

# Conscious Elders Gathering Report...

"We need tribes of elders to lead us."

Ken Dychtwald ASA 2014 Future of Aging Conference.

What follows is a report on the Conscious Elders Gathering in early April.

First, a context-setting introduction:

We all found joining in knowing that what is needed is social activism interfaced with deep inner work so that what we do comes not from reactivity but from heart and soul wisdom that seeks fullest blossoming of greatest good for all. We joined in recognizing that we need a new story and new vision. For as the Talmud says, "We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are."

Evaluating reality through our physical senses and socially conditioned cognitive perceptions we see a world of separation and think of ourselves through an ego-identity distinct from others, from the earth, from nature. Yet modern science tells us that on the subatomic level there is only interconnected quantum entanglement of Oneness, exactly what the world's spiritual traditions have been telling us for thousands of years. Science is now confirming this truth through its increasingly sophisticated observations of both the macro and micro world.

Evolutionary pressures from today's planetary challenges are pushing us towards release of the old reality –as-separation world view into the new vision of this essential oneness. When we open our awareness to a consciousness of this oneness, a spiritual perspective, we simultaneously open ourselves to a radiant energy present in all of material creation and to the invisible field from which physical creation manifests, call it what you will.

In this infinite field of creative, wisdom-power energy we connect with the truth of who and what we really are – sacred, worthy, luminous beings whose essence is love, which is for giving. When we identify with and live more consistently from this truth of our being

we can create life-affirming and life-sustaining behaviors as expressions of the spirit of the universe seeking to use us as agents of conscious evolution.

The following report is written by Susan Prince, a co- member with me and two others of the "spirit and ceremony team" who did a great job summarizing what was a very touching, stimulating and powerful time.

"48 impassioned people met at the Mercy Retreat Center in Burlingame to launch the Conscious Elders Project whose mission is "to create a social movement of Conscious Elders to guide the transformation of our society by identifying and developing effective responses to social and economic justice and environmental challenges demonstrating how elders can effect positive change".

This gathering came out of the vision of a few who recognized that in this most precarious of times, when humanity is way out of good relationship with the earth, it is the role of the Elders to catalyze a movement to set things right. Traditionally, in the Indigenous cultures, Elders were seen as the wisdom keepers for the community. They were the placeholders – who because of their long lives held the stories that provided continuity, bringing the generations together and informing all future decisions. So here we were again gathered together in our modern day Longhouse.

We came primarily from the West and East coasts, medium age 65, equally divided between men and women – all of Caucasian decent. Among us were teachers, wilderness guides, coaches ministers and people from the financial and technological worlds. What we all had in common was a sensibility of active service born out of the nineteen sixties and nurtured by our long range view. The issues that we face in 2014 aren't new: social and economic injustice, environmental destruction (climate change), gross overconsumption, dysfunctional governance and broken educational and religious systems. But there is an acute immediacy now.

As our group met in circle, I could still see in our faces the eyes of a young and hopeful tribe who once fervently believed that we could make a difference. And here we were again – now at the other end of

our lives. Many of us have more time now, we are still healthy and energetic and collaboratively, we have a huge body of knowledge and skill sets. Most significantly, as Conscious Elders, we are doing the inner work necessary in order to awaken to our true essence; practicing non-violent communication while embracing our inextricable relationship to our Planet and acknowledging our personal responsibility for her well being.

This is a key point. Many times over the course of the workshop we reminded each other of the Einstein quote, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking that we used when we created them." It's really important to us to suspend the finger pointing: to take responsibility for the problems and to commit to being a part of the solutions.

We went thru many processes over our long weekend together. We prayed, meditated, danced, sang, laughed. We shared hopes and dreams, articulated our grief for the world, envisioned positive change, brainstormed practical projects, explored who to network with and how to craft and spread our message. And we told and heard many inspiring stories.

We all recognized that a strong relationship with the natural world is imperative if humans are going to be motivated to protect it. We also agreed that, in order for that to happen, many Elders first must reconnect with Nature themselves. We also focused on how to work to change the political system. One of the most compelling stories was told by one of our participants who, after the Sandy Hook massacre, organized people in Sunnyvale and managed to pass an initiative outlawing the sale of automatic weapons in their town.

We even talked about the unsustainable relationship that Americans have with dying; how people are being kept medically alive when there is no hope of recovery instead of being encouraged to have more dignified end of life choices.

At the close of the workshop, we left with our hearts inspired and our heads full of ideas. (tomás comment: each elder stepped over a threshold we created while I drummed and we all sang – "You are a

Sacred, Worthy, Luminous Being. You are Love and your Love is For Giving.”) Each person received one of the world love bracelets created for them as they stepped over the threshold into committed conscious aging.

Every one of us recognizes that this is a huge project and the good news is that it’s already happening on a smaller scale all over the country. There are transition town groups and Elder councils meeting in many places. Our aim is to create a network that can link all these people together, aligning with those who are addressing the same social and environmental problems. We especially want to support the younger folks who are facing the daunting tasks ahead. Our ultimate mission is to help create a new story for the future generations of all species.

For now we are continuing to meet virtually in our smaller working groups. We are crafting a mission statement and articulating our Vision. Soon we will meet again as a larger group – maybe on the East coast next time. We have no sense of exclusiveness and invite anyone who is inspired to join us. Meanwhile stay tuned for updates as things progress.”

Here are some additional points of agreement and intention that offered for your reflection:

1. Elderhood – the growing phase of life between adulthood and old age, generally the age span of 55 and up, plus or minus on both ends. True elderhood is more about one’s accumulation and positive use of wisdom and broadening experiences than about age.
2. Conscious Elder – one in or entering the elderhood phase of life who has/is deliberately doing the work to become aware of their inner state of being, effects of life conditioning, ego, and true essence as a person; and is attentive to the broader state of our world and the need to respond in correcting human-caused injustices to our fellow living beings and damage to our life-sustaining planet home.

Points within our vision/mission:

1. As conscious elders we bring our talents, resources, experience, and wisdom to the building of a caring, equitable, non-violent future for all of life, starting in our own country, reclaiming our rightful role as mentors, guides and leaders.
2. We are launching a new elder-led movement to build this future. Our movement is about conscious, elder activism. This growing movement is a new entity, with planning and operations continually evolving over a rolling five-year period.
4. Our activist goals are to address the problems caused by (a) social and economic injustice; (b) environmental destruction and non-sustainable consumption; and (c) dysfunctional governance. In so doing, we also define and evolve to exemplify a new living paradigm.
5. We work both locally and nationwide collaborating with other elder-led organizations that align with our goals, and with organizations that are addressing the same social and environmental problems as we are.
6. We organize in web-interconnected local (physical) pods and virtual (cyberspace) pods. Elder pods may be organized around a single activist interest or many; they may also focus on developing a caring, mutually supportive elderhood community that embodies the "new story".
7. We strive to be as wise and clear as possible in describing this mission, inviting others to join us, and using multi-media tools and story-telling to promote our mission. We are guided by the knowledge that We are One.
8. As we grow in size and scope, this movement will evolve to become inter-generational.
9. Our main tool is education because the problems we face are caused by our own ego-based consciousness based on perceptions of separation.

That's it for now.