

# Challenge

Helping Our Children Find Meaning and Purpose



Harlan Carl Scheffler



# CHALLENGE

Helping Our Children Find Meaning and Purpose

*An Introduction to The Quest*

Harlan Carl Scheffler



GEORGE RONALD PUBLISHER  
OXFORD

George Ronald, *Publisher*  
Oxford  
www.grbooks.com

Copyright © Harlan Carl Scheffler 2006  
All Rights Reserved

ISBN: 978-0-85398-506-8  
0-85398-506-5

Illustrations by the author

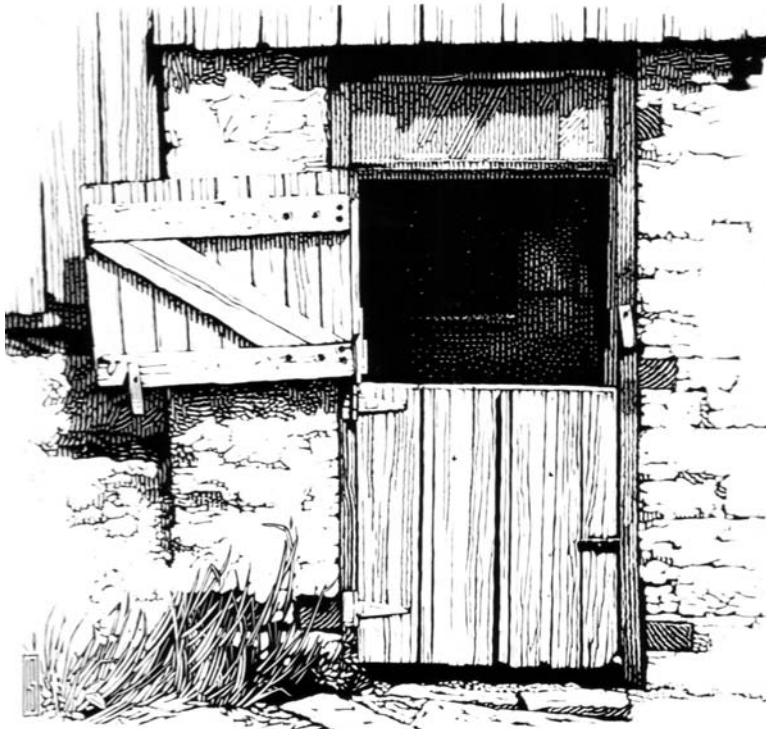
Acknowledgement is made to the following for use of  
copyrighted illustrations:  
Kraft Foods, Inc.: page 15  
Dynamic Graphics, Inc.: pages 4, 7, 10, 16, 20, 22, 25, 34, 36

This essay is Part I of a larger work by Harlan Carl Scheffler, *The Quest*  
(ISBN 978-0-85398-503-7 also available from the publisher)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

# CONTENTS

Connections .....	1
Affinity Abounds .....	4
The Great Mystery .....	7
Cause and Effect .....	10
Knowledge and Understanding .....	16
Diversity .....	20
Consequences .....	22
Education and Competition .....	25
From Atom to Art .....	30
The Mischief-maker .....	34



## Connections

In 1922, when I took my place in the course of human affairs, the world was very different. The span of a lifetime such as mine was to witness unprecedented milestones. The beginnings of technology and the downfall of isolationism apparently were destined to take place in this microsecond of our history – can you imagine! I was the child who toyed with the crystal set, touching the needle to connect with the hidden sounds, and I was the youngster turning the pages of the *National Geographic*, wondering about the remote lands and peoples, pondering the strange countenances caught in a moment of time.

