

ESSAY: SPIRIT IN BUSINESS AND WORK

by **Ronald Bell**

*The most exciting breakthrough of the 21st
Century will occur not because of technology,
but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human*

--John Naisbit, *Megatrends 2000*

*Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness,
nothing will change for the better in the sphere of our being humans,
and the catastrophe towards which this world is headed –
be it ecological, social, demographic
or a general breakdown of civilization...*

--Vaclav Havel, President of Czechoslovakia
In his address to the U.S. Congress

In recent times, interest in the subject of Spirit in Business and Work is reflected in conferences, seminars, videos, books, research studies, the founding of new associations, polls and articles in such publications as *Business Week*, *Fortune*, *Industry Week*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Psychology Today*, *Leaders* magazines and *The New York Times*. From an individual worker's sense that "something is missing" to a growing corporate awareness of global interdependence and the importance of economic, ecological and social sustainability, (beyond a limited view of "profit" in the financial index's *Dow* to a broader kind of balance sheet's *Tao* of business) interest in the subject is increasing.

The purpose of this essay is to energize and facilitate an inquiry or conversation that is gathering steam across the United States and the globe, regarding the nature and role of Spirit in Business and Work. A central goal is to help connect who we are, what we do, and what we value. The conversation is multidimensional, multifaceted, and expressed from various perspectives, professional domains and in a variety of word symbols.

At the conceptual or theoretical level, the elusive essential quality we call "*spirit*" may be intrinsically resistant to quantification and limiting definition, yet "*it*" is something we all experience. **At the experiential or practical level**, we can be mindfully aware of spirit and cultivate its positive life-generating qualities in life and work.

Peter Senge observes that:

*Any description of reality, be it modern or ancient, religious, mythological or scientific can only offer us a story, partial and incomplete about reality. The inquiry in business about building community, stewardship, core values, belonging, and spirit is about "**real time, real stuff**" that has profound implications for organizations serious about business success, learning,*

sustainability, competitive advantage, and retention of high caliber people in critical times.

Michael Lerner (*Spirit Matters*) speaks of the conceptual/theoretical limitations of thinking and language and of the mysterious dimensions of Spirit:

That's a problem with Spirit – we can allude to it, but every attempt to define it in itself rather than in its manifestations ends up seeming silly, empty or vague. The deepest spiritual thinkers warn us that the realm of Spirit is the realm of the ineffable. It simply can't be adequately expressed in language. The best we can get is poetry and song, not propositional knowledge. ...Abraham Joshua Heschel (states): "The heart of being confronts me as enigmatic, incompatible with my categories, sheer mystery. All we have is a sense of awe and radical amazement in the face of a mystery that staggers our ability to sense it."

In this relatively brief essay, I will avoid at once a quick "One Minute Manager", "Three-Minute Meditation", microwave-oven approach, and an exhaustive inquiry (which may be beyond my time or competence and our pragmatic scope) into the multi-dimensioned theme of Spirit in Business and Work. We can, however, **attempt to work with the subject in an introductory, practical, usable manner, while simultaneously unwrapping some of its' meaning and honoring its mystery.**

The Center for Business Excellence (CBE) and SIB Sponsored Spirit in Business and Work Forums are held in geographically representative regions of central New Jersey. Together they **represent a programmatic vehicle of The Center for Business Excellence (CBE) for bringing together senior business, government, educational and community leaders to address the issue of Spirit in Business in a way that is practical, timely, and designed to produce effective change.**

The SIB Forums are **similar to the CBE's "Breakfasts with Champions" series of seminars** featuring business authors, thought leaders, and corporate change agents working to transform organizations, workplaces, and communities in ways that respond to changing opportunities and needs. CBE says of the breakfast seminars:

*"One of the challenges facing innovators and change agents in any area is simply that of being heard. The mass media creates the illusion of a multiplicity of coherent ideas, while frequently creating nothing more than a cacophony of competing marketing messages. Such messages, however beguiling, cannot produce genuine transformation. **Human beings need to speak and to listen to each other individually and in small groups. To dialogue and to engage with ideas, to absorb and to appropriate not only the content of the message but also its real context, its emotional weight, its personal and social significance. And they need to be able to build on these ideas with practical and concerted action.**"*

The SIB Forums are intended as opportunities for exploring the nature and role of spirit at work and the practical possibilities for creating more harmonious, creative, sustainable, empowering workplaces and communities, which encourage the integration of spirit, life and work.

Studs Terkel says: “*Most people have jobs that are too small for their spirits*”. A poll suggests that 80 percent of American workers are unhappy in their jobs. Boredom, frustration, lack of personal meaning, significance and value, etc. can exact high tolls in overall health, job satisfaction, productivity and the business “bottom line” (however defined). Most people spend most of their lives at work. Instead of imprisoning and depleting human energy, passion, and vitality in jobs that block and limit spirit, work can nurture and release the human spirit. **We can encourage the connection of who we are, what we do, and what we value in work and life, while enhancing a triple bottom line of people, profits and the planet.**

Spirit at Work Forums can look into some practical on-the-job expressions of spirit as having to do with such realities as creating and connecting, being vulnerable and authentic, really showing-up and being present, valuing and being valued, contributing and serving, etc. – in other words, with **what it means to be fully human at work**. I believe that deep down, most of us want to **bring our whole selves to work** and stick our lives into the gizzard of the business enterprise, organization and community to make generative, finger-print-like positive differences. The dialogues seek to assist each participant in making a real, practical difference and contribution to work and the community.

