America celebrated its first Earth Day on April 22, 1970. That year also marked the publication of my favorite children’s book, The Wump World, by the beloved writer and illustrator Bill Peet. I discovered The Wump World in a mountain of books my mother helped my little brother and me haul home from our local library—our revered and preferred source of entertainment in the very early ‘70s! After my first read, I searched anxiously for The Wump World every time we visited the library, looking forward to sitting for the umpteenth time with the story of the “Pollutians,” who invaded the pristine, green world of the furry, doe-eyed “Wumps,” with their ideas of industrial progress. In the simple, colored-pencil illustrations, the hapless Wumps retreated into underground caves until the Pollutians finally declared to their leader that they could not live on such a polluted planet anymore; they were sick from their lifestyles and had to find another planet.
After the Pollutians took off in their spaceships, the Wumps emerged from their caves to a “dead” landscape of concrete buildings, smoke-filled skies and paved-over earth. The book’s message about pollution did not escape me or my first grade classmates, as most of us displayed “Turn Off Your Lights” stickers on our light switches and watched Iron Eyes Cody, the Native American in the Keep America Beautiful commercial, cry as he overlooked a littered cityscape. It wasn’t the book’s obvious message, that pollution was bad and we needed to do our part to stop it, that I found fascinating. It was the last page that held my rapt attention: A solitary Wump, staring at a sidewalk, where a single, green-leafed plant had pushed its way through a small crack in the landscape of gray rubble. Perched on a crumbling wall, the Wump’s unmistakably happy smile seemed to impart a secret…or a promise.

It was this last page that I would race to each time I read The Wump World, as if each time I was looking for reassurance that the Wump, the leaf and I shared—the secret knowledge that something else was true, something greater and more real than the passing story of the Pollutians and their irrational dedication to industrial progress at all costs, even their own health. What was that something else, whose power would eventually heal the Wump’s world?

At this moment in time, four decades later and on the heels of the largest environmental disaster in human history, it feels like much of humanity is staring at the last page of The Wump World and wondering, with no way off the planet (though some are working on it), how do we begin to enter into a relationship with the consciousness, the vitalism and the healing force of Life represented by this humble green leaf? How are we going to heal our world and our on-loan, animated Earth suits—our bodies—that depend upon the health of the Earth? Can we find the will to discard the limiting, old story of “we’re Pollutians and this is just what we do,” and instead write a new story, one that features human beings tapping into their innate potential, pursuing conscious relationships with all of Life and working together to co-create a healthy world?

Why is it imperative that humanity create a new story? Because “our story”—a story created and told by humans, mostly out of habit—represents our view of the world. And worldviews create worlds.
What is needed to root out the old, unsustainable view? Perhaps identifying some of the assumptions embedded within the old story would help us better recognize its influence in our individual and collective lives:

- Growth is good; more is better.

- Economic wealth is the truest sign of progress.

- The “market” is the most reliable measure of value.

- Individual selfishness serves the common good.

- We live in a world of scarcity.

- Humans are superior to other creatures.

- The Earth is ours to exploit.

- The world can be divided into “us” and “them.”
Rewriting the Story of Who We Are: A Shift to Conscious Choice

Written by Lisa Reagan
Wednesday, 01 September 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 08 October 2013 12:51

People are intrinsically bad.

- Technology—or God—will save us.

What if current science had already blown past this tired, old tale? What if you didn’t need a corporate-sponsored study to tell you what to believe because you could go straight to the source? Can this be a part of our new story: direct knowledge?

Taking on the task of answering the many questions that emerge when considering a new version of reality to guide us to our full human potential is the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS). “Noetic” sciences are explorations into the nature and potentials of consciousness using multiple ways of knowing— including intuition, feeling, reason and the senses. Noetic sciences explore the “inner cosmos” of the mind (consciousness, soul and spirit) and how it relates to the “outer cosmos” of the physical world. For three decades, IONS has studied the evidence of humanity’s awakening as our consciousness shifts away from the industrial worldview of our old story to our emerging new story, with its integrated, holistic worldview.

This transition, from our old story to a new story, was experienced firsthand and spectacularly by IONS’s founder, astronaut Edgar Mitchell, in 1971, on his way back from the Apollo 14 mission to the moon. Sitting in the cramped cabin of the space capsule, Mitchell saw planet Earth floating freely in the vastness of space. He was engulfed by a profound sense of universal connectedness—an epiphany. In Mitchell’s own words: “The presence of divinity became almost palpable, and I knew that life in the universe was not just an accident based on random processes…. The knowledge came to me directly.”

