

Transforming the Dark Night of the Globe
Ted Williams - August 13, 2017

Introduction

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the Lummi people and the ancestors who have lived in this place for time immemorial and thank them for the opportunity to be here on this beautiful land, to my blood family – my parents, grandparents, and all who came before – I would like to thank for giving me life, and to the BUF congregation for the opportunity to speak here today and to share some of my journey.

My journey to speak here today started many years ago, perhaps long before my birth when my mother who grew up in the 1930s in pre-Nazi Germany and she and her parents barely escaped before WWII broke out and when my father fought in Germany in WWII, watching many of his fellow soldiers die on the front lines. My two grandfathers fought on either side - the German and the American - in WWI. Their journeys are part of my journey too.

More recently I, like many of you, saw my life take a drastic turn on Nov. 8, 2016. Following the election of Donald Trump, I fell into deep despair, anger, and fear of what could happen in the future. I was literally immobilized and heartbroken. But something shifted within me when millions of women, men, and children stood up and marched for love on January 21, 2017. I remembered that we have a choice about how to respond but I also knew that it would have to be a different approach than the one that got us here. Since January, I have been on a profound journey of exploration. When Paul mentioned last spring that he was looking for people to lead Sunday services this summer something in me said “yes” and I know I needed to offer to lead a service as part of my work to meet the current world struggles. When Paul explored developmental stages last March, including discussing the Ken Wilber article “Trump and the Post-Truth World,” I knew that I wanted to use those ideas as a springboard for exploring how I could make a positive difference in the current world situation and, hopefully, have something of value to share with each of you for how you can move forward. What I have found in the intervening months could easily fill a book, weaving in my background in astrophysics, math, computer science, and systems counseling, as well as my experience as a Buddhist practitioner and educator at an Indigenous college. It has been very difficult to hone my presentation down into a 20-30 minute talk rather than a 15 week course. So, even though I can only share a small part of my explorations today, this process has been very fruitful, even though it has also been very difficult. But, hey, that’s the way growth often goes. (3:35 for the intro)

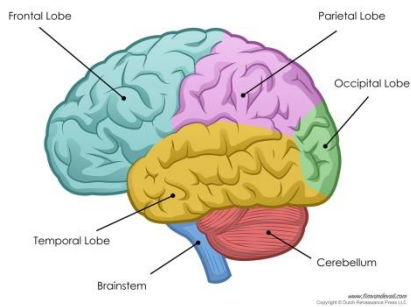
Complex Systems

So, with that I would like to dive right into some ideas and models that have helped me in making sense of where we are as a people on this planet and how we can move forward. I would first like to share some ideas about complex systems, more specifically complex adaptive living systems, and how they relate to human growth and evolution. I didn't originate any of these ideas but hopefully my presentation will be useful to you. I also want you to know that I believe that any model or theory is not reality but, hopefully, helps to make sense of it. As such, it is very important to hold them lightly and let go what doesn't work for you or for a given situation.

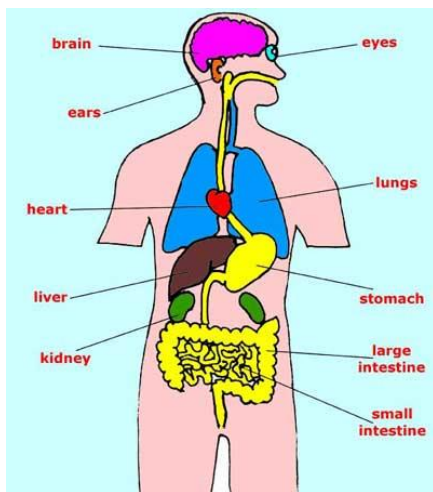
I would like to begin by describing some terms. A complex system consists of many components that interact over and over again, changing each other with each interaction, with results that cannot be accurately predicted. Complex systems can be differentiated from complicated systems by this aspect of unpredictability. Sending a rocket to the moon or predicting the path of the solar eclipse happening on August 21 is a complicated system requiring many calculations but the result can be determined many years ahead of time with great accuracy. A complex system is like my daughter. For the most part, I can't predict what she is going to do or say even one minute from now. But that doesn't mean that complex systems are random only that they evolve in complex ways because of the huge complex interactions of the *parts of the system*. Consider what would happen if a yellow jacket flew right in front of my daughter's eyes – she would scream and runs away because of all of the psychological and physiological interactions triggered by the sight of the yellow jacket. If a small puff of wind made the yellow jacket instead fly just behind her so she didn't see it her response would have been completely different.