The root of the word “*spirit*” means “*to breathe life into*”. **Significance, purpose and meaning are not givens** in life and work, they are human creations – **we create meaning(s)**. Humans can create multifaceted ways to evoke and express spirit and “breathe life into” work and work environments. Nelson Mandela said:

*“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.”*

When the naturally zestful and caring vitality of the human spirit is released, productivity, people, profits, community and the planet *all* flourish. The wise and witty “Pogo expresses our reality and our challenge: “***We are surrounded by insurmountable opportunities!***” It is empowering to re-member that businesses and organizations are human constructions, and as such are subject and open to human reformulation, reconstruction and transformation. (*AI Constructionist Principle*).

There are multiple faces of the human spirit and a variety of its forms and expressions. Business, work, organizations and the community are composed of a plurality and diversity of perspectives and practices. **We will explore spirit in the workplace – not so much as *the answer*, but as a life-kindling question into *what gives life at work* –**

facilitating an ongoing search for what's most meaningful, true and satisfying in terms of one's own individual perspective, values and experience.

The intention is to encourage forums that are inclusive by design and characterized by an appreciation, honoring and valuing of difference, diversity, pluralism, individual tradition, perspective and experience. The aim is to encourage dialogue “spaces and containers” that are safe and large enough to hold together a diversity of individuals and a diversity of apparent competing conceptual polarities, such as: individual and community, autonomy and interdependence, inner-work and outer-work, wounds and healing, being and doing, continuity and change, chaos and order, particular and universal, local and global, past and future, intuitive/mystical and analytic/scientific, material and non-material, essence and existence, implicate and explicate, shadow and light, endarkenment and enlightenment, questions and answers, mystery and meaning, consciousness and commerce, intellectual inquiry and practical action. F. Scott Fitzgerald declared the test of a first-rate intelligence as being the ability to hold two contrary ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. (And once we have mastered paradox, perhaps we can deal with polydox.)

Another intention is to frame the conversation about Spirit and Work in the positive direction of health rather than pathology in the (Appreciative Inquiry) belief/assumption that people and organizations move in the direction of what they inquire about (heliotropic and pygmylion principles). The conscious choice of directing the flow of dialogue from individual and organizational dysfunction toward optimal function or performance and “what gives life” is admittedly not neutral, in the sense that it represents a sort of intervention in and of itself. It also implies and envisions **a positive SIB mission:**

to connect leaders in a community of inquiry, learning and action ,to release the creative power of individuals and organizations for the benefit of the whole, to support and accelerate the trend toward visionary leadership, organizational transformation and evolving business as a agent of community and world benefit.
(Excerpted: the National/Global Spirit in Business's Mission, amended for essay).

The CBE Mission and Purpose statement reads

“The CBE is an organization devoted to transforming the relationship between business and the community, by recognizing and supporting the practices and principles of business excellence through analysis, education and effective demonstration. It brings together senior business, government, educational and community leaders to address these issues in a way that is practical, timely, and designed to produce effective change; it offers them a platform for communicating values, objectives, strategies, and initiatives and gaining the support of the community in fostering greater awareness, confidence, and support for business. It works to serve the community by ensuring that our businesses are the best they can be.”

Established initially in the heart of Central New Jersey, one of the most attractive locations for corporate headquarters in the Northeast, the CBE is able to draw upon a wealth of executive talent and experience, and to offer conferences, seminars, roundtables, programs, and publications of interest to a sophisticated and growing corporate audience. The Center also promotes strategic initiatives that create visibility, transparency, and sustainable economic growth, both locally and in the wider regional economy. ...

The CBE works in close cooperation with the business programs of several nearby educational institutions, and with other organizations, to strengthen these programs and their ties to the business community. (July 2002)

In the conducting of SIB Forums, I suggest we consider Michael Lerner's (*Spirit Matters*) question and observation:

What could this workplace, profession, or type of work look like if we had a new Bottom line? ... *The hardest part of this discussion is getting rid of what I call "the reality police" – all those voices in our own heads that tell us that "they" won't let us make these changes and that therefore we are wasting our time even thinking about all this. As long as people allow the reality police to hold them back, the discussion will remain stunted and uninspired.*

Visionary and transformational leadership beckons us to become ***entrepreneurs of the possible***.

A few more words about words is important to keep in mind in regard to the CBE/SIB sponsored Spirit in Business Forums. Words and language are objective "facts" in the world by way of human agreement and consensus. In this sense, their "meanings" (consensus reality) exist because folks agree around more or less specific denotations and connotations. This is *not* to say there is not any specific realities or going-on-ness independent of us and/or our word-symbols. It *is* to say that the words we use can signify and evoke multiple shades of meanings and emotions, depending on individual differences in mental models, paradigms, perspectives, experiences, assumptions, beliefs, interpretations and conscious or unconscious dynamics and intentions.

It may be useful to make distinctions between the words "spirituality" and "religion." James R. Lucas (in *The Passionate Organization- 1999*) refers to what he calls "*The Red Herring of Religion*":

The Red Herring in the area of spirituality, the great big giant distraction from a meaningful approach to the deepest and best part of who we are as humans, is often religion. Although religion can be supportive of our spirituality, it can also easily misguide or devour it. ... Religion is our attempt to deal in an organized way with spirituality....Religion itself is not the problem. It's the wrong "application" of religion, the codifying and labeling and restricting and judging and condemning. It's the arrogance that claims to possess all of the answers

while others have none. ... But the charge to us as leaders is not to throw out the good with the bad, the mystery with the confusion. ... My experience tells me that most people are open to spirituality but that many are closed to, bored with, or fanatical about religion. We leaders can –with great care, to be sure –appeal to their spiritual core while avoiding the red herring of religion.

Mitroff and Denton (*A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America*) surveyed or interviewed approximately 1700 people about spirituality and its role in the workplace; this statement represents the most widely held view of spirituality, according to their research:

Spirituality is the basic desire to find ultimate meaning and purpose in one's life and to live an integrated life.

