

Religion, Science, and Spirit: A Sacred Story for Our Time

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The GATE website features this quote from script consultant Dara Marks.

"Media is transformative when it serves its highest function – which is to show us how to live. The core building block of all forms of media is story, and story is the central delivery system of all self- knowledge."

Our most familiar forms of storytelling focus on the individual, the hero's journey of self-discovery. Personal self-discovery is essential to our individual achievement of a mature spiritual awareness. Transformational media has an important role in advancing that discovery.

I want to speak, however, about the larger, more difficult, and perhaps less familiar challenge of advancing a process of *collective* self-discovery as a global society in deep crisis.

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1. We face a global **economic crisis** created by an unstable financial system that favors speculation over real investment, drives continuing cycles of boom and bust, mires people and governments in debts they cannot pay, and holds national governments hostage to the interests of global financiers.
2. We face a global **social crisis** of extreme and growing inequality. The enormous disparities feed violence by undermining institutional legitimacy, human health, and the social fabric of families and communities.
3. We face a global **environmental crisis** of climate chaos, loss of fertile soil, shortages of clean freshwater, disappearing forests, and collapsing fisheries. This crisis is reducing Earth's capacity to support life and creating large-scale human displacement and hardship that further fuel social breakdown.

Why do we tolerate the economic excesses responsible for this failure? I suggest it is because of a constantly repeated story rarely challenged in public conversation. These are some of its critical narrative elements.

Time is money. Money is wealth. Those who make money are society's wealth creators. Envy is a sin. Consumption is the path to happiness. Humans are by nature individualistic, greedy, and competitive, which are in fact beneficial qualities that the invisible hand of the free market

channels in ways that create prosperity for all. Maximizing financial gain is a moral and legal duty of business. Earth is a rock in space useful as a stock of free resources and a convenient waste dump.

This is the standard economic story propagated by the few whose interests it serves—and, as you may have noticed, it is false on every point.

Contrast that story with these narrative elements of a more accurate story that is the foundation of the local living economies many millions of people throughout the world are already living into being.

Time is life. Life is the most precious of the many forms of wealth. Making time for life is the path to happiness. Equality, community, and connection to nature are essential foundations of human health and happiness. It is our human nature to care and to share. Sufficiency and sharing are adult virtues. Earth is our sacred mother. As she loves and nurtures us, we must love and care for her.

Every enduring human group has a cultural story field that serves as the lens through which its members interpret the information received by their senses. Those stories define the group's shared values, understanding, and expectations—and are essential to society's coherent function. Relating without a shared cultural lens is rather like trying to have a conversation among people who lack a common language.

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Political demagogues have long sought to manipulate the shared cultural story field of society to their own ends—often with powerful effect. Likewise, during the 20th century, *advertisers* became masters of the arts of cultural manipulation to create an individualistic culture of profligate material

consumption that serves well the interests of corporations and financial markets, but now threatens human survival.

Our future depends on a cultural and spiritual awakening that liberates our minds to discover our true human nature, heal society and the planet, and put ourselves on a course to a positive future.

That awakening is at hand.

Jet air travel and the internet together have obliterated the barriers of geography to bring about unprecedented cultural intermingling.

The sudden immersion of hundreds of millions of people into cultures starkly different from those with which they are familiar has jarred a great many of us into awareness that culture is a human construct subject to conscious choice and that we are responsible for the consequences of the stories by which we choose to live.

This awareness, combined with our capacities for instantaneous nearly free communications between all the world's peoples via the Internet now gives us the means to choose our shared cultural stories and thereby our common future as a species. This may be the most significant human development since the development of language, because it is now within our human means to the human future as a conscious collective choice—and to do so with extraordinary speed.

That is what we must now do, beginning with the most foundational of all our stories—the creation stories by which we understand the nature and purpose of creation, moral choice, and our relationships with one another and Earth.

It is now within our human means to alter the human future as a conscious collective choice.

Let me briefly illustrate by noting the implications of three contrasting stories.

The first is the story of the Distant Patriarch—

the familiar religious story of an all knowing, all powerful God who created Earth and all its beings and rules them from afar. Because all that happens is by His will, those who possess great wealth and power in our present life are clearly His favored and we must therefore honor their authority. Our primary purpose in this life is to discern His wishes and win His favor to gain a place by His side in the afterlife.

I once heard a woman on a radio call in show say that she thinks of her life on Earth as nothing more than a short stay over in a cheap hotel on the way to Heaven. That is her story. No way can we expect her to accept responsibility for the upkeep of that cheap hotel. If you're familiar with the Rapturists, you know they celebrate the social and environmental breakdown that threatens our human future as an indication the end times are near and that as believers they will soon be lifted to Heaven to sit at the hand of God.