An important aspect of complex systems is called "emergence." Emergence refers to new properties that arises when systems come together to form more complex systems, such as when hydrogen atoms and oxygen atoms come together to form something with totally different properties that didn't exist in the constituent atoms – a water molecule. Emergence also occurs when a person or a group of people goes through a transformative process and grows to have qualities that didn't exist previously and which could not be predicted by looking at the properties of the constituent parts. I asked Karen to perform her piano piece "Emergence" for the prelude because I think it beautifully expresses this quality.

Another quality of complex systems is described by Dr. Daniel Siegel, a child development psychiatrist and neuroscience researcher, who has stated that a living system, whether an individual or a group, is healthy and has well-being when it has integration of well-differentiated parts.



Consider the human brain, for example. To be healthy, the parts of the brain must each function properly and communicate in mutually supportive ways with other parts of the brain.



A healthy human body must have each organ and system performing its function while communicating in mutually-supportive ways with other systems.



For larger systems, this means that each person or group of people in the system has a clear identity and that each of the people relate with each other in mutually supportive life-giving ways. The component parts of the system communicate in such a way so as to regulate the overall functioning of the system to keep it health. This is known as self-regulation.

Example of Healthy Systems

My experience working in Native communities has helped me to see that, prior to European contact, Indigenous peoples exhibited these qualities of a healthy system.



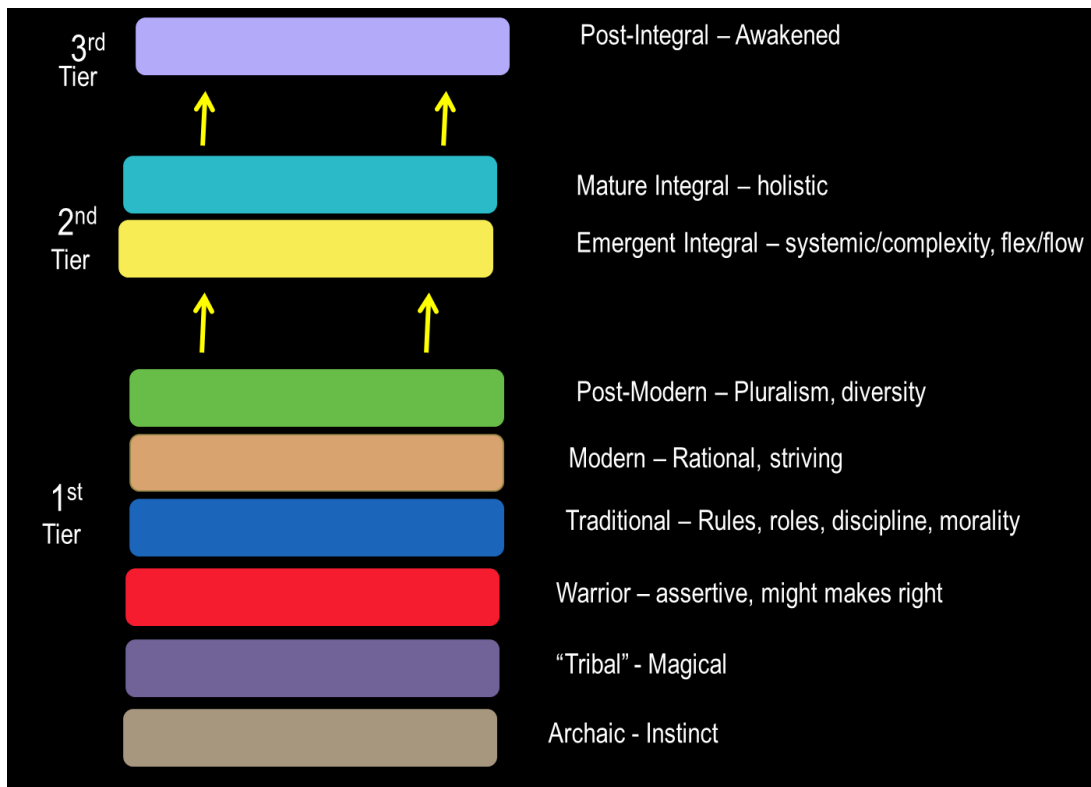
Coast Salish people, for example, built long houses while people of the plains, such as the Lakota people, were more mobile and used teepees. The Coast Salish people's lived and continue to live in deep relationship with the salmon and the ocean, while the Lakota people lived and continue to live in deep relationship with the bison and the plains.