It is not uncommon for words like “spirit,” “soul,” and “spirituality” (or even “business” and “work”) to evoke multiple, differing, emotionally laden states and conflicting views. The two views, which follow are illustrative:

“I think that all leadership is indeed spiritual leadership.”
--prominent management consultant and author Peter Vaill

“When the talk turns to the spiritual side of leadership, I mostly want to run.”
--prominent management consultant and author Tom Peters

From CBE/SIB’s perspective in general and for the conducting of Spirit in Business Forums in particular, it is suggested that such words *not* refer to any organized religion, particular deity or faith tradition. This is not to suggest that there is anything wrong or untruthful with such words and their referents, but that in the context of SIB Spirit at Work Forums, their “red herring” connotations can produce non-useful, unproductive conflicts or detours. This arbitrary distinction is only utilitarian and is intended to be solely facilitative and instrumental; its use does not suggest any truth or untruth, rightness or wrongness, only distinctions as to probable usefulness or un-usefulness, specific to SIB Forums.

The words of the poet Rumi are suggestive::

*“Somewhere
out beyond ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing
there is a field.
I’ll meet you there”*

An implicit operating and guiding principle for Spirit in Business and Work is that the CBE/SIB is *neither* representative of, aligned with, *nor* antithetical to any particular philosophy, political party or faith tradition. Rather it views itself as a bridge-builder and common ground space for *all* vectors and sectors of business and the wider community. It is a force for collaborative win-wins and a (neutral) *field* for positive total community-

wide possibility. CBE/SIB's process and purpose, its practices and principles, means and ends, programs and mission are intentionally inclusive, not exclusive. Its aim is to understand rather than judge, and to respect and celebrate individual, cultural, ethnic, religious and spiritual differences.

It is my bias and assumption/belief that the word-symbol "spirit" is *intrinsically* resistant to precise measurement, quantification and definition. Such words as *spirit* and *soul* are powerful and useful word symbols, precisely in part, because they refer to and make possible our communication and reflection about social reality and how it fits into a larger context or "big picture" of meaning and ontology of being and existence. John R. Searle (*The Social Construction of Reality*) refers to this amazing (though often taken for granted) powerful human ability to symbolize:

With consciousness comes intentionality, the capacity of the organism to represent objects and states of affairs in the world (other than itself) to itself.

Word-symbols such as "spirit" and "soul" both necessarily *reveal* and *conceal* and thus remain mysteries, yet they can also communicate significant and useful meanings which we may agree upon, experience and intentionally cultivate and nourish in our lives and work. Word symbols are both mysterious and practical. I highly value the brief six-line poem of Emily Dickenson:

*The word is dead
When it is said
Some say.
I say
It just begins to live
That day.*

For the remaining portion of this essay, **I will utilize a typology or organizing formula** which can be semantically and mentally useful, borrowed from Diana Whitney's 1995 article written for the World Business Academy entitled: *Spirituality as a Global Organizing Potential*. Diana is an author, thought leader, consultant and President of the Corporation for Positive Change). She states:

As an emergent concept, spirituality, as it relates to business, organizational development, and the workplace, currently engages organization scholars and practitioners in a multifaceted, postmodern discourse. ... **Each of these conversations evokes ... a differing and yet somewhat overlapping set of principles and practices for addressing spirituality...** ... Current considerations of spirituality as it relates to business, work, and organization development might loosely be **clustered into four primary conversations** that I have called **spirit as energy, spirit as meaning, spirit as sacred, and spirit as epistemology**.

SPIRIT as ENERGY

This approach and understanding of spirit in the workplace revolves around the sense of spirit as energy in individual and organizational contexts and in all living systems.

Harrison Owen (in *Spirit: Transformation and Development in Organization –1987*) reflects this sense:

“Whatever else high performance and excellence may be based on, they would seem to have something to do with the quality of spirit ...human Spirit, our Spirit, the Spirit of our organization.”

Individual and organizational effectiveness and transformation is viewed in terms of removing energy blocks and the releasing or directing of energy flows associated with an *élan vital*, energized feeling and spirited high performance.

Peter Vaill (*Managing as a Performing Art*) states:

All the case studies and other research results that have come out about excellence and peak performance confirm that both members and observers of excellent organizations consistently feel the spirit of the organization and the activity, and that this feeling of spirit is an essential part of the meaning and value that members and observers place on that activity.

Spirit as energy conversations can be about being in the “flow” (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi), in the “zone” or having a “peak experience” (A. Maslow), mindfulness, and “bliss”(J.Campbell). Joseph Campbell – the famous scholar of mythology- did not mean by “bliss” mere “fun”. He said (in a documentary about his life and work), *“By bliss I mean the deep sense of being totally engaged in life.”* This conversation can involve feelings of passion, team spirit, intuition, going with the gut or heart, authenticity, experiences of synchronicity, synergy, alignment of individual and organization values and goals, commitment, going the extra mile, emotional intelligence, empathy, caring, compassion, forgiving, accepting, releasing, connecting, community, belonging, sacrificial giving, serving, contributing, zest, celebrating, festivals in the workplace, visioning, increased focus and concentration, work that matches a person’s skills and interests, enjoyment, excitement, challenge, sensing strength and power, creative breakthroughs and flashes of insight (*eureka*s), pushing the imagined envelope of limitations, inspiration, heroic actions, etc. . Some of these spirit-as-energy conversations, though distinct, overlap with spirit-as-meaning conversations.