## Challenge

I can hardly believe I survived the perils of those days. Collecting mercury from broken thermometers and rolling the lethal ball in the palm of my hand was an adventure, but watching its offspring come into existence with a tap of my finger was, I thought, a miracle. Melting cubes of lead over the gas flame on my mother's stove and molding the heavy liquid to create cowboys and Indians, carving smooth the seams with silvery-gray fingers, was fun. And I'm still here to tell how my dad and I would go to Hendrick's Drug Store and buy chunks of potassium cyanide to dispatch beetles and butterflies for my collection (hopefully painlessly). Gracious!

And now I am seated at my computer, connected intimately with the world. I know now, but I didn't know then: listening and touching and looking was my introduction to the mystical world of insight.

Learning about the two worlds – the material one and the more-than-material one – started when I was very young. Nature always interested me. How can the caterpillar turn into a butterfly? What makes things work? Vacations in the North Woods, trips to the Natural History Museum and Aquarium and Planetarium were part of the undisclosed agenda my parents had planned for my sister Betty and me. How life, in all of its aspects, presents itself, was the exciting fundamental of my parents' teaching. Had they not shared this secret, my sister and I would have most likely travelled our paths unmindful and unaware. As a family, we went about our business of work and play, but inwardly our lives were directed by the oneness of this wondrous material/non-material partnership. It was the central *theme* that paved our way. Hence, when as a youngster I was on my bicycle heading for the forest preserve to poke around in the ponds and streams, or, much later, caring for the wounded on a hospital ship in the South Pacific, my true home was in the non-physical world.

How my bicycle and the forest pond and the countless other happenstances of my life served to connect me with the

## Connections

non-physical side of things is a mystery, but certainly not just my mystery. We all **physically** connect with the so-called *immaterial* world:

- The **eye** looks, enabling *sight*, and sight welcomes *perception*.
- The **ear** hears, but *listening* is more, and *meaning* is even more.
- The **finger** touches, but *feeling* is revealed, and then *distinction*.
- The **tongue** tastes, taste summons *flavour*, and *discernment* is born.
- The **nose** smells, but *scent* is invited to reveal *sensitivity*.

Our physical tools allow the non-physical realities to become known, and with our ability to attribute significance to the signs displayed, our own true identity comes forward.

My teachers at Haven School were well prepared to teach the magic of numbers and letters, but the deeper meanings, toward which these lessons could have led, were not addressed. And Haven School was not alone.

From the outset, our children are introduced to a divided world, a world where material things are true, and intangible, non-material considerations are also true. The problem for our youngsters is to figure out how, in the classroom, two truths can be in contention with each other (or apparently so, for one can be taught, and the other cannot). There must be some flaw in our thinking, and how and what we are teaching, for reason tells us that there can be only one truth; truth isn't one thing – which can also be two. Where are the experts who might help the children with this conundrum?

As parents and guardians (teachers), let us not underestimate our own competence. If truth is one, then we must look again at what *we* have been taught and told, and find the flaw ourselves.





## Affinity Abounds

Since the dawning of intellect, the quest to uncover the fundamentals of life has been the mission of the inquiring mind. Long before technology was to make its appearance, thoughtful thinkers were thinking thoughtful thoughts. After our species had fulfilled the requisites of our physical, intellectual, and

societal evolution – a germination spread over countless epochs and eras – a Greek philosopher named Democritus came on the scene. He theorized that if matter were divided into smaller and smaller pieces, it would eventually reach a point where it could no longer be divided. This smallest bit of matter was called *átoms*, a Greek word meaning ‘not cuttable’. This Greek idea about the nature of matter was then largely forgotten for more than 2,000 years. Then in 1803 John Dalton, an English scientist, proposed a theory about atoms. He believed that all elements are made up of these minuscule particles, which *cannot be created or destroyed* or even split. He thought that atoms of the same element are alike, and differ from atoms of any other element. Dalton also believed that different atoms combine in definite ratios to form molecules.

Two hundred years have passed since John Dalton shared his thoughts. Along the way, other scientists have submitted their theories, some, even, have split the atom, but still we are not privileged to understand the true essence – the inner workings – of this mysterious atomic entity. But there are clues. Life hints at its secrets.

