Path requires that we think carefully about what will make us happy, what will bring happiness to others, and what will please God (or humanity, the Earth or the universe). If we are careful to live this way and make few mistakes, we will stay healthy and calm and keep our relationships healthy and honest as well. This triangle of discernment is an excellent way to train our spirits to live within God’s will.

Bringing God Back

Humanity, as a whole, needs to integrate the social, economic, political and spiritual aspects of our lives. Compartmentalization is bad for me personally, but it’s not just me. Compartmentalization has made human society too secular, amoral, a-spiritual, and oblivious to the laws of nature. Competitive warriors fighting for dominance in various spheres have increasingly used science, money and even religion to rid our daily lives of God. Worshiping competition, we compete mostly for money. Worshiping money, we commodity everything. Believing that a competitive “free” market will solve all our problems, we reduce society to economic transactions. Nothing is sacred. Nothing has intrinsic value. Everything is valued by the money it costs or can bring. And if nothing is sacred, if nothing exists other than this physical world, if the winner is the guy who dies with the most toys, then selfishness knows no limit. The fate of the Earth, the fate of humanity is irrelevant. If life is nothing more than the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, it’s good to be rich, and it doesn’t matter who or what you trample to get there.

As humans evolved beyond other primates, we did so in close communication with nature. We saw in nature vast powers, mechanisms and cause-effect relationships that we worshiped as gods. To my knowledge, all ancient hunter-gather peoples lived according to some form of the Divine Natural Path. They prayed for God’s guidance and protection, expressing gratitude for blessings received.

With the rise of totalitarian agriculture, human society developed totalitarian empires. Political entities and political control extended ever further beyond the personal relationships of clans or tribes. As empires grew, their citizens began worshiping distant, relatively unknown kings and emperors as gods or leaders anointed by “heaven,” with kings and emperors doing their best to encourage and enforce that worship. This humanization of the spirit world led to bizarre distortions of our spiritual impulses. Imperial humanity conflated with God led to the imposition of political/religious power established through domination and violence. God became a frightening tyrant to be obeyed on pain of death.

Under the reign of tyrants, the rise of science came as a great relief. At last, humanity had a method of seeking truth that did not rely on political or spiritual dictators. Science was a way back to the laws and facts of nature. However, with the rise of science, humans came to believe we can live without God. Thanks in large part to science, many of us now think that God, religion and spirituality are the stuff of primitive myth, not worthy of the modern intellect. The “new atheists” believe religion to be the root of much evil. Some philosophers have gone so far as to declare God dead. Since the existence of God cannot be proven scientifically, we feel quite free to doubt that existence. The idea of God is ridiculous to the materialist, scientific mind.

I am quite familiar with scientific atheism. My stepfather was a scientist, and I was once quite devoted to materialism myself. I formally declared myself an atheist in junior high school in a failed attempt to persuade my mother not to force me to go to church.

“I’m an atheist! Why should an atheist go to
“I’m an atheist! Why should an atheist go to church?”

“As long as you’re living in my house, you’ll go to church.”

Out of spite, I would read the Bible carefully because I delighted in going to Sunday school and ridiculing everything it and the teacher had to say.

I nurtured my antagonism toward Christianity until I came to Hiroshima in my late thirties. Here, I encountered Professor Nara and Mr. Takenori Sera, who knew the spirit world the way you know the outskirts of your own city. These teachers helped me see that all religions (even my despised Christianity) have strengths and weaknesses. Like all nations, all corporations, all groups and all individuals, they are here to make certain contributions to the whole. All religions and all of us as individuals are here to learn from each other and improve where our understanding or discipline is lacking. We are all amazingly gifted in some ways. We are all hopelessly disabled in others.

To my teachers, and to me, because of certain experiences for which I have no other explanation, the questions of God and the spirit world are not questions at all. They are facts to be dealt with. Actually, they are facts that will deal with us, one way or another. And they are facts that hold indispensable keys to making our future better than our present. To avoid extinction, we need to lift human consciousness to the point where a majority of us understand that this physical world is a school, a training ground. Its primary purpose is to help us thrive in the spirit world. We need to become fully and continually aware that we were put on this Earth to improve it and make it a paradise for all its inhabitants. We were not meant to destroy it with our thoughtless, violent, selfish competition. We need to be ready for a conscious awareness of the spirit world and a willingness to work with entities in those dimensions to make the changes we will need to survive and thrive.

To achieve this state of consciousness, we have to accept that mind is over matter, that is, matter is created from mind by acts of will. Most importantly, we have to understand and accept that the goal of life in this physical world is not material wealth or political power. Our goal—as individuals and as a species—is genuine, unconditional love for all, which we manifest by pursuing universal health and well-being.
We are using Earth’s resources far faster than they can be renewed; we are emitting more waste than the Earth can absorb and purify. The consequences are evident and derive from ignoring the needs of our planet.

