

"This brilliant manifesto weaves science, spirituality,
and social healing into a peace roadmap for us all."

—**Deepak Chopra**, author of *Peace Is the Way*

Cultivating Peace

Becoming a 21st-Century Peace Ambassador



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"A marvelous book." —**Mark Gerzon**, author of *Global Citizens*

of the planet's climate scientists, they refuse to act decisively. Only a new kind of leadership will save the day!

How, you may ask, is climate change a problem for peacebuilders? I was at a meeting in Washington, DC, on systems thinking and policy change in 2009. Two military representatives of the Joint Chiefs were present. They outlined various scenarios of war, conflict, and mass refugee movements arising out of climate change catastrophes. When the military is drawing up scenarios, you know the situation is serious. But it seems world leaders are waiting to see who will have the courage to do something first.

We noted in the chapter on systems thinking how peace is interconnected with poverty, women's rights, a healthy democracy, social networks, and so on. I have particularly stressed that peace calls us to cultivate capacities in compassionate and skillful listening, nonviolent communication, truth telling, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Without these qualities we cannot move the entire social order to the next turn in the spiral of our collective evolution.

As brilliant peacebuilders, Lynne and Bill Twist founded the Pachamama Alliance to help the Achuar people save their rain forest territory in Ecuador.¹ The Achuar people in their wisdom told them that the most urgent priority was for them to *change the dream of the West*. In other words, the world cannot have peace unless *we* change our ways. Saving the rain forests and protecting indigenous lifestyles require those who live in advanced materialist societies to dream a new dream of communal well-being and sustainability. It is obvious that we urgently need legions of awakened and conscious new-paradigm evolutionary leaders, who can rise to the occasion as we face the challenges left by distorted, myopic leadership.

Characteristics of today's emerging peace ambassadors

Here are some of the defining traits and qualities of the emerging leaders devoted to cultivating peace:

They experience a hologram of the whole

We know that the right hemisphere of the brain is able to see whole pictures. It can leap from seeing the elements themselves to experiencing how they connect and what happens when they do. We honor the left brain because it can analyze, and we honor the right brain because it can synthesize. This capacity to experience the “patterns that connect”—as if they come together like light beams in a three-dimensional hologram—is vital for any leader. Indeed, while others may get lost in the details, leaders must be able to see the overall design. Here, I am not suggesting that leaders have all the answers but rather that they—at minimum—must be able to initiate dialogue that leads to insights into how we can serve what physicist and systems theorist Fritjof Capra refers to as the whole “web of life.”

The whole can also be experienced in a deeply sensorial way: the holographic vision is felt at the level of gut instinct, in the emotional field of the heart’s knowing, and in the mind’s intellectual lucidity.

They are servants of the whole

“Serving the whole” refers to the capacity to commit to a vision or, as some would say, surrender to it. There is no hedging. Nor is there any need for “I’ve got the answer” bravado. Serving the whole requires spiritual maturity, for one of the major aspects of surrender is letting go of ego. The servant of the whole cannot be what we have called a partisan of the part. Leadership is greatly compromised when it is not supported to fulfill this function of serving the whole.

They see problems from the perspective of solutions

With any problem, we want to know who is responsible or often who is to blame for creating it. We can get sucked into problems, and they can shape our thinking in ways that keep us preoccupied with what is wrong rather than on creating solutions.

Problems can quickly progress from warning signal to entropy zone, where they start to pull down everything that surrounds them. Naturally, problems demand attention, but the challenge is not to allow our attention to be framed or defined by them. The solution does

not lie inside the problem, but it does require understanding and accepting the gravity of the problem.

The leader who sees the big picture focuses attention on the solution that picture offers. Any new problems that arise are indicators that the journey to the solution is going astray. The mature leader keeps attention on the desired outcome and allows problems to be learning signposts. It is a matter of seeing where energy is diverted and making sure more energy is not poured into the diversion but into the course correction. The desired outcome must always be the strongest attractor or the evolutionary lure.