These people, while in respectful relationship with each other are distinct and well-differentiated having significantly different histories, heroes, systems of governance that arises from their unique sense of place. Even within Coast Salish Peoples, when a traditional Lummi person travels to Tulalip they know that while they are relatives that it is not the home of the Lummi person and therefore they do not think that they make decisions for their relatives at Tulalip. Colonization by European settlers damaged and continues to damage these relationships and thus undermined the health and well-being of those systems. This fact will tie in with the last part of my talk.

Spiral Dynamics

I would now like to very briefly discuss a model of individual and social development called “spiral dynamics” which is a way to describe development of complex human systems. It is called spiral dynamics because the interaction of a system with changing environmental conditions causes the system to become more and more complex as it adapts to the changing environment, which is often shown as a helix such as in your order of service.

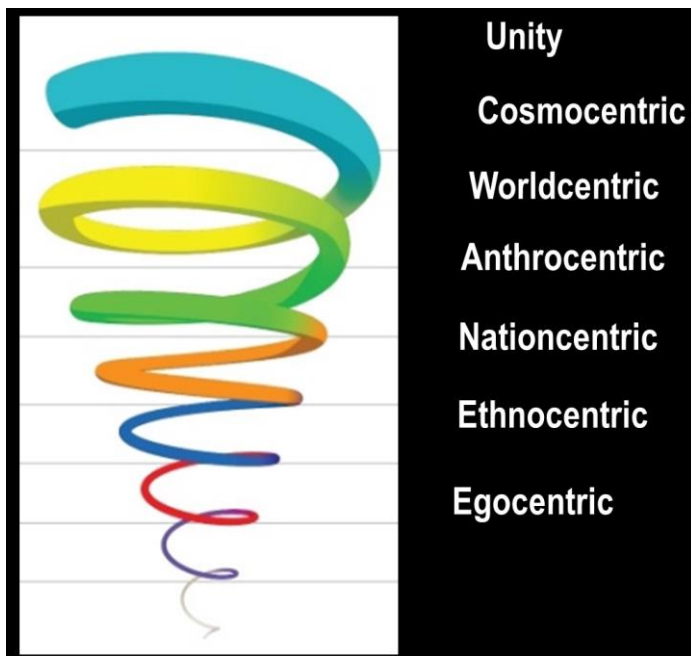


The spiral dynamics model uses colors to represent different stages of development. Consider the development of a child from birth, when it is at the beige level – simply focused on survival without a sense of a separate self. As the child gets older its world becomes larger and it evolves. At age about 5-7 the child reaches the red level and is very focused on self-definition and not on relationship. Societies similarly go through developmental stages. At the red stage the society is very focused on power and control, might makes right and building alliance around power. Gangs exhibit this type of structure. Positive aspects of the red level include assertiveness and proaction. The blue or traditional level has developed rigid ways of relating within the small group, and includes hierarchies, strong rules of discipline, punishment. Positive aspects include emerging morality. Fundamentalist religions are at the traditional level. Several hundred years ago the orange or modern level emerged during the enlightenment in Europe, which led to science, democracy, and capitalism. This level also includes a sense of striving and individualism and can be thanked for many material and technological advancements. I think

you will all recognize the next level, the green or post-modern, which is marked by a sense of pluralism, appreciation of diversity, and a belief that values are relative rather than absolute. This level emerged in the US prior to the Civil War, leading to abolition, and became a prominent force starting in the 1960s. You may recognize all of these levels around the world and in the US and perhaps even within yourself. Each of these levels has a worldview with an according value system. At the red level whoever has the power gets to make the rules. The orange has set rules firmly stated in doctrine. One downside of all of these levels, known as 1st tier levels, are that they devalue other levels and think that those at other levels are just plain wrong, leading to a sense of what has been called “othering” or dehumanizing.