Some examples of actual titles of seminars and workshops involving spirit as energy conversations are: *Bringing Joie de Vivre to Work: Integrating Heart and Mind with the Organization’s Purpose and Brand; Get Inspired! Be Part of it; Reinspiring Work: How to Create the High Passion-High Performance Work Environment; Cool Fire: Meditation for Business Success and Creativity; HeartMath: The Critical Role of Emotions in Decision-Making, Innovative Thinking and Organizational Effectiveness; Successful*

Behaviors Emerge from True Head, Heart and Soul Connections: A Case Study; The Circle of Fire: Leaving Your Comfort Zone in Order to Change; and Leading from the Heart.

Spirit as energy can also refer to the basic stuff, which animates or makes life possible. Fritjof Capra (*The Hidden Connections*) speaks of this dimension of spirit:

In the languages of ancient times, both soul and spirit are described with the metaphor of the breath of life. The words for “soul” in Sanskrit (atman), Greek (psyche), and Latin (anima) all mean “breath.” The same is true of the words for “spirit” in Latin (spiritus), Greek (pneuma), and Hebrew (ruab). These too, mean “breath.”

The common ancient idea behind all these words is that of soul or spirit as the breath of life. ...

Since respiration is indeed a central aspect of the metabolism of all but the simplest forms of life, the breath of life seems to be a perfect metaphor for the network of metabolic process that is the defining characteristic of all living systems. Spirit – the breath of life – is what we have in common with all living beings. It nourishes and keeps us alive.

What distinguishes spirit as energy from the conversation of spirit as meaning, is the primary focus on the feeling of *aliveness*. Joseph Campbell emphasizes this focus in *The Power of Myth*:

People say that what we’re all seeking is a meaning in life. I don’t think that’s what we’re really seeking. I think what we’re seeking is an experience of being alive...or the rapture of being alive.

I don’t think it has to be either/or; it can be both/and – a sense of *aliveness and meaning*.

SPIRIT AS MEANING

This conversation of spirit as meaning is wide-ranging but has as part of its core the understanding that workers need more from their work than money. Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs” model illustrates a core assumption of this perspective – it views human needs as moving beyond biological necessity toward safety/security, sense of belonging, recognition, self-esteem/worth, and self-actualization. Workers are seen not as simply instrumental *objects* or “widgets” to be used in an organizational assembly line, or as things like “Kleenex” to be used and disposed of, but rather as whole *subjects* of holistic intrinsic value and as integral parts of the “triple bottom line” of people, profits and the planet.

Peter Senge, director of the Center for Organizational Learning at MIT’s Sloan School of Management and author of The Fifth Discipline, notes that the prevailing mechanistic model of business encourages managers to see people as machines, not people and says,

“We deeply resent being made machinelike, in order to fit into the machine.” ... “As we enter the twenty-first century, it is timely, perhaps even critical, that we recall what human beings have understood for a very long time, that working together can be a deep source of life meaning. Anything less is just a job.”

(Peter Senge, Foreword to A. de Geus, *The Living Company*, Harvard Business School Press)

In similar vein Barbara Shipka states:

We in the corporate setting tend to believe that we are supposed to check our deepest personal selves – our inner selves, our soul’s development – at the door of the workplace, at least publicly. This assumption prevents us from bringing some of the most powerful and creative parts of ourselves to our jobs. In corporations, fear, anxiety, a sense of isolation, apathy, and despair are the results of spiritual poverty.

The spirit-as-meaning conversation involves such themes as the aligning of individual and organizational purpose, mission and values; visioning of desired futures; making a difference; inspiring visionary leadership which models and “walks the talk”; authenticity; integrity; empowerment; servant leadership; conscious creation of individual/organizational history through “storytelling and appreciative inquiry; being vulnerable; awareness of and attention to individual/organizational loss, suffering and anguish; connectivity, team and community building; individual development and training; emotional intelligence; value of risk-taking, creativity, humor and play; business/community and local/global interdependence; ecological stewardship and sustainability for future generations; valuing of difference and diversity and the honoring of all voices; value of mytho-poetic traditions; ritual and the “hero’s journey”; and the sense of work as a “calling” or vocation.

Linda Naiman in an article entitled *Creativity and the Meaning of Work* (published by the World Business Academy, 1998) states:

*Today we are experiencing a revolution in the workplace. Not only are institutions and huge conglomerates crumbling around us, our traditional ideas about work itself are dissolving. As a society we are undergoing a radical change in the way we think of work. We are starved for **meaning and purpose** in our lives, and with the breakdown in job security in the corporate world, we are no longer willing to separate our values from our work. There is a yearning to align life purpose with work to make it meaningful.*

Robert Frost’s poem, *Two Tramps in Mudtime*, expresses this desire to align life purpose and one’s work:

*Yield who will to their separation
my object in living
is to unite my avocation and my vocation*

as my two eyes make one in sight.

*Only where love and need are one
and work is play for mortal stakes
is the deed ever really done
for heaven and the future's sake.*

Some examples of actual titles of seminars and workshops involving the conversation of spirit as meaning are: *Who Are We and What Can We Accomplish?*; *New Science and the Human Experience*; *Personal Leadership*; *Five Steps to Values-Driven Success – The Practical Use of Spiritual Values in Business*; *Sustainability, Leadership and the Role of Business in the 21st Century*; *The Seven Acts of Courage: Bold Leadership for a Wholehearted Life*; *Beyond Yes: The Spiritual Art of Negotiation*; *Creating a Brand Message that is Fun, Effective, Creative AND Ethical*; *Accesses Your Soul @ Work: Creating Happiness and Fulfillment in Your Work*; *Values-Based Leadership: Not an Oxymoron!*; *The Significant Trials of Transformational Leaders: Exploring the Mystery of Suffering*; *Ethical Decision Making as the Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility*; *Living and Communicating Our Mission*; and *Values Based Leadership in Good and Bad Times*.