They welcome all forms of feedback

Because everything is in movement, it is a mistake to believe that any given path to the accomplishment of a vision will be secured or guaranteed. Zealots get attached to a “this is the only way” orientation. The evolving leader, immersed in visionary insight, does not get locked into a particular strategy. The nineteenth-century British politician William Wilberforce experienced a vision of the end of slavery and surrendered to it, but he spent a lifetime experimenting with different strategies and tactics to reach that goal. All his efforts had a cumulative effect, but in the end clever parliamentary process played the decisive role.

Because the emerging leader’s energy stays inside visionary goals, feedback is welcomed rather than regarded as negative or obstructive. This is the stance of a highly dedicated learner whose true passion is the acquisition of knowledge that advances human evolution rather than of skills to broker on the market. What emerges is a dynamic combination of being led by vision and being grounded in the reality of what is.

They are not defeated by petty or cynical obstruction

We noted earlier that the cynic disguised as the voice of reason constantly finds objections to an idealist’s course of action. Multiple stakeholders with a vested interest in the status quo will offer all kinds of “practical” reasons why things should be delayed or done differently.

“But you haven’t thought of . . .” or “You really have no idea what you are getting yourself into!” These are the nattering nabobs of negativity. But oh, how they can present themselves insidiously as quite reasonable! “You really need to get grounded,” they say. Translation: you are not protecting your own narrow self-interest, or you are about to tread on their self-interest.

But the leader who has inhabited a vision of the solution won’t be deterred by these voices. One of the hallmarks of conscious and peaceful leaders is that they are able to smoke out the difference between genuine feedback and cynical posturing. When you have surrendered to something great, you are not so likely to be deterred by petty objections. Your steadfast commitment to your life’s purpose frees your heart and mind to experience an inner peace that doesn’t fall prey to worry or short-term thinking.

They cultivate multiple ways of knowing

The evolving leader is moving into a space where mentally focused intelligence alone cannot serve. We are called to integrate the instinctual intelligence of the gut, the spacious inclusiveness of the heart, and the lucidity of the mind. In recent years, science has explored these distributed intelligences in the body, and new research in psychology and consciousness studies has given us maps of a new human wholeness.² Departing widely from the typical reductionism of most mainstream research, the new curriculum emerging out of a collaboration between science, psychology, and spirituality points at expanded human capacities.

They value the role of compassion

I once sat down for tea with the commander and president of the West Point Military Academy. He told me that he taught a class on leadership, and at the beginning and end of the class, he asked cadets to list ten qualities of a great military leader, in order of importance. By the time they completed his class, many understood that the most important quality was compassion or empathy. The students understood

that a good soldier was one who was dedicated to protecting life, not destroying it.

We have discovered that empathy is a root intelligence affecting others and that a whole array of qualities of emotional intelligence can be cultivated. Cultivating an advanced emotional and social intelligence is only possible when those who teach such intelligence have themselves mastered it. When our leaders mirror emotional and social intelligence, it percolates through institutions, transforming them from the inside out.

The evolution of our species calls for deep relational maturity, for without it we will never know peace.

They move in an amplified field

When leaders are living a full commitment to their ideals and manifesting their essential qualities, they live in an amplified field of being. In their presence, we feel richer and more expanded. They model for us the courage and the commitment to be true to ourselves.

This amplified field is magnanimous and not compromised by any suggestion of meanness or rivalry. In fact, evolved leaders are always creating a space for others to evolve along with them. In some traditions, they say you need to meet a spiritual master so that you can experience the expanded state he or she lives in. Indeed, it does help to see the leadership you aspire to actualized and embodied. It catalyzes your growth to be invited into your own creativity and greatness by leaders who have stepped into theirs.

I have personally experienced this as a miraculous sense of flow, connection, and synchronicity. When I am in the presence of an amplified being, I move out of staccato and into flow. For truly great beings, there is no disruption of the flow, no matter what happens around them.