Speaking of pursuing universal health and well-being, that happens to be the goal of what I learned in Hiroshima to call “peace culture.” And peace culture is the political path to survival.

We humans have for some time been living beyond the means of our planet. We have been using metals, oil, gas, water and other vital resources at rates far beyond Earth’s ability to renew them. We are already running out of key resources in key places, including oil and water. When we run out of oil, we will lose the ability to carry on what we fondly call “civilization.” By seriously contemplating the transition from our current way of life to one without oil, lithium, rare earth, natural gas, and abundant, cheap fresh water, we can begin to comprehend the problems we have created by ignoring the laws of nature.

We humans are also emitting far more waste than the Earth can absorb and purify. Our air, water and soil are filled with poisons. Our industrial activities are heating the world dramatically. This heat, pollution, and careless destruction of habitat are causing a sixth mass extinction. If we continue on this path, we will damage the delicate life-support systems on which we depend. If we damage them badly enough, the Earth will become uninhabitable. As I write, we are ignoring the Earth’s limits and, without dramatic lifestyle changes, will make it uninhabitable within a few decades.

This is not a rhetorical threat. Fifty percent of the people on this planet are trying to live on less than ten dollars a day. Twenty thousand children die every day of malnutrition or easily cured diseases. Eighty-eight million people are on the move, having been forced by climate, poverty or violence to flee their homes. Storms, droughts, and floods are intensifying. The oceans are rising, acidifying and dying. I don’t know how much time we have, but I do know that no one can ignore natural law without consequences. We are using Earth’s resources far faster than they can be renewed; we are emitting more waste than the Earth can absorb and purify. The consequences are evident and derive from ignoring the needs of our planet.

Some assume we will come up with technological solutions. Some believe they will be insulated from the effects by wealth or location. Some believe we are approaching Armageddon anyway, so the fate of this physical Earth is not a concern. Others assume they will die of natural causes before the mass human extinction, so why should they care? Others are driven by institutional...
necessity to deny their lying eyes. As Upton Sinclair said, “It’s difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on his not understanding it.”

Most of us understand that we face some serious, life-threatening problems derived from our burgeoning population and our failure to recognize and obey natural law. This group includes millions, maybe billions of us. Yet, we fail to mobilize in sufficient numbers to force our leaders to take meaningful steps toward solving urgent, existential problems. Why is that?

The Obstacle

The obstacle is what Ichiro Moritaki called the “civilization of power.” Moritaki was the most important leader of the hibakusha movement, the political effort to get help for A-bomb survivors and Hiroshima as a city. He was profoundly influential in shifting survivor rage away from Americans and the US and toward nuclear weapons and war in general. After the bombing, he was bedridden for five months, and during his recovery, he thought deeply about the meaning of this new weapon that had destroyed his entire city in ten seconds. He ended up losing one of his eyes but arriving at two crucial insights still reflected in Hiroshima’s peace culture.

He immediately recognized that the atomic bomb made the conflict between the US and Japan irrelevant. The deep meaning of this bomb, he told us, is that human beings can no longer resolve conflicts through contests of destructive power. The problem of nuclear weapons is a problem for humanity as a whole, not a tool for any subgroup to use against another.

His other insight went to the heart of global society. Way back in the 1950s, he pointed out that we live in a civilization of power and unless we can graduate to a civilization of love, we will destroy ourselves. He said this based on only on nuclear weapons. His message is obvious now, given our environmental problems. And yet, global society is still structured by the pursuit of power.

At the highest levels of power, society is characterized by intense, often violent competition for more power—political, economic, and military. Most world leaders (business and political) are highly competitive warriors who want to control as much wealth, territory, market share, and labor as possible. Their behavior is driven, above all, by the desire to win, to be the alpha male, to be number one. This competition renders the governments of the US, China, Europe, Russia, other countries, as well as most corporations, incapable of cooperating to the extent needed to address our global problems. For our business and political leaders, competition and winning come first. They have no time for taking care of the Earth and its weaker inhabitants.

Vince Lombardi, Super Bowl-winning coach of the Green Bay Packers, famously said, “Winning is not the most important thing; it’s the only thing.” Granting that this was hyperbole and that he retained some respect for “how the game is played,” it remains an excellent expression of what it takes to get to the top of any hierarchy in our civilization of power. Nearly all political and business leaders at the very top of any global hierarchy are people who will lie, cheat, and steal to win. Many actually deceive, betray, or kill their rivals to obtain or maintain power. Corporations routinely sacrifice workers, communities, consumers, and the environment in the name of profit. Love, honesty, morality, the common good—all are sacrificed on the altar of victory. But we can’t put the blame on them. Most of us compete at work in ways that keep us too busy and too tired to care about the sixth mass extinction. Putting food on the table today takes precedence over anything that might happen some years or decades in the future.