Science has determined that the atom is the key factor enabling existence to become known. It is the basic component of every physical form, past, present and future; known and unknown. All the categories of life, herein named mineral, vegetable, animal and human ‘kingdoms’, employ these complex particles to present their substances and identities to the world of being. And to make things even more confusing, we are told that the atom’s composition is less (or more, if you like) than ‘material’. If we were to examine the integral parts of every definable form – elephant tooth, cup of coffee, or whatever – we would find (up to the time of this writing) no more than 110 elements – in total, the basic substance of life. All of existence is made up of these essential fundamental ingredients. And each element takes its place in this miraculous display through the participation of its smallest particles – its atoms. A mere few, particularized and gathered together in the structure of our DNA, enable our genetic heritage. In addition, we are told that the atoms themselves are

## Challenge

constructed of electrified sub-particles, some charged positively, some charged negatively, and (of course) some with no electrical charge at all. It is here that our perception of our substantial world and our bodily selves becomes fuzzy, sort of illusionary, because these tiny bits of matter are themselves a bit ambiguous. They assume a disguise, for they do not fit into the physical slot as much as we would like. So, way back in history, when we were beginning to examine our surroundings and wonder about ourselves, our linguistic experts designed a word that helped explain things, and that word is **energy**. Energy defines the atom and is its attribute.

*Attribute!* Where did we find this one? What a wonderful word! And why so wonderful? Wonderful because it serves to define a non-physical condition and presence. *Non-physical attributes define all physical matter*; can you imagine. In the mineral realm, a rock is a rock because its atoms hold together and form a structure, and we name this holding-together-attribute *cohesion*. It is a *non-physical* quality, and it identifies the essence of the rock. We can pick up a rock, but we cannot pick up cohesion. We can examine a rock, but we cannot examine cohesion.

What is the difference between a plastic rose (or a dead one) and a real live rose? Well, one is just an assortment of mineral atoms dressed up in fancy attire busily demonstrating *cohesion*, and the other is an assortment of mineral atoms busily showing off not only cohesion, but *growth* and *metabolism* as well. None of these attributes have substantial presence, but they are essential in identifying the substantial presence of the rose. A rose cannot be known without knowing its non-physical qualities and attributes.

An incomprehensible configuration of specific mineral atoms (*live* mineral atoms!) appropriately assembled in the form of a small house mouse, *evokes* a small house mouse, because the house mouse configuration enables *cohesion*, *growth*, *sense perception* and *instinct* to become manifested – all defining attributes.

And how it could be, and who could imagine, that our own minuscule atoms, packed tight with energy, might work in concert to facilitate a *harmonious thought* or the *freedom to choose*?



## The Great Mystery

The greatest mystery of all, of course, is that all the different forms – employing the same atoms and displaying the same energy – behave so differently. It is an unusual consideration, but it is quite obvious that a particular material composition cannot but evoke a predictable non-physical performance. The way things are put together will determine how they will behave.

In theory, if our children in their science class could introduce a few more than 66 billion billion atoms of hydrogen to a smattering of more than 33 billion billion atoms of oxygen, they

## *Challenge*

would bring forth one drop of water. And if the children could combine a determined assortment of these tiny particles, assemble and align them just as they are so perfectly assembled and aligned in the petunia, they would create a petunia. The effect is already in the cause. There is not even a remote chance that a honeybee will write a sonnet – even though its atoms are the same as ours.

So let's give energy a round of applause and honour it with a capital 'E', for it is the answer to our dilemma. Here lies the flaw in our thinking, for we have placed Energy in the wrong slot. Good old-fashioned Energy – it makes the material world, and the more-than-material world, one. Good old non-physical Energy!