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Second, is the story of the Grand Machine—

the familiar science story of a clock

works universe in which only the material is real, life is an accidental outcome of material complexity, and consciousness and free will are illusions. Life evolves through a brutal competition for survival, territory, and reproductive advantage—a behavior mimicked by global corporations that engage in a similarly brutal and mindless competition for economic and political dominance in the global economy.

The degree and complexity of the coordination and cooperation involved is beyond human imagination.

This story celebrates what would otherwise be condemned as immoral behavior and strips our lives of meaning, purpose, and moral foundation. In response, we turn to the pursuit of money and material indulgence as our source of solace and sacred purpose. Having a bad day? Go shopping.

For more than six centuries, science and religion have engaged in mortal combat for recognition as the primary story keeper of Western civilization. Yet ironically, they together provide the intellectual foundation for the suicidal economic system we must now put behind us.

Third, is the story of an Integral Spirit, which is less visible to the public mind, but well known to many of us in our private mind. It points both to a potential synthesis of the Distant Patriarchy and Grand Machine stories and to a future path for humanity. By its reckoning,

all of creation is the manifestation of an integral spiritual intelligence engaged in a sacred journey of self-discovery as it actualizes its possibilities through a process of creative becoming. Every being—from the star to the grain of sand; from human to the bacterium—is an expression of this divine force—each with its place and function in the journey of the whole. Far from being alone, we are all deeply and irrevocably interconnected. To the extent that we accept our human responsibility to and for the whole, our lives have profound meaning and purpose.

Creation advances through an awe inspiring creative process of intelligent, cooperative self-organization of extraordinary beauty and profound mystery. Take the story of Earth's biosphere, the exquisitely complex, resilient, and continuously evolving layer of Earth life, as revealed by science.

It is a story of many trillions of individual choice-making living organisms cooperating as an intelligent whole to optimize the capture, organization, and sharing of Earth's energy, water, and nutrients to bring Sacred Earth to life. Together these countless organisms continuously regenerate Earth's soils,

rivers, aquifers, fisheries, forests, and grasslands while maintaining Earth's climatic balance and the composition of Earth's atmosphere to serve the needs of Earth's widely varied life forms.

The human body tells an even more intimate story of life's capacity for conscious, intelligent self-organization. My body, as is yours, is comprised of tens of trillions of individual living cells, each a decision-making entity in its own right with the ability to manage and maintain its own health and integrity under changing and often stressful circumstances—and at the same time maintain the health and resilience of the larger whole. The degree and complexity of the coordination and cooperation involved is beyond human imagination.

Together these cells maintain the body's health and integrity even under conditions of extreme stress and deprivation to create a capacity for extraordinary feats of physical grace and intellectual acuity far beyond the capability of the individual cell.

These stories of our Sacred Earth mother and the human body are only two examples of the many narratives of Creation's capacity for cooperative self-organization from which we have much to learn as we move forward with the transformation of our human cultures and institutions.

The Integral Spirit story is affirmed by our inner awareness, indigenous wisdom, the teachings of the prophets, the findings of science, and our daily experience. It is a story that I believe lives in the heart of every person, which means we need only provide a source of public affirmation to bring it to the fore of public consciousness as a shared story—which entertainment media is uniquely positioned to do.

Making these stories accessible to the public mind is an exciting and worthy challenge for you, the creative minds and storytellers of the entertainment industry. It is an epic challenge and I trust that you will rise to the occasion. Thank you.

[Dr. David Korten](#) is the author of [Agenda for a New Economy: From Phantom Wealth to Real Wealth](#), [The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community](#), [The Post-Corporate World: Life after Capitalism](#), and the international best seller [When Corporations Rule the World](#). He is board chair of [YES! Magazine](#), co-chair of the [New Economy Working Group](#), a founding board member emeritus of the [Business Alliance for Local Living Economies](#), president of the [Living Economies Forum](#), an associate fellow of the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), and a member of the [Club of Rome](#). He earned MBA and PhD degrees from the Stanford University Graduate School of Business and served on the faculty of the Harvard Business School. [He blogs for YES! Magazine](#). This presentation to the [Global Alliance for Transformational Entertainment](#) Story Conference is based on his essay "[Religion, Science, and Spirit: A Sacred Story for Our Time.](#)" [This presentation is also available](#) online on David Korten's Living Economies Forum website.