At the grassroots level, competition prevents the kind of cooperation needed to wrest power from the forces destroying our ecosystem. Competition for funding and attention keeps even our most progressive, selfless peace culture leaders from cooperating enough to mount a serious challenge. Activists working for economic justice, racial equality, gender equality, human rights, animal rights, peace, and the environment inevitably find themselves competing for foundation funds. Even within those broad categories, activists work in separate silos based on differing strategies, tactics, philosophies, priorities, funding sources, locations, and who we know. Our competition for money, attention, and publicity keeps us from even coming close to solving the problems we most want to solve. We keep fighting, but we often fight our friends as intensely as we fight our enemies. Tragically, we sometimes feel that fellow activists are our most dangerous enemies. As products of the war culture, fighting is what we know. We believe that we can only make the world a better place by obtaining sufficient power to defeat those who are selfishly driving us over the cliff. Because we believe in power, we neither understand nor believe that love and cooperation are prior and superior to power. We know how to pursue money and utilize power; we have no idea how to pursue love and harmonize with each other.
With all competing against all, global problems go unattended and unsolved, but how do we stop competing? Most of us believe that if we stop competing, we will lose. Even the most devoted peace activists forget that we cannot possibly achieve peace by winning.

— STEVE LEEPER
The pursuit of power is itself the problem.
We will achieve peace only by terminating rivalry, animosity, and competition through love, sacrifice, and a refusal to win at someone else's expense. But can we get there? Around the world, millions of people work hard every day feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, preventing war, promoting peace, cleaning plastic out of oceans, fighting for human rights, fighting for animal rights, fighting human trafficking, fighting mass incarceration, fighting injustice, fighting for environmental protection, and academically studying all of these issues to come up with technological or policy solutions. All of these people are, in a sense, pursuing peace culture; they are trying to make the world a better place for all. But despite great victories here and there, the world is becoming unlivable. To actually make our world better, we will have to rise collectively as a species to an unprecedented level of cooperation.
Building this movement will not be easy. Political people and spiritual people mix like oil and water. Worse still, peace activists (political and spiritual) tend to be so pure we can’t get along with anyone even slightly different.

Our movement for a peace culture or a civilization of love must be broad enough to accept, respect and appeal to anyone and everyone working to make the world a better place for all. We do not refuse to listen to those who identify as atheists or secular or political, but we do not accept the secular conventional wisdom that limits us to consensual reality. We are as open to prayer, meditation, rituals, ceremonies, worship services, exorcisms, and channeled spiritual advice as we are to demonstrations, boycotts, civil disobedience, getting arrested, and voting for peace culture candidates.

Building this movement will not be easy. Political people and spiritual people mix like oil and water. Worse still, peace activists (political and spiritual) tend to be so pure we can’t get along with anyone even slightly different. I remember working with one political organization in Hiroshima that grew to about 25 people, at which point one of our members said, “We are no longer unified. We need to purify this group.”

Another indelible memory is the look on the face of the leader of a peace group when I told her I couldn’t attend a meeting because I had a prior commitment to a group that prays for peace on the sixth of every month. Her face said, “What in the world are you talking about? You’re going to miss our meeting to pray?” As if this were the most ridiculous thing she had ever heard. But this is the test! God clearly wants us to learn to listen to everyone, do our best to find ways to take advantage of each other’s strengths, help each other overcome our weaknesses, seek truth, resolve conflicts, and work together in pursuit of universal health and wellbeing.

Four billion years of evolution have led to the choice we (humans) will be making in the coming two or three decades. Will we cling to our animal habits, competing with and preying on each other until Earth goes the way of Venus? Or will we learn to live in harmony with each other, our plant and animal relatives, and the Earth.