We can help our children understand how Energy, fundamental, inexplicable, unknowable, but true, proves its own existence. In the classroom, if our students were given a bundle of atoms to hold in their cupped hands, and it had shape only, they would quickly identify it as a mineral of some kind – a chunk of limestone or granite. If the assembled particles were growing, perhaps photosynthesizing, the children would easily name this assortment an aster or asparagus. If the sample were furry and cute and purred, they would call it a kitten. And, though too large to hold in cupped hands, if the conglomeration was thinking and hopping about and trusting and loving and wondering about things, they would be looking at themselves. In the guise of atoms selected from that warehouse of 110 elements, our faithful friend Energy is doing its job of bringing forth miracles.

And then the questions will start. 'How can the same atoms display so many different attributes?' 'Surely these tiny particles are not able to make choices, decide when to hold on to one another, or grow, or move around or think about things?' David will join in, 'And how do they know when to come on the scene and when to leave?' And Kara will raise her hand and wonder, aloud, 'If Energy appears in all these life forms without their beckoning or approval, who or what is responsible?' Well, Kara, the answer to this question is not to be found in your textbook. It is a very good question, but one that you will be better able to



## *The Great Mystery*



address as you get older and as you mature. Your Maths, Science, Social Studies, Languages, Arts and History lessons are the necessary tools of learning, and, as you acquire knowledge, be assured that insight will follow. However, it will not follow unless you ask lots of questions along the way.

‘Questions? Questions about what?’ Kara, questions about everything!



## Cause and Effect

**T**he physical compositions of all life forms define and determine the degree of Energy that is to be displayed. Non-physical Energy, pure and simple, does not and cannot reveal its full power, for its measure is eclipsed by the capacities that reflect it. The mineral, vegetable, animal and human kingdoms, perfectly formed as they are, impose restrictions. In its secret world, the mineral might wish to fly, but that is a futile wish.

Well, this isn't quite true. What does the teacher answer when Sylvie wonders: 'When the sparrow takes a drink of water, and those atoms of oxygen and hydrogen become sparrow and the

## Cause and Effect

sparrow flies away, aren't the minerals flying? And when the cow eats the grass, and the grass turns into cow, can we say that the mineral and vegetable particles can now moo?' And after Sylvie has had time to muse about her musings, she might present her paper with this observation: 'If the same atoms are used over and over again by the different life forms, and these compositions determine the degree of Energy that is to be displayed, then Energy must have a life of its own. If this were not so, we would have to credit the atoms themselves with this initiative – that they are in control of their own destiny and can, if they choose, lift themselves up by their own bootstraps.'

In their discussion class, the children might tackle the relationship between cause and effect. What an interesting topic! Somewhere along the way they might discover that *cause* and *effect* are so closely linked that they change places with each other – the effect becomes the cause of the next effect – immediately, without a perceptible lapse of time. The relationship is so fixed that the children can plan every action with confidence and direct every thought with predictability.

And then there is another consideration. A cause cannot enter or become a part of its effect – it *creates* the effect. Energy, as the cause, does not become a large flower or a small elephant, nor does Energy paint marvellous works of art. Rather, non-physical Energy uses the physical forms (minerals, plants, animals and people) as intermediaries to bring forth its non-physical effects (attributes).

And then another observation might come to mind. Perfection is an attribute of life; all beings, minerals included, reflect the presence of Energy perfectly. (We must stop telling the mineral kingdom it is dead. We search the outer regions of the universe, hoping to find signs of life, forgetting that the atoms in the most distant galaxy are dancing.) However, perfection is relative, not absolute. Thus, the rock holds together perfectly; the flower grows in exemplary fashion; the pollywog's wiggly ways are flawless, and the child is inimitable. Everything manifests Energy perfectly, to the degree allotted to and allowed by its parent



## *Challenge*

kingdom. The premise here outlined suggests that the differences in our children have little to do with their essentiality, their intrinsic nature, for their Energy is essence-mixed with the quintessence (or the word of your choosing) of life. When a child is conceived, the mix of atoms and molecules and genes – the components of egg and sperm – impose restrictions on the degree of Energy that is allowed, and it is in this manner that the child's capacities and aptitudes come into being. Although the propensities for specialization and uniqueness (personality, too) are concealed therein, these attributes will gradually become apparent as the little one sets out on his or her journey. We must remind ourselves: the child is something more than – and something apart from – his or her attributes. Attributes describe the child, but they are not the child.