They cooperate with the great mystery

Once you cross the threshold of ego-dominated personality and reach deeper into the source of your consciousness, you touch a great mystery. Getting to this place is clearly a spiritual aspect of leadership.

Mystery opens us to experience aspects of reality for which we have no reference points. In recent years, we have seen both scientists and mystics acknowledge this sense of the mystery of life and existence. For example, the astronaut Edgar Mitchell spoke widely about experiencing a mystical sense of oneness with everything in creation as he journeyed back to Earth after walking on the moon. This does not mean that he disconnected from the reality of his space capsule; it means he was connected to a comprehensive reality beyond rational explanation.

Mystical teachings of the world's religions, as well as most indigenous traditions, say it is important to cultivate a relationship to mystery, sometimes referred to as the great mystery. Generally, they teach that encountering mystery has the power to wash away false certainty and rigidity. It cleanses us of a conditioned mind and any notions of self-importance. "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious," Einstein said. "It is the source of all great art and all science."

When we commune with the mysterious, we get a taste of the unity of all life and are graced with hints and flashes of reality's grand design. The great mystery is always pulsing with both emptiness and fullness. Cooperating with it is the essence of great leadership.

They avoid judgmental thoughts and feelings

There is a difference between being discerning and being judgmental. Every leader needs to be highly discerning about people, proposals, and situations. Discerning truth from lies and the real from the fake are prerequisites of good leadership. Discernment frees us up for what is essential.

Being merely judgmental carries freight. It is loaded with divisive condemnation and moral superiority. It is often concerned with being right or being seen to be right. Standing in judgment of others is a way of placing yourself above them. It is one thing to judge a person's actions, but it is quite another to judge that person at the level of their being.

We drown in a sea of negativity when we put ourselves above others. It is impossible for us to lead if we regard others as inferior. The way an evolved and peaceful leader removes the virus of judgmental thinking and feeling is to constantly promote an atmosphere where people give and receive healthy feedback.

They witness the best in others

More than anything else we all have a need to be seen. Those who recognize our essential qualities are the true peacebuilders: they let us know that they see the significance of our lives. Meanness of spirit stems from a place of neglect and the absence of nurturance and love. When we have not been seen and loved for who we are, we can turn sour and even violent.

The peaceful leader is sourced by the power of love. Love is solar; it radiates. It shares of itself. This generosity is not threatened by others' strengths and qualities; on the contrary, it draws them out. Ultimately, it draws out the essence in the other because it speaks from essence to essence.

This leadership quality contains a balance of both feminine and masculine; think of combining the safety and acceptance of the feminine ground of being with the masculine energy of "Try harder—I know you have it in you to do better." When we see the best in others, we are seeing them as they are, as well as seeing their true potential. Imagine how quickly the world would be transformed if we all developed the capacity to see the best in one another and understood that when we do the opposite, we breed hostility.

They step into authentic power

Leadership is the consummate skill of handling power with grace on behalf of the greater good. The conscious and peaceful leader knows that power is never stolen from others. The abuse of power results from a deeply rooted inner sense of inadequacy in the abusive leader. When power is distorted, the leader unconsciously conceals this place of inadequacy and heavily camouflages it so no one can identify it. Ironically, violent leaders first process their own energy through a

pattern of subversion, repression, and denial in themselves long before their power manifests in the distorted way they treat others. When asked about the slaughter of nonviolent protesters in his country, President Assad of Syria replied softly, “But I would never kill my own people.” Assad is guilty of deep denial, but there are other, equally dangerous syndromes, especially that of projection. For example, in so many places of the violent abuse of power that I have visited, imbalanced leaders create an atmosphere where enemies are essential, where their opponents are labeled as dogs, rats, cockroaches, foreigners, fanatics, or terrorists. Inauthentic leadership always resorts to some form of name-calling so that it can stand above what is below.