Studs Terkel interviewed workers in diverse work contexts and observed (*Working*):

This book is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying.

James Autry in his book *The Servant Leader* finds meaning in relating spirituality to a deeper connection with our work. In surveying recent changes confronting business and a flurry of responses – “everything from *Total Quality Management (TQM)* to *Reengineering to the Learning Organization*”- he asks the question:

So what's missing? *I submit that what has been missing is a deeper connection with our work, a connection that transcends position and power and money, a connection that earlier generation had but that we seem not to have. I call that connection, that deeper meaning, the spirit of work. ... I say “the spirit of work” to distinguish your spirituality at work from the more personal spirituality that comes from your relationship with the sacred, with God, with a higher Power. Certainly the spirituality you bring to work is derived from the same source – but the expression of it is in another context, which is, “How does your spirituality find expression in the workplace, in your attitude about your work, in your relationships with your employees, peers, colleagues, customers, vendors, others?” That's the question and the challenge, because it is in your attitude and behavior as well as in your relationships that your spirituality expresses itself at work – an expression that is most often manifest as service.*

SPIRIT AS SACRED

Diana Whitney distinguishes this conversation: “*One might consider this the realm of Spirit with a capital S, to distinguish it from the preceding conversations about spirit with a small s (Hawley, 1993).*”

This conversational domain seems, more often than not, to bring a connotation of “divine spiritual presence” to perceptions of the natural world and to reality. It may or may not involve a connection to organized religion, a specific faith tradition, or belief in a Divine Being as such. The conversation can involve belief in a Divine Being that is envisioned to be “transpersonal” (*more* than anthropomorphic or personal) and/or at *least* personal, because the “personal” is considered the highest form of creation/evolution. This view can sense the sacred or divine as *either* imminent (with us and within nature) *and/or* transcendent (beyond us and outside of nature). Some forms resemble a “pantheism” (god or the divine “as” nature) or a “panentheism” (the divine “in” but not equated with or identified “as” nature).

This conversation is nuanced, multidimensional, multifaceted and multi-perspectival. Christian theologians such as Paul Tillich speak of God as the “*Ground of Being*” or as our “*Ultimate Concern*”. Jewish theologian Martin Buber speaks of the divine as revealed in the “*I-Thou*” relationship or encounter. Buddhist, Taoist and Native American perspectives envision the sacred, spiritual, or divine spirit as a quality in all of life, in nature, animals, plants, materials and all relationships in the “Great Chain of Being”.

Zen master and author Thich Nhat Hanh encourages the practice of “*Mindfulness*” in everyday life and our sense of oneness and unity with the sacred essence of Life. He writes of “**Interbeing**” -- speaking poetically and metaphorically of the page upon which he writes (and we read) as containing the whole universe:

*If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper “inter-are”. “Interbeing” is a word that is not in the dictionary yet, but if we combine the prefix “inter-“ with the verb “to be,” we have a new verb, **inter-be**. If we look into this sheet of paper even more deeply, we can see the sunshine in it. Without sunshine, the forest cannot grow. ... Looking even more deeply, we can see ourselves in this sheet of paper too.... It is part of our perception. Your mind is in here and mine is also. We cannot point to one thing that is not here – time, space, the earth, the rain, the minerals in the soil, the sunshine, the cloud, the river, the heat. Everything co-exists with this sheet of paper. ... “To be” is to inter-be. We cannot just “be” by ourselves alone. We have to inter-be with every other thing. This sheet of paper is, because everything else is. ...*

As thin as this sheet of paper is, it contains everything in the universe in it.

Matthew Fox – author/theologian/creator of *Creation Spirituality*-- writes about *Original Blessing* (vs. Original Sin) and the mystical-prophetic tradition and the spirituality of work “Where the Great Work of the Universe and the Work of the People Come Together.” He states in *The Reinvention of Work – A New Vision of Livelihood for Our Time* (1994):

*At bottom, the issue is one of spirituality, which is always about “all our relations,” as the Lakota people pray. And work is clearly a deep partner in our relationships. ...It is tragic to separate living from livelihood, values from the workplace. ... One might name the paradigm shift of our time as moving from machine to green or from green to sacrament. **We are talking about resacralizing our work worlds and therefore our whole world...as “theosis”, the divinizing of the universe.***

The Indian mystic Kabir, wonders how it is possible for humans to experience a lack of the sense of the sacred in a spirit-filled universe, and says:

“I laugh when I hear that the fish in the water is thirsty.”

Kabir also writes:

*O dear friend
In search of
My Beloved,
I wandered
All over the earth
In far and distant lands;*

*But on meeting
With Him,
My own courtyard
Became the universe!*

William Blake expresses similar sensibilities saying, “*If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would be seen as it is, infinite.*”

Other voices for spirit, as universally present in all life forms, are the ecologists, environmentalists and others calling for ecological stewardship and sustainability. Whether or not they sense the spiritual affinity, numinous presence or enchantment in the natural world described by John Muir and Henry David Thoreau, they do recognize our connection and practical interdependence with the natural world. The valuing of biodiversity and nature as a sacred trust is actually self-serving, practical and makes good business sense. Paul Hawken –social innovator- advocates working with business, in his book *The Ecology of Commerce* and joins with his colleagues Amory and Hunter Lovins,

in their book *Natural Capitalism* in proposing that natural resources are a form of capital. They state (or overstate, depending on where you stand) that organizations such as Greenpeace and the Sierra Club:

...have now become the real capitalists. By addressing such issues as greenhouse gases, chemical contamination, and the loss of fisheries, wildlife corridors, and primary forests, they are doing more to preserve a viable business future than are all the chambers of commerce put together.