When his feet hit the ground (literally and figuratively), Mitchell faced a critical challenge. As an engineer and physical scientist, he had grown accustomed to directing his attention to the objective world “out there.” But the experience that came to him in space led him to a startling
hypothesis: Perhaps reality is more complex, subtle and inexorably mysterious than conventional science had led him to believe. Perhaps a deeper understanding of consciousness (inner space) could lead to a new and expanded view of reality, in which objective and subjective, outer and inner, are understood as equal aspects of the miracle and mystery of being.

Mitchell sought out others who likewise felt the need for an expanded, more inclusive view of reality. Together, they resolved to explore the inner world of human experience with the same rigor and critical thinking that made it possible for Apollo 14 to journey to the moon and back. (Dr. Mitchell’s story is told in the book, The Way of the Explorer: An Apollo Astronaut’s Journey Through the Material and Mystical Worlds.)

According to the IONS website, the mission of the noetic scientists is to expand our understanding of human possibility by investigating aspects of reality—mind, consciousness, and spirit—that include, but go beyond, physical phenomena. They seek to understand the inner world as thoroughly as we have the outer world, based on the premise that what finds expression in the world at large is a reflection of our interior landscape. Today, the institute carries out its mission as a worldwide research, education and membership-based organization in Petaluma, California. (Visit them at noetic.org)

The IONS annual publication, the Shift Report, has this to say about our old story: Its purpose has been fulfilled, and, therefore, it is no longer needed. The 2007 report, titled Evidence of a World Transforming, concludes: “Materialist science represented an evolutionary leap from a mind-set that relied on religious authority for verifying truths to one that valued an objective search for knowledge. In this global age of rapid change and transformation, it is time for another such leap… [to] include the rigorous study of subjective, inner experience, a renewed appreciation for meaning and purpose, and a recognition that the world of consciousness is far more mysterious and influential than we have ever imagined.”

What are our greatest obstacles to creating a new story, a new worldview—and therefore a new world? There are obstacles on every level of human organization, from communities to nations to planetary forces. However, the one “obstacle” that we all individually possess and control—somewhat—is our brain. But as Andrew Newberg states in Born to Believe, “The brain is a stubborn organ. Once its primary set of beliefs has been established, the brain finds it difficult to integrate opposing ideas and beliefs. This has profound consequences for individuals and society and helps to explain why some people cannot abandon destructive beliefs, be they religious, political or psychological.”
A 2004 study at Emory University illustrates how our brains entrench in preconceptions defying all reason. Researchers studied the brain activity of participants with functional magnetic resonance imaging, fMRI. Participants, a sampling of partisan Republicans and Democrats, were asked to rate a series of contradictory statements made by both John Kerry and George W. Bush. “We did not see any increased activation of the parts of the brain normally engaged during reasoning,” said Drew Westen, director of clinical psychology at Emory. “What we saw instead was a network of emotion circuits lighting up…. Essentially, it appears as if partisans twirl the cognitive kaleidoscope until they get the conclusions they want, and then they get massively reinforced for it, with the elimination of negative emotional states and the activation of positive ones.” In short, “Partisan beliefs are calcified, and the person can learn very little from new data.”

The 2008 IONS Shift Report, entitled Changing the Story of Our Future, takes note of this study, and concludes, “And so it appears that we avoid the discomfort of contradictory facts when they challenge a particular decision or belief—denial equals emotional homeostasis. This observance has a strong bearing on how one confronts an existing worldview and considers ways to change it. Those who accept the maxim, ‘Growth is good,’ for example, will resist other perspectives even in the face of evidence that such a conviction may be slowly killing us. The media is complicit in reinforcing such entrenched assumptions, and the inability to distinguish between reality and fantasy becomes an enduring characteristic of the cultural soup.”

Two years after IONS published the 2008 Shift Report, the catastrophic oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is riveting the world’s attention with an ecological crisis whose impact cannot be measured and is expected to continue for decades. In 1971, the same year Edgar Mitchell envisioned IONS, Joseph Chilton Pearce presented humanity with a guide to transcending toxic, irrational cultural conditioning in his seminal work, The Crack in the Cosmic Egg. But it was the cracks in the sea floor of the Gulf of Mexico this past spring that attempted to break through calcified neural nets and institutionalized ignorance, with the mainstream media announcing the obvious: It’s over. 2010 may go down in history as the year denial was no longer a functional way for Americans to live their daily lives.

The consequences of the 500-year-old industrial ideals of profit and production are mounting. The old story we tell ourselves about who we are limited to be as a consumer culture is evaporating, leaving in its place the frantic question: What comes next? To some, whose calcified belief systems will not allow a different, reality-based set of data to guide them through the ongoing and forthcoming global transitions, it might indeed feel like the end of the world. But
for those willing and able, the current shift in human consciousness promises exciting opportunities for personal and planetary change.