Where to Begin

We have to begin by unifying those who want to be unified. We have to unify all who are trying to make the world a better place, all who are trying to make the profound systemic changes required to restore the Earth and everyone on it to health and happiness. This enormous task has to start somewhere so I propose beginning with two goals. One goal answers the question, What do we want? The other the question, How do we get there?
What We Want

For the first goal, I propose that everyone who cares about universal health and wellbeing begins right now to focus like a laser on a single objective—the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Although I’m a product of Hiroshima, and Hiroshima has long been promoting the abolition of these weapons, I am not proposing this starting point because I’m brainwashed or trying to curry favor in Hiroshima. Nuclear weapons are the place to start because none of the other aspects of peace culture become possible until we have eliminated this threat. I am not saying nuclear weapons are the most important problem. I am saying: 1) as in meditation, we need to start by focusing on a single point (a unifying goal), 2) nuclear weapons are the easiest global problem we face, 3) nuclear weapons are the ultimate embodiment of the cutthroat competition and violent animosity obstructing solutions to our other problems, and 4) if we can’t even cooperate enough to get rid of unnecessary, expensive, bizarrely dangerous doomsday machines, we will not accomplish any of our other peace culture goals.

Nuclear weapons are doomsday machines. If you doubt this, please read The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner by Daniel Ellsberg. Ellsberg points out that if the US is attacked (or thinks it’s being attacked) by either Russia or China, it will respond by sending several warheads to every major city in both Russia and China. Hundreds, perhaps a thousand warheads would be delivered, blowing up enough cities to plunge us all into a deep nuclear winter. Ellsberg hesitates to say that such a nuclear war would necessarily mean the end of human life. Certainly, no one wants to be that one want to be an alarmist saying things unsupported by scientific fact. To my mind, though, scientists and most anti-nuclear activists are overly conservative in their estimates of the consequences of nuclear war. Just as every climate prediction by the UN IPCC is quickly outrun by reality, I believe that nuclear war will be far more deadly than the scientific experts allow themselves to predict.

I have never read or heard anyone of any political or military persuasion look comprehensively at all the effects of a nuclear war. They look at heat, blast, radiation and fire (as they have been taught to do by Hiroshima), but I have never encountered anyone dealing with the consequences of blowing up or losing control of our 440 nuclear power plants. It’s not just the reactors. More than 400,000 tons of spent nuclear fuel is stored at hundreds of vulnerable sites across dozens of countries.

I have never heard anyone including in calculations the release of vast quantities of poison gases and chemicals from chemical plants, natural gas plants, and refineries. Remember all the first responders getting sick and dying from the poisons that exploded from the World Trade Center? What about the chemicals and poisons aerosolized by exploding and incinerating thousands of cities around the US, Russia and China? What about the poisons that will come from facilities owned by DuPont and Monsanto? What about the labs experimenting with Ebola and other deadly diseases? I have never heard anyone deal with the sudden total loss of electricity and petroleum, and, therefore, heating, cooling, transportation, and nearly all the activities our food deliveries and waste removals depend on.

What would nuclear war do to the bees and butterflies already heading toward extinction? What would that many bombs going off with that much power and radiation do to our atmosphere? Exactly how deep would the nuclear winter be? For how long? What kinds of insects, microbes and monsters might emerge? It may be that scientists who write papers don’t bother to tell us exactly how they come up with the casualty figures they offer, but from what I’ve read, I’m convinced that no one has the slightest idea what would happen if thousands of bombs, each one dozens or even hundreds of times more destructive than the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, pulverize, atomize and aerosolize thousands of military, civilian and infrastructure targets. I don’t see how anyone can argue that nuclear weapons don’t at least have the potential to extinguish human life. That being the case, it should not be difficult to persuade the people of the world that allowing the weapons to exist is insanity.

Of all the global problems we face, nuclear weapons are the easiest to solve. Nine countries could end this threat in a week or two if they wanted to. All we have to do is to make them want to. What this really means is helping the global public understand that a nuclear-weapon-free world is possible and necessary for continued survival. When they understand this, they will no longer elect and follow leaders who refuse to take this first, simple, prerequisite step toward peace culture. At that point, we will elect and follow only leaders who can solve problems by “playing well with others.”

Why Haven’t We?

If nuclear weapons are such a terrible existential
Another major uprising took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s, bringing a million people to New York for the Second Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament.

— STEVE LEEPER
threat, and if this threat can be eliminated so easily, why haven’t we? The answer is two-fold. First, warriors compete for power, and nuclear weapons are power. In addition, fear of nuclear weapons makes populations compliant, happy to put ever more power (money) into the hands of the warriors who promise to protect them from the instantaneous annihilation of which they are continually, though unconsciously, aware.

Second, the NGOs, NPOs, and peace groups trying to get rid of nuclear weapons rarely cooperate. For seventy-five years, literally millions of people have contributed in various ways to raising human consciousness regarding nuclear weapons. But, the thousands of organizations working for peace and abolition in their own way have little to do with one another. The most massive uprising against nuclear weapons (500 million signatures), which took place in 1954, was tragically weakened by internal conflict and Japan’s enthusiastic adoption of “atoms for peace.” Another major uprising took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s, bringing a million people to New York for the Second Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament. This outpouring of public demand helped to bring about serious disarmament efforts by Gorbachev and Reagan, and since that time the number of nuclear warheads has been steadily decreasing. It may even have contributed to ending the Cold War. But nothing even close has happened since, and nuclear weapons have steadily faded from global public consciousness.