Energy has been around forever, but until we came on the scene, pictures and images, descriptions and depictions, were abiding in the secret world waiting to be born. Then, in due course and after the passage of the rightful and proper time, we dipped our fingers into the clay, turned sticks into brushes, and recorded our presence. Good old Energy was there all the time, ready and waiting to do its job, but until we made our appearance, repetition and humdrumness were the order of the day. Energy, powerful, indestructible and indefinable, is hidden until an intermediary becomes its agent. Minerals, vegetables, animals, people – little children – all are needed to prove Energy's existence and convey its power, for it is unknown and without influence until physical matter is put to work (or, perhaps, Energy calls it into being). If our children question their own significance, let them imagine what the world – or, for that matter, existence – would be like without them. Energy-infused intellect is mandatory.

A trip to the forest preserve will be a special day; all children love nature. 'Look, there, see the minnows?' 'Hey, Wal-Hum, watch the frog jump!' The children will take notes and list all the different life forms they find, and the next day everyone will pass the quiz with flying colours because the outing was such fun. But

## Cause and Effect

there is a wonderful lesson hidden in the forest retreat. Becoming acquainted with the pollywog, and the pond with its whirling teeming life, can be a window to understanding. Sitting up straight and thinking thoughts, the children will enjoy the arithmetical riddle of the lily pond:

*A lily pad is placed in a pond. Each day thereafter, the pad and all of its descendants double. On the 30th day the pond is covered completely with lily pads, which can grow no more. On which day was the pond half full and half empty? The 29th day.*

When the children begin to think creatively, they will tap into the flow and find hidden meanings. In this instance, it will be easy for the children to foresee their own future when they envision their own environments hanging in the balance, overpopulated or dysfunctional in any way.

Back in the classroom, the children will compare notes and share their discoveries. They will listen to Wal-Hum's report (he was the brave one who caught the pollywog in his cupped hands). 'It was so beautiful! So perfect, and I could just *feel* its Energy. I thought of bringing it back to school, but then I realized that it was *more perfect* at home in the pond.' Wal-Hum learned a great deal at the outing.

Considerations such as these will help our children understand that physical matter is the costume that Energy wears in order to display its power – with and through endless particularity. This knowledge will also give our children the awareness that diversity is normal and natural and necessary, and that their special allotment of this life-giving force is what makes them what they are. If our children were all the same, their particles dipped from the same *mélange*, they would reflect the same interminably boring, irksome, monotonous uniformity. As it is, however, each of our children is a prize waiting to be opened.

\*\*\*\*\*

What may the consequences be if we fail to share the evidences of this secret realm? Well, first of all, we should not be surprised if

## Challenge

the children perceive their lives to be insignificant – even that it is pointless to survive in a meaningless world. And close to follow will be boredom and apathy, for many children find learning by rote, through fixed routines, without thought or understanding, to be inconsequential. To really understand, David must call on as many of his tools for learning (his senses) as he can. To truly learn about pyramids, David must read and think and dream about pyramids; he must travel across the ocean, climb up on a camel, find Cairo along the bank of the Nile, and then *look* and *see* the ancient tomb. He will *touch* and *feel* its massiveness, and he will *listen* to the silence and *hear*, in his own far distant past, the cries of the million slaves who built it. He will breathe the air they breathed and he will *taste* the bitter fruit of their labour. Then David will know pyramids.

What will be the consequence when we share this secret?