The second tier, known as the integral level, is a distinct jump with a significantly different orientation. People and societies at this level do not think that they are at the ultimate level but in a state of constant growth and consider all other levels to be part of themselves. This level does not exist at the societal level in the world but individuals and groups exhibit it. It is marked by a more fluid and systems approach. Sociological studies show that when about 10% of a population reaches a certain level of development then the entire society begins to make major shifts.

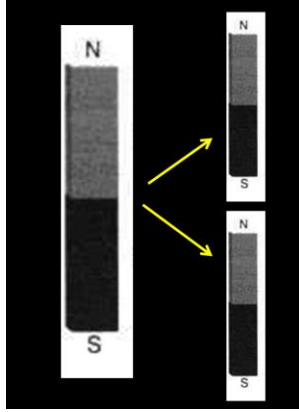
Size of the System at each level



As any system becomes more complex it is able to embrace more and more of the world. Both for individual people and for societies this grows from the self, to one’s own in-group, to the nation, all people, the entire world, universe, and unity consciousness.

Polarities and How they are Managed at Different Levels

Imagine that you have a bar magnet and you decide that you hate north poles. So, you break the magnet in half and throw away the north pole. What happens?

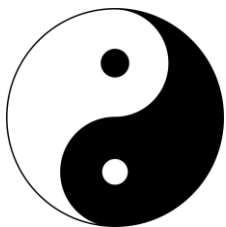


Each magnet now has both a north and a south pole. Magnets only exist in nature with both a north and a south pole. This is the nature of all polarities. A very important aspect of levels of development is how they deal with polarities. Societies and individuals at the traditional level deal with them in an either/or manner. If, for example, you don't believe their doctrine then you will go to hell. As individuals and societies move to the post-modern level and beyond they see polarities as both/and. Sometimes this can take the form of completely rejecting any either/or thinking, which is a form of either/or thinking.

There are many examples of polarities in our lives. For example,

- Male – female
- rigidity-chaos
- collective – individual
- stillness – action
- Light - Dark

At the integral level, a deeper level of understanding of the inter-relationship of the poles is seen, as demonstrated by the yin-yang symbol.



Note that we all at times decide that we don't like one pole or the other, become polarized, and the disowned pole becomes what is known in Jungian psychology as the shadow. Shadows can do tremendous damage if not owned and healed. Unowned shadows become a source of projection and violence. I and many other people contend that we are at a place in the world now where our previous ways of doing things is no longer working. It wasn't for a long time but it used to be easier to ignore. We are now at a place where we need to jump to the next tier, reown our shadows and mature as a people. People who study such things believe that we do not have enough people and groups at the integral level yet to make the jump to yellow but world circumstance are rapidly moving us toward that shift. Thus, the changes in the world environment are forcing humanity to evolve. Unfortunately, as with growth for individual people, societal jumps to the next level require disintegration and reintegration at the higher level. For individuals, this is often a difficult time, which may be called the Dark Night of the Soul. I knew this experience when I went through divorce 26 years ago.

Many people are seeing that the world society is going through a disintegration right now which might be called the Dark Night of the Globe. The question is how we go through this dark night and whether we do it consciously or not.

Guided Meditation

Special Music – Swimming to the Other Side

Part 2 – Transformation and Action

We are at a profound and scary time in the world. We are facing the Dark Night of the Globe with saber-rattling with North Korea and the violence in Charlottesville. How do we respond? If we only respond in opposition are we making the changes that are necessary? What is a viable path that can bring us through to a healthier world?

This is a very difficult question and I don't claim to have answers but I hope that some ideas can help.