Peace activists at all levels tend to think that just doing something is enough. When we hold an event and only five people show up, we assure ourselves that it’s quality, not quantity, that counts. We tend to think that we should all just do what we can, and the cumulative effect will change the world. After 75 years of failure, we should rethink this assumption. Failure? I will be correctly criticized if I fail to recognize the progress that has been made. We have the Partial Test Ban Treaty, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. There used to be 70,000 nuclear warheads in the world, now there are about 13,000. And of course, in July 2017 in the UN General Assembly, 122 nations adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), and ICAN, the campaign that pushed for that treaty, received the Nobel Peace Prize. The TPNW got its 50th ratification in October 2020 and will formally go into effect (for those who sign it) on January 22, 2021. Plus, 47 peace groups in Japan collaborated well enough to gather nearly 20 million signatures on a petition calling for the end of the nuclear age.

I do not mean to discount or make light of these achievements, but they are not even close to getting the job done. The groups in Japan that collected 20 million signatures declared at the start of their campaign their intention to gather 100 million. Even in Japan, most people have no idea about the TPNW or ICAN and don’t care about nuclear weapons. A growing minority think Japan should get them because North Korea has them. The Japanese government clearly believes that keeping the US happy is more important than abolishing nuclear weapons.

In the US, the nuclear abolition movement seems limited to a few blocks around the UN in New York. There are abolitionists elsewhere, of course, but in Atlanta where I live, despite some great efforts by talented and devoted activists, nuclear abolition is never even mentioned as a public concern. It is not discussed on call-in radio shows or at dinnertime. Nor is it an action theme of church groups. If asked, most Americans still say we would be better off without nuclear weapons, but even Rotary International, an organization that “connects the world” and has peace as one of its seven areas of focus, refuses to call for a nuclear-weapon-free world. Doing so would be “too political.”

Meanwhile, the US government has made it clear that the US will not be bound by any treaty having to do with nuclear weapons. The US will do as it pleases, and recently, it has deployed, small, “usable” nuclear warheads on missiles carried by submarines. This fact was met with some criticism by some alternative news outlets, but no cries of alarm have been heard from the corporate media or the general population.

Most people today are focused intently on the novel corona virus. The social and economic chaos arising from the virus and millions of suddenly unemployed people is revealing dramatically our interdependence and the atavistic foolishness of treating each other as enemies. And yet, most of us are unconcerned about living minutes away from extinction at the hands of a few hyper-competitive warriors. They have never heard about nuclear darkness or nuclear winter. They don’t know which countries have nuclear weapons, how many they have, how much they spend and what they are prepared to do with those weapons, and how easy it would be for a nuclear catastrophe to happen by accident. They blithely assume that since nothing terrible has happened since 1945, nothing will happen and, in any case, there’s nothing the common man or woman can do about it.

The global population needs some serious consciousness raising with respect to nuclear weapons. But the real issue is not the weapons; it’s the mindset behind those weapons. When we raise consciousness about nuclear weapons, we will also be raising consciousness about rivalry, animosity, violence, viruses, pandemics, human interdependence, and the need to cooperate to
Nuclear weapons are the weakest, most vulnerable pressure point on the body of the military-industrial-Congressional-penal-media-academic-war-culture complex.

Keep our planet livable. Nuclear weapons impact or are impacted by all of these issues in a way that makes “the right thing to do” crystal clear. Nuclear weapons are not compatible with a sustainable culture of peace. Nuclear weapons are the weakest, most vulnerable pressure point on the body of the military-industrial-Congressional-penal-media-academic-war-culture complex. Eliminating nuclear weapons will embody our collective willingness to cooperate to survive. Taking that cooperative step for survival will open the door to other forms of cooperation for survival. If we want to raise human consciousness, promote peace culture, and survive to the end of the century, nuclear weapons are the place to start.

The Information Age

I’ve heard this term for decades, but only recently have I learned what it means. We live in a time when the primary form of competition is the control of information and, by extension, the control of what people know, think and feel. The battle for dominance (wealth and power) is increasingly being conducted on a battlefield known as “the media.” This reality means that our effort to raise global public consciousness will succeed or fail depending on our ability to communicate through the media.