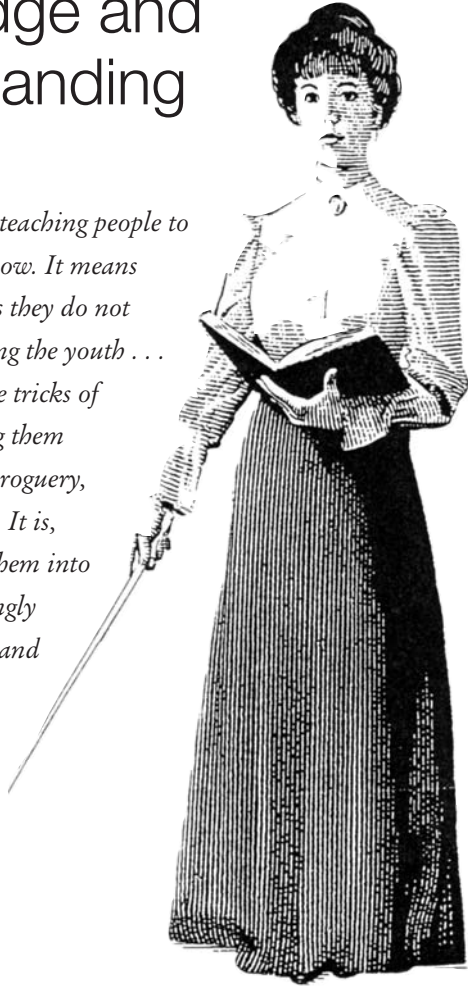


David

# Knowledge and Understanding

*Education does not mean teaching people to know what they do not know. It means teaching them to behave as they do not behave . . . It is not teaching the youth . . . the shapes of letters and the tricks of numbers; and then leaving them to turn their arithmetic to roguery, and their literature to lust. It is, on the contrary, training them into the perfect exercise and kingly continence of their bodies and souls. It is a painful, continual and difficult work; to be done by kindness, by watching, by warning, by precept, and by praise – but above all, by example.*

John Ruskin (1866)<sup>1</sup>



**I**n a sense, everything is a half, and to know its whole we must become acquainted with its partner. Ask the children to define a 'line'. They might start by describing what a line is not. It is not a dot (the line's alter ego). What is a straight line? A straight line

is hard to define without knowing its counterpart – a crooked one. Rough needs smooth to find its identity. Light and dark, high and low, open and closed, alive and dead, female and male, smile and scowl – our children, making a game of it, will find the list a long one. And this equation relates to the non-physical, abstract world as well. Happiness is the other half of sadness. Love and hate, greed and generosity – hope, trust, desire, devotion, belief, truth – all have their opposites.

Such an exercise will help the children understand that their daily encounters will touch on both the material and non-material aspects of their lives. Going to school, mastering the magic of letters and numbers, will comprise much of their education. Learning the principles of mathematics, the theories of science, and the facts of history will train minds to store information and draw from its resources, but the deeper meanings toward which and for which this wealth of knowledge might lead will probably not be touched on. It is true that the proper use of words and all the facts and the figures will help our students fit into the waiting world, for these are essential tools, but facts alone can be irksome and tedious. They will not be fulfilling or bring happiness or self-confidence unless *purpose* and *meaning* are incorporated, and this bounty will remain hidden if we, as educators, do not share the secret of the existence of the hidden world of abstraction.

As our children become acquainted with the tools for learning, a process that has its beginnings in their earliest formative months and years, they will, from the outset, if carefully taught, gradually direct their Energy to serve *meaningful* goals. And the goals must be *appropriate* goals. Personal aggrandizement can lead to feelings of self-sufficiency, and thus the door is opened to isolation. This is the more serious and troublesome consequence, for this kind of behaviour is self-destructive, and our children can easily set themselves adrift.

Education is more than the acquisition of knowledge. The purpose of education is to prepare the individual to be a participant. Aptitudes, synchronized to the common good, find

## *Challenge*

accordance and harmony in a function greater than their own. We can imagine the consequences when each individual participates in the manifestation of universal goals.