For many months I have been thinking about the notion of a Politics of Love which is a distinct shift from the politics of hate or even the politics of division and discord that we are so familiar with. I believe that we are at this point because of a crisis of relationship and healing can only come through relationship. I have been amazed as I have seen other people express similar ideas as ways to move forward. As I mentioned before the music, one of the big issues we must address is how we deal with polarities that results in projection, discord and violence. The result is a break in relationship and a dehumanizing of others. This is what happened to and continues to happen to Indigenous people in the face of colonization. This is what happens to anyone who is not of the dominant group. The problem is that the rehumanization cannot just

be for the afflicted but it must also be everyone. This is extremely hard work, much more difficult than simply opposing injustice. Yes, we must oppose injustice but we must also heal the divisions and reown the larger human family, and for that matter, the family of the earth and all living things.

Several months ago I became very interested in the work of Marianne Williamson. I hadn't previously been aware that she is very politically active. She delivers a live talk each week that is broadcast on the internet. I follow these talks closely as they have given me a great deal of inspiration as I explore my spiritual and political response to the current situation. In essence, she states that we must respond clearly and strongly to the injustices of the world but we absolutely must do so from a place of love and recognition that everyone is our relative. As my daughter wisely says, even if we don't agree with what Donald Trump does he is still our brother. As Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh says, we inter-are. Every person and everything is part of me and I am part of all of them. The awakened ones know this and we must grow into it. To forget this results in violence. It may seem like small violence, such as simply discounting another person's opinion, but it is violence the same and it is what wars are built upon.

Just two days ago, I listened to a talk by John Paul Lederach, a sociologist who has worked throughout the world in peace building efforts. I was amazed how he spoke of many of the same things I've been thinking and that I have heard from others, which include the importance of understanding systems dynamics and managing polarities.

As I reflect upon what I have learned, I believe that there are certain qualities or principles that we must learn to hold and express individually and collectively in order to move forward in a conscious manner. This list is not meant to be exhaustive but hopefully gives you some useful ideas for the work ahead. I also want you to know that I am struggling to embody these qualities and ask that you accept my humble offer that they may be of value.

Here are qualities and characteristics that individuals and groups must embody:

1. Vulnerable courage – this is the willingness to dive into relationship without agenda – to step into the mystery with beginners mind – in the mind of the expert there are few possibilities. In the mind of the beginner there are many. The etymology of the word vulnerable means a wiliness to carry a wound and courage comes the word for heart (couer) – the wiliness to carry the wound of the heart. this work is hard, very hard – but this is where the transformation happens.
2. Respect – The word respect comes from spect – to look. So to respect is to look again. When we interact with a person different from ourselves we tend to automatically respond in opposition to the differences, we become polarized. We must instead stop, question our

assumptions, and look again. We must listen more than speak. We must seek to understand before we seek to be understood. This can result in redignifying for everyone involved and a reowning of our shadows. In this way we are befriending ourselves and others, rehumanization and protecting the dignity of your enemy. You must see the person first and their perspectives second.

3. Resilience – one definition of resilience is the ability to stand in the tension of polarities with awareness and to not collapse into one pole or another. This requires immense integrity and self-awareness to stay present. There is no single or simple pathway to do it. It requires a high level of tolerance of ambiguity. It requires self-reflection, mindfulness and a way to still oneself. This is one reason why a spiritual practice, whether meditation, prayer, or whatever draws you, must be a regular part of your life so that you can stay centered in the fire. I must admit that this is a very difficult task for me to keep a regular practice.

So how do we put these ideas into practice and how will they change the world?

One of the keys is to go out of our way to dialogue with those who are different. I have been trying to gather the courage to dialogue with neighbors who I know voted for Donald Trump but haven't done so but I have had some wonderful conversations with a work friend who voted for Trump and those conversations have strengthened our relationship and encouraged me to take greater risks. I am reminded of the black man who choose to attend KKK meetings and eventually became friends with some of the key members who eventually left the KKK. Change of this sort can only happen through open hearted truly vulnerable dialogue. There is risk in doing so but if we don't extend beyond our comfortable borders we will forever be creating enemies. This requires great endurance as my Native friends have taught me as they seek to decolonize and rehumanize their communities.