Theoretically, it might be possible for some messiah or group of messiahs to lift global consciousness by meditating on a mountaintop. It’s conceivable that hundreds of unconnected peace groups might raise human consciousness. But so far, it’s not happening. More importantly, “using the media” may be part of the test our species needs to pass. To use the media to lift human consciousness, the peace movement will have to raise millions of dollars. To do that, activists will have to cooperate. Then, we will have to invest those dollars in a unified, agreed-on campaign, and we will all have to play our part to make that campaign effective. Such a campaign will embody or manifest the level of cooperation humanity will need to achieve if we hope to survive. Those of us who believe in cooperating to make the world a better place must cooperate as never before to raise consciousness about this need for unprecedented cooperation.

If we who believe in cooperating for the good of all fail to cooperate, we will leave cooperation to the one percent who are eager to turn ninety-nine percent of us into robots to exploit at will. The one percent do compete among themselves, often with disastrous results for the masses, but they cooperate extremely effectively when it comes to accumulating power at the tops of hierarchies. Very few peace groups cooperate internally as well as any military organization. With complete power overtly vested at the top, and with the hierarchy plain for all to see, tasks are distributed, rewards are distributed, and action takes place in an admirably cooperative way.

Unfortunately, war-culture cooperation will not save humanity. The US will never achieve the power to dictate global policy or action. Nor will Russia, China nor any other country or group of countries. Meanwhile, their intensely competitive pursuit of power and control is leading us toward the abyss. Our only hope is to suppress competition and shift decisively toward peace-culture cooperation, not for the benefit those at the tops of hierarchies, but to bring health and happiness to the Earth and everyone on it.

The Management of Power

To achieve our initial goal of nuclear weapons abolition and our ultimate goal of establishing a global peace culture, our species will have to shift from the adversarial pursuit of power to the cooperative pursuit of truth through peaceful conflict resolution. To bring about this profound
change in global politics, the peace movement will have to begin with ourselves. We need to be the change we want to see in the world. This means changing the nature of leadership, the way we manage power, the way we make decisions. It means graduating from leaders who tell people what to do to leaders who resolve conflict to the satisfaction of all parties. If we are serious about making the world a better place, we have to change how we govern our movement. We have to make the resolution of conflict job one. We have to put trained or natural mediators in charge of that process, and quickly build ever-larger coalitions.

The first step toward a peace culture planet is for all peace culture organizations and coalitions to abandon adversarialism and shift to resolutionism. This means subordinating adversarial decision making (winning) to the cooperative pursuit of mutually satisfactory decisions derived by actually resolving the salient conflicts. Concretely, this means appointing conflict managers with the authority to identify and analyze conflicts, then create inclusive, mandatory processes to resolve them.

Resolutionism

Let’s say we have a burgeoning movement to help our species graduate from the civilization of power to a civilization of peace. Let’s say peace groups, social justice groups, environmental protection groups, and religions of all sorts are coming together to work for universal health and wellbeing. How, in the face of the tremendous array of powerful interests aligned against us, do we take control and remake the system? How do we assert ourselves and make the changes we want to see in the world without entering the pursuit-of-power fray?

Two answers: conflict resolution and a new governing guild. We need to develop, use, and promote a new way of doing politics (managing power) that makes decisions by actually resolving conflict. When we’ve incorporated this new approach within our movement, we need to establish a new political party and campaign to get our candidates into elected offices at all levels, including, eventually, the presidency of the US, the top leaders of other countries, and top officials at the UN.

Yes, this is a contradiction. I’ve been criticizing the pursuit of power and even the concept of winning. Now, I’m advocating the pursuit of power and the winning of elections. To resolve this contradiction, all candidates and elected officials representing our new Global Resolutionary Party (GRP) must be members of the Mediators Guild. Official, authorized, members of the Mediators Guild must agree to earn no more than the median income of the nation they serve. They must also agree to open their financial records to the public to ensure that they are not receiving additional funds. They must not have large investments anywhere in the world. They must be financially and socially clean. And, they must be guaranteed the national median income until the day they die or take another job, which they can’t do for at least five years after stepping down from a government post.

These rules governing the guild are essential to ensure 1) that the mediators cannot personally benefit or be harmed by any government decision except decisions that increase the median income and 2) to persuade the public that these mediators are not simply another power-seeking group. They seek to win elections and obtain the powers of the offices to which they are elected, but they seek power only to take power out of politics. The power they seek is the power to bring parties in conflict to the negotiating table to resolve conflicts through dialogue, negotiation, and persuasion grounded in the pursuit of truth and solutions that are beneficial, or at least acceptable, to all.

The bumper sticker for this approach is “government-by-process,” which is opposed to “government-by-power.” Under this system, our elected officials will not make decisions and establish policies that the rest of us must live by. Instead, elected officials will design and implement processes that bring all conflicting parties to the table, establish ground rules, facilitate the discussion, identify and analyze the conflicts, investigate matters of objective fact, dovetail interests and ensure that all parties are satisfied, or that they can at least accept that any given decision is the best we can do at the time.