What we do with the tools of learning is the indeterminate factor, for our particularized focusing of Energy can give birth to wonderful achievements, or result in the infliction of horrendous despair. In our formative months, when we are just little tikes, we begin to reflect the influence of our surroundings and guidance, and when we enter the classroom some sixty or seventy months later, our dispositions and attitudes are already quite well defined.

Fitting into the spectrum of life – becoming a part of the social order, not only the human social order, but also the natural conformity presented in the surrounding environments and systems – is obligatory. In our human realm, the stability and integrity of every social structure – family, town, state and nation, even inter-nation – is qualified by the participation of each individual constituent. Since children are tomorrow's adults, they must find their assigned place in the scheme of things as quickly as possible, for the overall organization of life will ultimately undoubtedly reflect their participation, or their lack of participation.

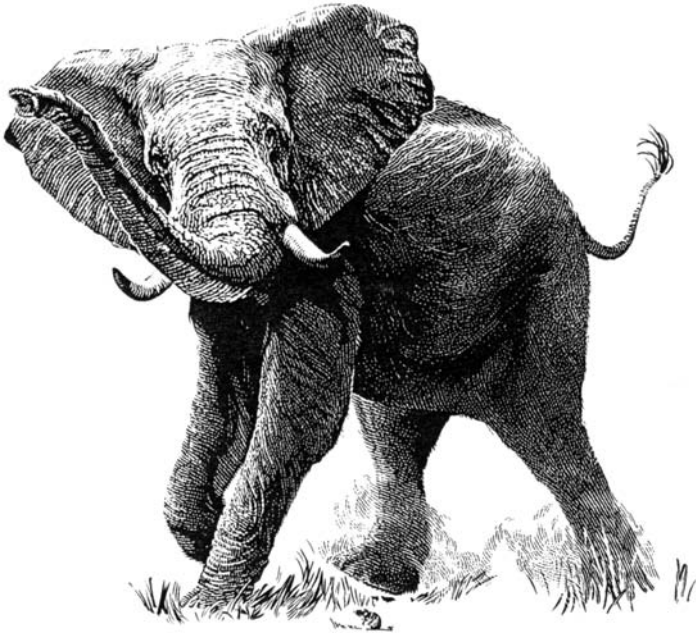
\*\*\*\*\*

Listening to the evening news, we cannot assimilate all the deprivation and unhappiness that flows over us like a heavy wave. It is unbecoming that we, the human beings, surrounded by beauty and majesty, should be contrary and dysfunctional – out of tune and worlds away. And this domain is waiting for the newborn babe. If this little one acquires the tools for learning and then surrenders them to egocentric goals, our kingdom's Energy will again be compromised, the waste will be confirmed, and the evening news will remain the same. We parents and teachers – parents as teachers – can help our children find their place and purpose by allowing the early introduction and exercise of imagination, investigation, and contemplation to come into their

lives. We will be successful, because we are working with minds that are still untouched by misapplication.

However, the adult community, apparently without a sense of connection, is giving mixed signals to our young people through its outward admonitions and its inward coalition with dishonesty, indifference and greed. Through advertising and other forms of commercialism, we deliberately mislead. Violence and anger and inanity are presented and acknowledged as entertainment: the little child deserves better. Subservience to debilitating substances, hateful, even indolent, behaviour, and vain and nullifying thought disrupt Energy's natural flow, and the consequences are grist to the media's mill. When the torment becomes intolerable we strengthen law enforcement, clamping down on the offenders, but what are we doing now about the kinds of abuses that targeted the embittered perpetrators when *they* were youngsters of tender age? It is obvious that the damage they now inflict was earlier directed at them. At such a time as this, when dysfunctionality so grievously inflicts its toll, we must be insistent and courageous as we, the teachers, call upon first principles. We must redefine education for our children.