They point out the many ways in which commerce can profit through environmental awareness, by working practically from within the system of commerce with a heightened sense of the sacred, inherent in our selves and in the natural world. We all live in one “spaceship earth” and are inextricably interrelated individually and corporately in terms of “the company we keep”. Gregg Levoy observes: *“The rub is that the human psyche is like the Earth –it is a closed system. There is no “out” as in “throwing the garbage out,” There is no trash icon. Whatever energies we ignore or repress will come up somewhere else.... And the frustrations and regrets in our lives become like tombstones, reminding us of where someone is buried.”*

The conversation of spirit-as-Sacred connotes a divine spiritual presence and a sense of reverence or connection with spirit, perceived as universally present. Dr. Joel Levey – organizational development consultant and author – (in an article entitled: *Consciousness, Caring, And Commerce: Sustainable Values for the Global Marketplace*) tells of walking into a crowded meeting at Bretton Woods and the first words he heard were, **“Invoked or not, God is present.”** He looked around and found himself in the midst of more than two hundred of his colleagues, as Peter Senge, Joe Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers engaged in a passionate, heartfelt “fishbowl” dialogue, which began with the opening question, *“What sort of interesting conversations are you having with leaders in business these days?”* The first reply was, *“How about the **“God Conversation”**? It’s a hot topic.”* Senge states: *“All this systems stuff has no meaning without understanding that **we’re part of something larger than ourselves.**”*

The spirit as sacred conversation understands that “something larger” as something Spiritual with a capital “S”. And again, it necessarily involves a deep reverence for **“all our relations,”** – *Mitakuye oyas’in*, as the Lakota people pray.

SPIRIT AS EPISTEMOLOGY

Epistemology has to do with the study or theory of the nature, sources and limits of knowledge. The spirit-as-epistemology conversation involves both an awareness of the nature, possibilities and limits of language, and an awareness of differences in the ways of knowing and knowledge gained.

An international conference brochure on *Enlightenment*, which just arrived in my mail, states: *“People are having experiences now that are not explained by the old scientific*

paradigm, and we are called to reconsider our cultural view of reality. ... Come investigate the space between ordinary and non-ordinary reality, expand personal awareness ... Each of us has experienced an enlightened state of consciousness at some time in our lives. Sometimes it can happen quite on its own, and come to us as a surprise. Sometimes people seek it out. It can be augmented through ingesting a substance, be the result of years of diligent discipline or happen by Grace. It is the root of every spiritual and religious tradition.”

A Gallop poll in the United States indicated that 33% of the population have had a profound spiritual experience, 70% pray or meditate on occasion, 58% have a deep yearning for spiritual growth, 80% believe in God, and that 55% have experienced a major transformation in recent years.

In Jan. 2002 in Santa Fe, NM there was held “*The Seventh International Conference on Business and Consciousness – Where Profit and Purpose Come Together*”. A sampling of the workshops: “*Honest to God in Business: Consciousness about Consciousness*”; “*The Next Step in the Transformation of Consciousness and Business*”; “*The Application of Shamanic Technology for Corporations*”; and “*How Spiritual Consciousness Can Transform Your Workplace with Unprecedented Performance Results*”.

The spirit-as-epistemology conversation expresses interest or appreciation in “alternate” ways of knowing and of realities beyond which we commonly see, hear, smell, taste and touch. Based on a current proliferation of conferences, inquiries and scientific studies being conducted by reputable experts, it appears that bridges are being built across the “epistemological divide” -- connecting scientists and shamans, physicists and poets, meaning and mystery, analysis and awe, science and spirituality.

Gary Zukav (author of *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics*, winner of the American Book Award for Science) makes a (rather radical) connection between an evolving human consciousness and commerce. He states (in *Evolution and Business*):

*Commerce as we currently experience it is a product of an evolutionary mode that is now obsolete. Commerce as future generations of humans will experience it will reflect the values and behaviors of a new humanity that is in the process of being born. ... The human species is now leaving behind the exploration of physical reality as its mode of evolution, and, simultaneously, the limitations of the five senses. **Five-sensory humans are becoming multisensory humans – humans that are not limited to the perception of the five senses....** the soul always strives for harmony, cooperation, sharing, and reverence for Life. ...The economy that is emerging will be based on abundance and oriented toward contribution. ...it will redefine all of the basic concepts that underlie the economy of today – ownership, productivity, and profit – in the process of replacing them with their successors.*

Many physicists, some inspired by the work of British physicist David Bohm, are inquiring into the processes and certainties that structure everyday experience. Ron and Susan Jordan Kertzner (in their article in *Rediscovering the Soul of Business – a Renaissance of Values*) state: “Beyond the cultural assumptions, beliefs, and opinions that guide most of our businesses is **the possibility of listening to a deeper voice connected to the unfolding nature of life itself.**”

In their book entitled “*Why God Won’t Go Away*”, which explores brain science and the biology of belief, Andrew Newberg, M.D. and Eugene D’Aquill, M.D. examine why even in our technologically advanced age, more than seventy percent of Americans claim to believe in God. Blending cutting-edge science with illuminating insights into the nature of consciousness and spirituality, they bridge faith and reason, mysticism and empirical data. In discussing the brain’s architecture, they point out:

*Nothing enters consciousness whole. There is no direct, objective experience of reality. ... tracing spiritual experience to neurological behavior does not disprove its realness. ... The best science can give to us is a metaphorical picture of what’s real, and while the picture may make sense, it isn’t necessarily true. In this case, **science is a type of mythology**, a collection of explanatory stories that resolve the mysteries of existence and help us cope with the challenges of life. ... the human mind is incapable of purely objective observations. All our perceptions are subjective by their nature, ... All knowledge, then, is metaphorical... ... The neurobiological roots of spiritual transcendence show that Absolute Unitary Being is a plausible, even probable possibility. Of all the surprises our theory has to offer ...the one fact that this ultimate unitary state can be rationally supported intrigues us the most. ... it makes a strong case that there is more to human existence than sheer material existence. Our minds are drawn by **the intuition of this deeper reality**, this utter sense of oneness... ... As long as our brains are arranged the way they are, as long as our minds are capable of sensing this deeper reality, spirituality will continue to shape the human experience, and God, however we define that majestic, mysterious concept, will not go away.*

The Spirit as epistemology conversation is about “listening to a deeper voice” and “the intuition of this deeper reality”. It does not devalue or exclude, but is deeper and larger than the familiar list of management power tools and techniques, such as: 360-degree feedback, after-action reviews, best practice, benchmarking, boundarylessness, conglomeration, cross-functional teams, downsizing/demassing, lean and mean, learning organization, management by objectives, management by walking around, matrix management, networking, open book management, outplacement, outsourcing, participative management, pay for performance, peer appraisals/reviews, quality circles, quick response teams, reengineering, reinventing the corporation/government, results-driven quality, rightsizing, situational leadership, stretch goals, t-groups, vision/mission/values, and zero-based budgeting.

At the 2001 International Conference on Altered States of Consciousness, I attended a seminar conducted by Dr. Charles Tart, who is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of

Noetic Sciences and also involved in the government-funded parapsychological research at Stanford Research Institute. Dr Tart states:

If you are called a carpenter to your home to do some repairs and he came with only one tool, say a hammer, you would wonder about his competency. Good at hammering, perhaps, but all those other tasks? We only “officially” recognize one state of consciousness, the so-called normal state, as useful, so we are a one-tool culture. In point of fact, we have many other tool/states available. Like any tools, we need to learn how to get them, how to use them skillfully, and what tasks each is best suited for.

Dr. Tart makes helpful distinctions between “Science and Scientism” and points out that the dominant materialistic/reductionistic, psychosocial climate of contemporary science (scientism), suppresses and actively rejects both having and sharing certain essential experiences, experiences roughly described by such words as “transcendent”, “transpersonal”, “spiritual”, or “psychic”. Dr. Tart says: *“My own and others’ research has convinced me that it is psychologically and spiritually pathological to deny any real aspect of the human spirit.”*

Dr. Tart has developed a project called The Archives of Scientists’ Transcendent Experiences (TASTE). His aim is to change this restricted and pathological climate through the operation of a world-wide website which allows scientists to share their personal, transcendent experiences in a safe, anonymous, but quality controlled space. The project provides research data on transcendent experiences in a highly articulate and conscious population, scientists, and facilitates the development of a full spectrum science of consciousness by providing both data and support for the study of transcendent experiences.

There appears to be a sort of complex “spiritual physics” developing involving quantum theory, with a multiplicity of different and often conflicting interpretations. Some of the key authors making such connections include: David Bohm, Fritjof Capra, Roger Penrose, Michael Talbot, Fred Alan Wolf, Gary Zukav, Ken Wilber, Paul Davies, Deepak Chopra, and Rupert Sheldrake. Deepak Chopra argues for the notion that “mind” is not localized in the brain but extends like a force field (similar to Bohm’s “implicate order”) beyond space and time. Sheldrake offers ingenious experiments to demonstrate the existence of the mind field, which he refers to as the field of morphogenesis.

A book which is at once, clear, profound, poetic and practical is Margaret J. Wheatley’s *Leadership and the New Science – Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*. Wheatley examines new science research from the disciplines of physics, biology, and chemistry, and from theories of evolution and chaos and inquires into metaphorical links between certain scientific perspectives and organizational life. She encourages a paradigm shift, a new picture of business management, a new relationship between business and science, and a new set of lenses through which to view our organizations. She states:

I realize that the work is not to introduce a few new ideas, but to change a world

*view. Now that I understand that this is our work, there are different things required of us, not just some new implementation techniques. ...we need to be together in work differently, with greater patience, compassion, and courage. ... I believe the fundamental work of this time – work that requires the participation of all of us – is to discover new ways of being together. ...Everywhere in the new sciences, in living systems theory, quantum physics, chaos and complexity theory, we observe life’s dependence on participation ... No subatomic particle exists independent of its participation with other particles. ...The participatory nature of reality has required scientists to focus their attention on relationships. ... **Nothing exists independent of relationships.***

FULL-CIRCLING REFLECTIONS

In our attempt to inquire into the nature and role of spirit at work we have seen how “each of these conversations evokes a differing and yet somewhat overlapping set of principles and practices for addressing spirituality”. Looking at spirit from four different angles or conversations as energy, meaning, sacred and epistemology can serve as a conceptual platform for continued inquiry, communication, and experience. I have attempted to work with the subject in an introductory, practical, and hopefully usable manner, while simultaneously unwrapping some of its *meaning* and honoring its *mystery*. I confess that I feel most comfortable and at home emphasizing the honoring of its mystery. As Margaret Wheatly has said: “*Some shapes and landmarks are already clear. Others wait to be discovered. No one can say where the journey is leading. But the relationship promises to be fruitful, and I can feel the explorer’s blood rising in me. I am glad to feel in awe again.*”

I have sought to introduce the four conversations about spirit *not* into a scheme of *explanation*, but into a scheme of *understanding*. Epistemology, the study of what and how we know, is not necessarily synonymous with ontology, the study of what is. Although I have biases of belief, I have tried to keep clear the distinction about what is accurate and what is true.