In addition to the rules governing members of the Mediators Guild, the mediators will have to establish and follow ground rules governing the conflict-resolution processes through which they
Mediators in the Movement

The Mediators Guild does not yet exist, but most organizations already have natural mediators who informally perform this function. Organizations with no apparent natural mediator should hire someone with conflict resolution training. One way or another, the leaders of organizations need to consult with their members and appoint a conflict manager whom the members trust and respect. Once the conflict manager has been appointed, all members should be informed and encouraged to take conflicts and “problems” to her or him. The conflict manager observes internal dynamics and receives information from the members. When a conflict or problem emerges, he or she conducts interviews, convenes meetings, and designs a process to address the conflict or solve the problem. All members of the organization, from top to bottom, are required to cooperate with the conflict manager’s processes.

The delegation of problem-solving authority to conflict managers will be difficult for some members, especially those in leadership positions. Leaders think of themselves as problem-solvers and deciders. They tend to resolve conflicts within themselves, then tell their minions what to do. But this form of leadership is obsolete. Despite the authoritarian backlash so shockingly encouraged by President Trump, global society has become far too complex for any leader to guide effectively through dictatorial decision-making. Although many people in most societies still long for Daddy to step in and make things right, most individuals today have their own ideas about how things should be done, and they want to be heard. They want their thoughts, feelings, and ideas represented in the decision-making process. The assumption on which the conflict manager system rests is this: the organization will function more effectively and more powerfully when all members are fully engaged and invested in its success.

Leaders will still be vitally important. Their ideas and talents will be recognized and usually enhanced by the conflict manager system, but it’s vital that leaders remain in touch with those they are leading. It’s vital that those being led feel free to raise questions and objections and alternatives. Most organizations using conflict managers will find themselves growing rapidly in comfort, enjoyment, effectiveness and collective power. This power will derive not from the pursuit of power but from deep mutual understanding and wholehearted cooperation among its members.
The ability to read the world around us is what we call “intuition.” To walk the Divine Natural Path, we have to use our intuition, and the better we get at doing that, the more accurately we can interpret what nature is telling us.

— STEVE LEEPER
Establishing Resolutionism

The use of conflict managers will help our organizations become more powerful, and the same is true of coalitions. Whenever organizations come together into a coalition, the conflict managers in participating organizations should meet to discuss how to handle conflict internal to the coalition. In fact, the willingness of all organizations in the coalition to place themselves under the control of the “conflict management team” should be a determining factor when deciding whether to form or join the coalition.

Every organization should be looking for coalitions to join. Every coalition should be looking for other coalitions to merge with. The goal is to expand the circle of cooperation as far as possible, and the conflict manager system will make this process easier and less frightening. No organizational member of any coalition should be worrying about losing more than it gains through working with others. The conflict manager system will ensure that all members are obtaining what they need to the extent possible.

All competitive issues, like fame and fundraising, should be discussed and managed in a transparent and cooperative way. As soon as possible, organizational fundraising should be abandoned in favor of collective fundraising by the coalition. Coalition synergy should ensure that each partner receives more than it was raising on its own. If this improvement does not take place, something is wrong, and every effort should be made to solve the problem collectively.

Cooperation among peace organizations is not mere strategy. Cooperation is the change we want to see in the world. If peace culture organizations are unable to cooperate effectively to the benefit of all parties, they have nothing to offer. My bet is that conflict-manager-based cooperation will greatly increase the power and prestige of all member organizations. Assuming this is true, resolutionism will quickly establish credibility, and we can move on to the next step.

Entering Politics

Eventually, somewhere within the peace culture movement, someone will launch the GRP and start running candidates for public office. The party should start small, perhaps focusing on a small city. The lead mediator becomes mayor, while other mediators get elected to the city council. As soon as the GRP is in control of any municipal government, it needs to begin demonstrating the enormous benefits of government-by-process.

Mediators serving municipal government need to begin identifying and addressing key conflicts within their municipal system. They need to begin filming and broadcasting their meetings. They need to use the powers of government to force all stakeholders to begin a problem-solving dialogue. Once the process begins, they need to persist until a breakthrough occurs and the problem is solved in a way that satisfies everyone.

If, during this process, the local mediators encounter problems that appear to be beyond their capacity, they need to quickly and courageously call in mediators with more experience or more organizational resources until the problem is under control. They need to get the process back on track and keep insisting that nothing will happen until a decision is made, and no decision will be made without the participation and agreement of all parties.