I want to say some more about the polarities of Love and action. One polarity is to act without love, which increases violence, or the other polarity of love without action which would mean burying ones head in the sand and imagining all is love and light. I want to make sure that it is clear that these ideas do not suggest not opposing injustice with all your might.

One way that helps me to think about this is to consider a small child who wanders too close to a busy street. When you see this you act to protect that child, you say "NO!" and run over to block its way into the street. But you never lose your love for that child even though it made a mistake. It is much harder to keep this love in mind when your family member pushes your buttons and it way harder to stay in that place of love and action when violent white supremacists kill people. Be clear also that

This does not mean that people who do violent things shouldn't be put into prison for their actions but that the dehumanizing aspects of prisons do not improve the situation but only perpetuate the problem.

This requires a reaching out to dialogue with people who don't believe what you believe with open curiosity and respect. Listen to understand not to convince. Then the alchemy can happen. Then something new can emerge in the system that wasn't there before.

With the recent violence in Charlottesville the polarizations have obviously increased. President Trump's message, while obviously scripted contains some words to which we must hold him, everyone in the government and ourselves to – to love each other. These are hollow words without actions but we can each do our own part in the process. This will not be easy work and will require great endurance and constant application of the three qualities we must each carry.

I would like to shift away from politics and such heavy topics to a broader look at what we can do individually in our own lives. I believe that every action done in love makes a difference to everyone. It doesn't have to be fighting oppression or being politically active although these are crucial also.

I want to share one example of someone who I believe is making a tremendous difference in making the world a better place by enacting these principles. Greg Moench is the owner and instructor at Boom Elite Karate just two blocks from here. My daughter is a student in his classes and I am amazed at the work and dedication he shows to his students. I have watched as he supports each student to grow into the person they can become as he teaches so much more than just karate. Some students need to gain confidence in themselves and he can see how to support them in doing so. Others may need greater focus or respect for others and he firmly and lovingly helps them to grow through that challenge. In his way, he is developing the next generation to be more whole human beings, which can only help all of us.

Every one of us has gifts and ways we can serve and make the world a better place. We are all part of the evolution of humanity and I believe that it is important that we each look within for what draws us to give. I am reminded of a definition of vocation that has stuck with me through the years – your vocation is where your deepest longing meets the world's deepest need.

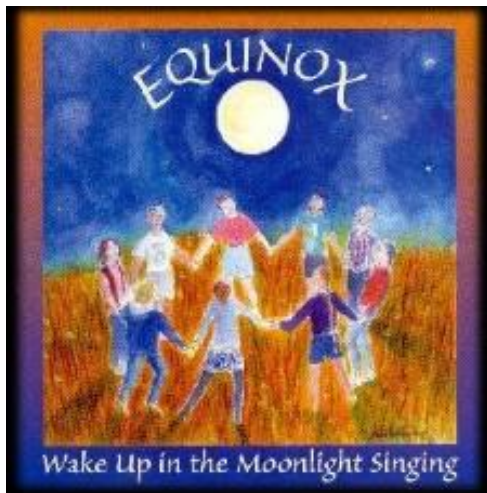
Over the years I have been inspired by a quote written by Marianne Williamson in her book Return to Love, which states:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about

shrinking so that other people will not feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Some people say this isn't correct, and that our deepest fear is that we are inadequate. But stopping with our fear of inadequacy means that we can blame others, our childhood, or even ourselves but what if we own our own power to make a difference in the world. This isn't about grandiosity but about greatness. True greatness is humble. It's about fully being yourself. I truly believe that we can step up and grow to the next level. We have absolutely no assurance that we can save this world but we are alive today and can make a difference.

While this is a serious matter it doesn't mean that we must face it without joy. We need joy in order to rejuvenate and to stay the course. Some of the people who have lost so much, such as the Dalai Lama, are also some of the most joyful people. They can be our inspiration.



Painting of Equinox CD cover by Carrie Koehline

I would like to end with a short verse from Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. I learned it from him many years ago and recite it silently to myself as I awaken each morning as a reminder.

Waking up this morning I smile.

Twenty Four brand new hours are before me.

I vow to live this day in mindfulness

And to see all beings through the eyes of compassion.