Jean Houston - author and psychologist- in her book *A Mythic Life* (in which she inscribed: “*For cousin Ronald who has a mythic Life!*” –i.e., we think we are biological cousins) writes:

Time mavens, mystics, and physicists hint that past, present, and future are our little local ways of boxing the universe to make it plausible to consciousness. They hint further that reality may be shot through with hyperdimensions and multiple realities. Can such thinking give us clues to the hidden meaning and purpose of our lives? If we crack open the habits of our local constructs of form, space, and time, might we glimpse vistas of a reality larger than our aspirations, richer and more complex than our dreams.? ... Essence is so real, so substantial, that it exceeds all symbols, images, and language. Symbols and images can provide, perhaps, flashes of insight about Essence, but not its living embodied

experience. ...Essence, we must conclude, can only be experienced.

So we have “full-circled”. In the beginning of this essay I said (p.1): “**At the conceptual or theoretical level**, the elusive essential quality we call “spirit” may be intrinsically resistant to quantification and limiting definition, yet “it” is something we all experience.” I also said: “**At the experiential or practical level**, we can be aware of spirit and cultivate its positive life-generating qualities in life and work.” We can rediscover “spirit” as a source for personal and organizational transformation.

Sander Tideman, in a four page paper of the Spirit in Business Learning Institute (representing their *First Knowledge Domain*, “*Spiritual and Scientific Reintegration*”) states:

In Summary, the following viewpoints have emerged:

1. *connectivity is the central principle of both the modern business reality and the modern scientific worldview.*
2. *consciousness/spirit is an integral part of the web of interconnectedness that makes up reality, and thus needs to be understood in order to understand and deal with reality effectively.*
3. *consciousness can be enhanced and utilized.*
4. *inspiration, creativity, and ethics are natural by-products of enhanced consciousness, naturally “flowing” through organizations and enhancing organizational performance.*

I look forward to Spirit at Work Forums and discussing the nature and role of spirit in business and work, exploring “what gives life” in organizations and work, and looking into some practical on-the-job expressions of spirit in which persons can be their whole selves -- fully conscious, connected, creative human BE-ings at work.

David Whyte (*Crossing the Unknown Sea – Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity*) says: “*Our work is to make ourselves visible in the world. This is the soul’s individual journey, and the soul would much rather fail at its own life than succeed at someone else’s. ... We go through most workdays forgetting that this grand migratory force exists within us.*” Humans have within themselves a “*grand migratory force*” or as Ken Wilber writes in *A Brief History of Everything*, his synthesis of spiritual and scientific thought, “*Evolution always transcends and includes, incorporates and goes beyond.*” Wilber uses the evolutionary concept of “*transcend and include*” to refer to the personal and societal movement toward wholeness. Another way of talking about this inner drive is the experience of “**entelechy**”, a Greek work meaning the dynamic purpose that drives us toward realizing our essential self. Jean Houston says: “*it is the entelechy of an acorn to be an oak tree. It is the entelechy of a popcorn kernel to be a fully popped entity. And it is the entelechy of a human being to be ... God knows what!*” Barbara Max Hubbard, a visionary futurist, social architect, spiritual pioneer, and author of several books including *Conscious Evolution – Awakening the Power of Our Social Potential*, states in her book *Emergence*:

Our entelechy is the oak pressing against the acorn to become a mighty tree. It is the power of the delicate green shoot breaking through the frozen ground in Spring. It is the butterfly silently self-organizing while hidden in the disintegrating caterpillar.

We are at once human BE-ings and human be-comings – nouns and verbs. Ideally, work should encourage and empower the human spirit, so that the triple bottom line of people, profits, and the planet all prosper.

*Continuum as experience is awakening
Nonetheless, there's nothing to seek
that isn't you and I already.*

*Yet our newness is perpetual.
With every breath I'm who
one moment earlier I wasn't.*

*Awareness, then, can't finish,
so no searching's ever done
but merely changes.*

-- Olivia Orfield (*Vortex – a personal quest into the nature of what is*)

Margaret Wheatley's last three sentences in *Leadership and the New Science* feel appropriate for the ending (or the "beginnings without end") of this inquiry and essay:

After all is said and done, we have the gift of each other. We have each other's curiosity, wisdom, and courage. And we have Life, whose great ordering powers, if we choose to work with them, will make us even more curious, wise, and courageous."

Hope to see you, your friends and colleagues at CBE/SIB Forums!

The SIB Mission:

to connect leaders in a community of inquiry, learning and action ,to release the creative power of individuals and organizations for the benefit of the whole, to support and accelerate the trend toward visionary leadership, organizational transformation and evolving business as a agent of community and world benefit.

NOTES

1. Ronald Bell, the author of this Essay and a catalyst/convener of the SIB initiative group, can be reached at:

Ronald Bell
Bell Consulting
PO Box 6353
Bridgewater, NJ 08807
Phone/Fax (908) 234-2913
Email: VastSpirit@aol.com

2. Jonathan Cloud, founder of The Center for Business Excellence, can be reached at:

Jonathan Cloud, Founder
Center for Business Excellence
< <http://www.cbe-nj.org> >
Basking Ridge, NJ 07920
(908) 306-9077
Fax (209) 844-2218
Cell (908) 581-8418
Email: jcloud@cbe-nj.org

3. Special acknowledgements to Diana Whitney for use of her clustering of the subject into four primary conversations called spirit as energy, spirit as meaning, spirit as sacred, and spirit as epistemology.

Diana Whitney, Ph.D., is president of the Corporation for Positive Change and is an internationally recognized consultant, speaker, author and thought leader of the subjects of *Appreciative Inquiry*, *Change and Spirituality at Work*.