

Transformation

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On Saturday, November 17th, members and guests of the Institute gathered for a conversation on Reflections on Transformation: What We Have Learned? The theme for the year was read out (see IWC webpage) and four presenters, Carol Bemis, Maurice Bisheff, Philip Grant and Tania Knox, led the group in an insightful discussion. Definitions were offered of transformation ranging from the more obvious changes in structures or appearances to the more mysterious and sudden epiphany that leads to a paradigm shift in assumptions. The light of the mind or a transpersonal spirit, it was said, might be the source of a process by which deep structures are converted into new surface structures. A magical intervention, not just an effort to use the will, might be necessary to move one in a moment to something that is new. "Happiness often sneaks in a door you hit" might be a way to describe a transforming experience. However, all change occurs in a dialectical contrast of the changing with the unchanging. It is the mark of a modern person to work with this dialectic of ceaseless change. The problem, one speaker suggested, was not grasping that transformation is the problem. If ultimate transformation is the basis of all life, then are we determined in what we do by a continual motion of cause and effect, or are we able to initiate and induce change? Is there any part of us that is not connected to or influenced by this momentum for change? Will is the energy most commonly identified with human efforts to make change. Is the will an expression of a center of identity that might be likened to a ray of light? Repeatedly, several participants made the point that change must begin within a human being. We must discover that we are masters of our own conscience and bearers of our responsibility. Fear and attachment to old forms must be replaced by an open mind that freely creates new categories of thought and explores multiple possibilities for solutions to social problems. Simple first steps may enable us to walk a thousand steps. For example a change in basic building materials may bring multiple benefits to the environment. Enabling those incarcerated in prisons to grow their own food may transform the inner dispositions of those whose out-of-balance behavior led to their incarceration. Deep transformation within a human being that awakens a new sense of identity and capacity is necessary for self-generated participation in Deep Democracy. All parts of our self must become engaged in political activism for the ideals of democracy to be fulfilled. True leadership will draw out the creative and expansive will in others that best serves the common good. The observation of Caesar Chavez was explained. Leaders who are too charismatic, he said, eclipse the perceptions and will of the followers they attract and make them passive. Instead everyone should be transformed by example and

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inspiration into a leader. This kind of leadership includes engaging people with different points of view. Thereby, the whole group becomes through a consensus building process the collective bearers of greater truth. Mahatma Gandhi integrated transformation within himself by living the life of ordinary people before he attempted to organize them into a mass movement. His teachings remind us that excessive will power, a primal force in nature, must be disciplined by a deep commitment to non-violence and the continuous effort that a revolution requires. Thinking through challenges rather than seeking outside assistance is a mark of a transforming agent. The role of ideals inherited from both Great Teachers and ordinary people was stressed. Ideals are not bound by time or space or conditions. Meditation on ideals enables us to be true to our real self and unleashes an inner dynamic of an ideal with a self-chosen action. Paul Hawkins' book, *Blessed Unrest*, was mentioned as an inspiring report on successful activism working through NGOs around the globe. Is transformation of people and environments promoted by architecture? Frank Lloyd Wright suggested that architecture is a means of passing wisdom from past to present. In this generational transmission, there is an unchanging motion in what is constantly changing. Forms can carry core ideas of balance and proportion and, in a magical way, stimulate transformation. Buildings inspire and teach us how forms inspire people to be inspired by the founding function of the building. The seminar ended with a metaphor. The universe was likened to one great tree producing tens of thousands of seeds. Some are spent unwisely, some lie barren in hard soil, but some grow. Sacrifice is necessary for nourishment. We must give without expectation of seeing results, but the great arc of transformative energy will sustain fearless effort to fulfill the highest potential in all that lives.

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