

PARADIGM SHIFT

by Elizabeth Fisher

The way many of us understand the world is changing rapidly. The pattern, or paradigm, that we have thought correctly put forth the order of things is now being seriously challenged in disparate walks of life.

A paradigm is defined as a filter for information. Everyone uses paradigms to organize what they perceive. Sometimes, a paradigm can literally impair perception. If what is taking place is beyond an individual's adopted paradigm, they often have difficulty accurately perceiving what is happening. Instead, they adhere to their familiar, though incorrect, paradigm, becoming blinded to creative solutions to problems because they are limited by a set of rules and regulations that does not provide the most useful perspective.

Currently, the dominant "old paradigm" asserts that all life is arranged on a hierarchical pyramid of descending value from top to bottom with God at the top, followed by elite human males, then other human males, then human females, then animals, plants, and finally what has been called inanimate objects such as rocks. Races and ethnic groups are also placed in various orders on the pyramid, depending on which culture or race is constructing it. Relationships are mechanical and can be regulated and controlled. The processes of life are believed to follow a linear pattern.

The "new paradigm" centers around a global perspective that values diversity — both human and cross-species — and acknowledges the cyclical process of birth, growth, fulfillment, degeneration, death, seeds, and new birth. This understanding of the way the natural system works also has a spiral quality that allows circles to evolve into other circles indefinitely, indicating the system is not closed, but open to infinite possibility. In this paradigm, these many forms of existence are connected by web-like strands that run in all directions and affect one another. Further, humans and the processes they participate in and the products and waste they create are a part of this complex, dynamic system.

When a "paradigm shift" happens, it means an individual, often a whole society, seemingly all of a sudden, adopts a new pattern — usually because the actual reality they are experiencing is so out of touch with their old paradigm they can no longer adhere to their earlier view.

Paradigm pioneers, who conceptualize specific applications of the new paradigm that are actually more in tune with the way things really are, spearhead this transformation. Numerous such pioneers are currently working in diverse disciplines and areas of endeavor.

Scientific research is beginning to use a model reflecting the new paradigm. Organizations are looking at the benefits of non-hierarchical management of work. Forms of this new paradigm are being used in business and government by those of varied political persuasions. Environmental urban management that considers the interconnectedness of the processes of modern cities is being recognized. Professionals in engineering, architecture and city planning are coming to realize the ecologists are trying to tell them something that is, in fact, a reality.

These changes in perception may be the most profound shift in human consciousness since acceptance of the belief that the world is a round sphere and not a flat plane.

An important part of this great shift is that women all over the globe are beginning to value themselves. As women esteem themselves, new possibilities begin to unfold. One important aspect of the worldwide women's movement is that many women, on a very personal level, value the natural systems of the Earth and every being and process that makes these delicate interrelationships exist and happen. Around the globe, grassroots ecology movements are bringing women into the public eye as they raise their voices for the trees, the water, and the soil they know supports their communities.

This new paradigm can have important global effects. It is quite possible that if we leave the current paradigm — which is dependant on an anthropomorphic view that holds us apart from the world — and discover how we are related to and embedded in all that exists, we will take a very different view of both global political and environmental concerns.

CHANGES IN SYSTEMS

Old Model

pyramid
hierarchy
unequal relationships
only males contact/interpret the divine/spiritual

New Model

networking web
3-dimensional connections
circle of equality
all personal experiences of the spiritual are validated

CHANGE IN PERCEPTION

Old Model

static, unyielding
unconnected, isolated
mechanical, machinelike
boundaries, closed-ended
disintegration, breakdown
change by authority
vested interests, manipulation
aggressive leaders, passive followers
conformity, adjustment

New Model

dynamic, flexible
interdependent, interrelated
organic, lifelike
fluid, open-ended
regeneration, self-renewal
change by consensus, inspiration
respect for autonomy of others
dynamic relationships that affect each other
pluralism, innovation

RESOURCES ABOUT PARADIGMS

Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives by John Naisbitt, Warner Books, New York, 1982. Many key concepts of the paradigm shift are explored: information, technology, world economy, decentralization, self-help, participatory democracy, and networking, among others.

Megatrends 2000: Ten New Directions for the 1990's by John Naisbitt & Patricia Aburdene, William Morrow and Company, New York, 1990. Major trends: economic boom, renaissance in the arts, free-market socialism, cultural nationalism, the rise of the Pacific Rim, women in leadership, the age of biology, and religious revival, among others. This book is visionary in scope and rich in examples.

Megatrends for Women by Patricia Aburdene & John Naisbitt, Villard Books, New York, 1992. Chapter by chapter, this book documents the sweeping changes women need to be aware of to be empowered in business, sports, religion, and political leadership.

Fractals — The Patterns of Chaos: A New Aesthetic of Art, Science, and Nature by John Briggs, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1992. Fractals are unique patterns such as branching trees, veins in a hand, and running water. The author uses over 170 illustrations to describe how fractals were discovered, how they form, and their unique properties.

Chaos: Making a New Science by James Gleick, Viking, New York, 1987. New concepts in scientific thought have implications in understanding nature.

Nature's Chaos, photographs by Eliot Porter, text by James Gleick, Viking, New York, 1990. A stunning book that shows that the Earth's beauty lies in disorder and wildness. Scientists and artists alike are beginning to recognize the uncanny structure underlying the jumble and turbulence of nature.

The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s by Marilyn Ferguson, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1980. Recognizing that a massive change is taking place in our cultural institutions, the author shows how the mind has the capacity to create a different kind of society that gives hope to our dreams.

The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism by Fritjof Capra, Shambhala, Boston, 1975/1983. A brilliant work detailing the meeting of East and West in current social trends and sciences.

The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture by Fritjof Capra, Bantam Books, New York, 1982. A compelling vision of a new reality, a reconciliation of science and the human spirit for a future that will work, a holistic paradigm of science and spirit.

Belonging to the Universe: Explorations on the Frontiers of Science and Spirituality by Fritjof Capra and David Steindl-Rast, Harper San Francisco, 1991. A dialogue between the trailblazer of new science and a contemporary Thomas Merton (a Benedictine monk). Jointly they investigate the parallels between new paradigm thinking in science and religion that together offer a remarkably compatible view of the universe.

Note: This essay appears in the *Rise Up & Call Her Name Sourcebook*, p. 129-31