Right now, we are all like the Wump who turns her attention from the devastation of the planet and instead chooses to focus on the promise Life offers. When we, too, shift our focus from fear to trust, the real question becomes: What will our new story tell us about ourselves and our world? Pearce believes an individual's worldview must be integrated. It cannot exclude what has gone before, but must appreciate aspects of all possibilities of perception.

“Our imagination cannot set out to find the cracks in the cosmic egg until someone lays the egg. New representations for reality, new ideas, new fabrications of fantasy searching for supporting logic, must precede the final ‘discovery’ by which verification of the notion is achieved,” writes Pearce in The Crack in the Cosmic Egg: New Constructs of Mind and Reality. “It has been claimed that our minds screen out far more than we accept, else we would live in a world of chaos. Our screening process may be essential, but it is also arbitrary and changeable.

“The difference between Einstein’s relative universe and the Dream-Time cosmology of the Australian aborigine is not a matter of truth or falsehood, realism or illusion, progression or regression, intelligence or stupidity, as the naïve realists have claimed,” writes Pearce. “It is a matter of aesthetic choice. Each system produces results unobtainable to the other. Each is closed and exclusive.”

Are you ready to turn the page of the old story and write a new one that you can gift to your children, and they can pass on to their children? Would you like to gather with like-minded seekers to explore and share insights for staying grounded while shifting paradigms? To find, for the journey home, realistic tools for community building and educational outreach? Do you want to know where to find support for the conscious choices of your daily life?

This fall, practitioners, parents and leaders of the consciousness movement will gather in Washington, D.C., to share their research, insights and tools for taking personal action to cultivate our inner world. They’ll show how working together through collaborations and community outreach can bring forth a new story of our role in our very vital and aware Earth and universe.
Speakers at the Freedom for Family Wellness: Celebrating the Shift to Conscious Choice summit include the most progressive researchers and thinkers pointing the way to a new story of humanity, as well as pioneers of conscious choice in daily life. The conference will also serve as a Pathways Live event, where contributing authors to the pages of Pathways will network with practitioners and parents in over a dozen intimate breakout sessions. Pathways Connect training classes will provide take-home tools for using the magazine’s educational outreach program and its turnkey features to initiate a community group in your practice or neighborhood.

A sampling of conference presenters includes:

**Bruce Lipton, Ph.D.** The author of The Biology of Belief and Spontaneous Evolution: Our Positive Future and a Way to Get There from Here, Lipton is an internationally recognized leader in bridging science and spirit.

**Joseph Chilton Pearce, M.A.** Author of The Crack in the Cosmic Egg and The Magical Child, Pearce is a world-renowned thinker, author and advocate of evolutionary child-rearing practices. He has been a seminal figure in the study of human consciousness and child development for over a quarter century.

**Cassandra Vieten, Ph.D.** Director of research at the Institute of Noetic Sciences, Vieten is the author of Mindful Motherhood: Practical Ways for Staying Sane During Pregnancy and Your Child’s First Year.

**Joe Dispenza, D.C.** Dispenza's 2007 book, Evolve Your Brain, connects thought and consciousness with the brain, the mind and the body. The book explores “the biology of change”—that is, when we truly change our mind, there is a physical evidence of change in the brain.

Other speakers include Ina May Gaskin, C.P.M., Spiritual Midwifery; Suzanne Arms, Immaculate Deception; Peggy O'Mara, Mothering Magazine; Lauren Feder, M.D., Natural Baby and Child Care; Neil Z. Miller, Vaccine Safety Manual for Concerned Families; John Breeding, Ph.D., The Wildest Colts Make the Best Horses; Joseph Mercola, D.O., of Mercola.com; Larry Palevsky, M.D., president of the Holistic Pediatric Association; Barbara Loe Fisher, cofounder of
I am so grateful to my mother for taking me those seemingly hundreds of times to the library as a child so that I could have the magical experience of searching for The Wump World, reading it as if for the first time, and experiencing, always, the joy of sharing the Wump's enigmatic smile at the green shoot in the broken sidewalk. In the end, we may, when we become brave enough, stare into the concretized beliefs in our own minds and witness the truth of Life’s possibilities and our innate potential shining through the cracks. As former IONS president James O'Dea has written, “Human consciousness is hugely more capacitlated than is allowed for in the reductionist paradigm. We are up to the challenges that face us precisely because we have begun to glimpse the greatest of resources—those within consciousness itself.”
Rewriting the Story of Who We Are: A Shift to Conscious Choice

Written by Lisa Reagan
Wednesday, 01 September 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 08 October 2013 12:51

This article appeared in Pathways to Family Wellness magazine, Issue #27.

View Article References

View Author Bio

To purchase this issue, Order Here.