All of the above is admittedly hard to digest. To assist this process, I have written a far more enjoyable book than this one. If you are interested in how government-as-process might work, please read Terry and Rebecca Save the World.

Goals, Objectives and Love

Goal One, as described above, is to unite the peace movement around the objective of abolishing nuclear weapons. In pursuit of this goal, our interim objective is to design and implement a multi-million-dollar campaign to raise human consciousness such that nuclear weapons are nearly universally recognized as obsolete anathema. Our long-range goal is universal health and well-being, which means learning how to keep eight billion people happy while restoring the Earth.

Achieving these goals will require unprecedented cooperation at all levels, within and among all segments of society. We will all have to do our best to implement well-designed plans in accordance with fully accepted written and unwritten rules. This cooperation will depend on graduating from adversarialism to resolutionism. Ultimately, we want our Earth to be a safe and secure home where we can all feel and express our love for each other, where we take good, loving care of the animals and plants we live with, where we resolve our conflicts through nonviolent processes that reveal new truths and help us grow, and where we are all helping each other rise to ever higher levels of purity and consciousness.

This admittedly utopian vision is one that...
most religions insist we can and must achieve. As I admitted above, I spent decades despising Christianity, but I have come to understand its great contribution. Jesus came to tell us how to defeat evil and death. He said clearly that the only way to do so is by loving God and loving each other, including our enemies.

The Buddha told us we are all one, that we can’t hurt each other without hurting ourselves. The strongest motivation one has to take the path of the Bodhisattva is the idea of salvation through unselfish love for others.

Muhammed said, “You will never enter paradise until you have faith, and you will not complete your faith until you love one another.” The founder of the Ahmadiyya sect in Islam, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad said: “The task for which God has appointed me is that I should remove the malaise that afflicts the relationship between God and His creatures and restore the relationship of love and sincerity between them.”

Bahá’u’lláh, the founder of Bahai, wrote that “Love is the greatest power in the world of existence and the true source of eternal happiness.” The Bahá’í teachings state that Bahá’ís should love all humans regardless of religion, race or community, and all should love even their enemies.

The sacred Hindu text Kanda Guru Kavasa says, “Oh Holy Great Flame, grant me love. You said the spreading love is Para Brahma, for the thing which is everywhere is only Love, and Love is the only thing which is like a soul within us. Love is Kumara. Love is Kanda. This simply means Love is God.”

In Sikhism, love means love for the Lord and His creation. Sikhism asks all believers to take on “god-like” virtues, and love is the most “god-like” virtue of all. Guru Gobind Singh Ji said, “Only those who have love will attain God.”

Ichiro Moritaki, the leader and most influential philosopher of the Hiroshima survivors, told us in the 1950s that we live in a civilization of power, and if we fail to graduate to a civilization of love, we will destroy ourselves.

Mahatma Gandhi said: “Fear and love are contradictory terms. Love is reckless in giving away, oblivious as to what it gets in return. Love wrestles with the world as with the self and ultimately gains mastery over all other feelings.

“My daily experience, as of those who are working with me, is that every problem lends itself to solution if we are determined to make the law of truth and non-violence the law of life. For truth and non-violence are, to me, faces of the same coin.

“The law of love will work, just as the law of gravitation will work, whether we accept it or not. Just as a scientist will work wonders out of various applications of the law of nature, even so a man who applies the law of love with scientific precision can work greater wonders. . . . Hate the sin and not the sinner is a precept which, though easy enough to understand, is rarely practiced, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world.

“Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment. Whether humanity will consciously follow the law of love, I do not know. But that need not disturb me. The law will work just as the law of gravitation works, whether we accept it or not. Through the Heart we may come to know the Love of God; through the Heart we may become the Love of God.”

“I’m an atheist! Why should an atheist go to church?”

“As long as you’re living in my house, you’ll go to church.”
Gandhi had this to say about the Atomic Bomb:
“Development of the atom bomb represents the most sinful and diabolical use of science. Atom bomb mentality is immoral, unethical, addictive and only evil can come of it. The atom bomb only aggravates violence and never protects against it. It symbolizes the futility of violence. It is the duty of large nations, and all other nations, in the interest of world peace, to give up the atom bomb.”

The Choice
Mahatma Gandhi was born at about the time radiation was discovered. During his lifetime, as he was developing satyagraha and ahimsa, the forces of death were developing the atomic bomb. Gandhi died by violence shortly after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Gandhi and nuclear weapons are historically simultaneous, but socially and philosophically incompatible and mutually exclusive. They represent the most important choice we, as a species, are in the process of making. If we choose the bomb, we will soon be extinct. If we choose Gandhi, we have a chance at Earthly paradise.