As I have pointed out repeatedly in this book, authentic power is always shared and always facilitates the empowerment of others. Power is the flow of energy that enables other energies to gather, connect, and move conditions toward desired outcomes. Authentic power can never take an approach where the ends justify the means. To be authentic, power must always justify the means to any end goal. In fact, the process must mirror the summoning and engagement of the highest values, not the lowest common denominator. The one who has the power to empower others is an authentic peace ambassador.

But let’s be clear: we are talking about how to ramp up power, not level it off. We are called to mobilize a whole-systems transformation, and that will require mass empowerment. We must get out of the way of the great power of our own evolutionary potential and stop blocking our destiny with insanely petty power games.

They skillfully transmute adversity

Leadership is defined by how it deals with adversity. When we confront serious challenges, we reveal our qualities and capacities at a deeper level, and usually our baggage is also revealed. Everything we haven’t been dealing with is discharged. At the same time, our core strengths are summoned.

A transformational leader embodies a consciousness that can stand in the fire of gross animosity and transmute it into compassion, forgiveness, and a willingness to face fear. We reveal so much when we are

tested. As I pointed out in chapter 6, transmuting adversity calls for a commitment to doing no harm to those who oppose you, if that is possible. It even means doing everything in your power to protect them from their own unskillful actions. It takes great skill to make sure that someone else's lack of skill does not trigger your own. It is precisely in a time of adversity that we can be pulled back into old wounds—for negativity can open those old wounds like nothing else.

They do not sell cheap remedies

Our frequent embrace of simplistic solutions would be almost endearing if that tendency did not lead to so many dead ends. Shallow, quick-fix, feel-good solutions abound. We confuse the truly miraculous with cynically marketed overnight cures. Demagogues are always touting simplistic solutions or framing issues in terms of good guys and bad guys. Nuance and subtlety are thrown out in favor of exaggerated certainty.

Complexity need not make things confusing. It can highlight webs of connection and the need for greater inclusion in assessing problems and designing solutions. The peaceful leader is not motivated by false imperatives or premature solutions.

Humility does not need to claim the answer to every question because it knows that knowledge comes from wrestling with doubt and understanding dissent. Combine power, humility, and authenticity, and you have the antidote to cheap remedies and snake oil.

They collaborate and unite

Since the new-paradigm leader is not an enforcer, the ability to foster collaboration is the key to effective service. To inspire collaboration, the leader needs to energize others with a clear vision and help them feel empowered to be part of realizing its accomplishment.

In our individualistic postmodern society, collaboration is something we are still very much learning about. We learn aspects of collaboration at home, in the office, and in team sports. We collaborate here and there but not necessarily as a way of life. What seems to be missing is the kind of learning that stretches our capacity for exploring

collaborative models of development. Indigenous ways of supporting kinship groups and tribal affiliations have much to teach us, but we need balance. I have encountered indigenous communities where the community breathes as one but where often individuals leave to explore their unique identity. Our evolving story as a species seems to want us to learn how we can integrate both unique individual and collective identities.

Uniting people in a common vision requires emerging leaders to understand how unity and diversity are part of living-systems design. We are brought together by those who can show us how to live principles that honor diversity and yet intensify a common purpose. The peaceful leader helps open up common ground, not so everyone sings from the same song sheet but so they can discover a harmony never experienced before.

This new form of spacious and inclusive unity is the cornerstone of the emerging planetary peace movement. It has room for multiple forms of leadership. In fact, the movement has left in the dust of evolutionary process any idea of a single model when it comes to leadership. The unimaginable is really happening: “We the people” are the voice of a new plateau of morality and shared higher consciousness.

As I write this in mid-2012, I look over the past year at the pain that people in the Middle East have endured to depose their dictators. Their passion to secure democracy for themselves and their children is evidence of the inexorable journey toward peace that so-called average people the world over are willing to give their lives to attain. And, frankly, the lords of ego just don’t seem to understand how we can be evolving so fast—maybe because ego can make us tone deaf to the great longing for peace that resonates deep within the human soul and because it is baffled by the emergence of collective leadership.