## Diversity

Disparity and diversity should be farther apart in our dictionaries. We might say that diversity is the plus side of disparity for it gives ‘difference’ a happy twist. In today’s classrooms, children are called upon to measure up to predetermined and impersonal standards of excellence. We continue to approve the pyramid structure where the “best” is at the top, and the rest are assembled in diminishing degrees of importance below. If we subscribe to the premise that each child’s capacities and aptitudes are unique – principally because of the manner and degree in which Energy manifests itself – then we must review the wisdom of competition in the schools.

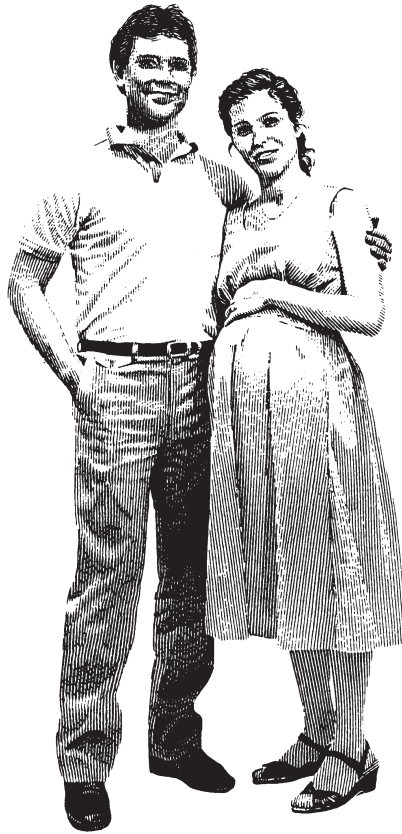
Parents and teachers are keenly aware of the anguish a child suffers when his or her capacities, designed for particularity, are

directed toward conformity. Is it little wonder that a child may shy away from initiative and individuality when these attributes are perceived in a negative light? We know that diversity makes the garden beautiful.

Within life's grand display, diversity is a normal attribute. All 110 elements comprising the mineral realm intermingle and correlate endlessly. The capacities of the lower kingdoms are fixed and captive in the mix. They are not able to step out of line and go their own way. Thankfully, young children (and old children) *can* step out of line and make life meaningful. Diversity is our most precious attribute. We must encourage the children to stand proud, make waves, contribute, and be noticed.

Oh, oh, Hamid has his hand up again: 'If I am made up of specific atoms of Energy, and these particles allow my individuality to present itself, *who* or *what* am "I" – the "Hamid" part? And all my friends – who are they? and all the people everywhere – surely they are more than clever bits of matter walking around and doing things!'

What is Hamid doing with his questioning? He is practising independent investigation. Throughout his life, as he examines and ponders, the spark of insight will accompany him – so long as he continues to 'ask those questions'! He will understand that to accept as truth the word of *any other person*, learned or not, will automatically deprive him of that truth – merely because he accepts it without understanding. This knowledge, in itself, will light up his world. These secrets, waiting for the inquiring mind, are less than a step away; they can click into consciousness and thought instantly, unannounced. When the children's Energy is so focused, purpose will come into their lives. It is here, in this private world, that *thinking* gives birth to *meaning*. Hamid will put on his thinking cap and ask questions his parents would not have thought to ask. 'Since all the various life forms employ Energy to show off their attributes, and as Energy is essential and universal, then are not all life forms parts of a wonderful oneness? Because "our" essence is the same, are we not all shareholders? Golly, could it be that I am truly connected with the universe – minerals, plants, animals and all?'



## Consequences

When conceived in the womb, every child of the next generation is a miracle waiting to be born, and when born into the physical world, this bundle of Energy is ready to be opened. At the enigmatic moment of conception, when the father and mother's components meet and merge, a combination of elements that has never existed before allows unknowable potentialities to come into being. The relationship of each particle

## Consequences

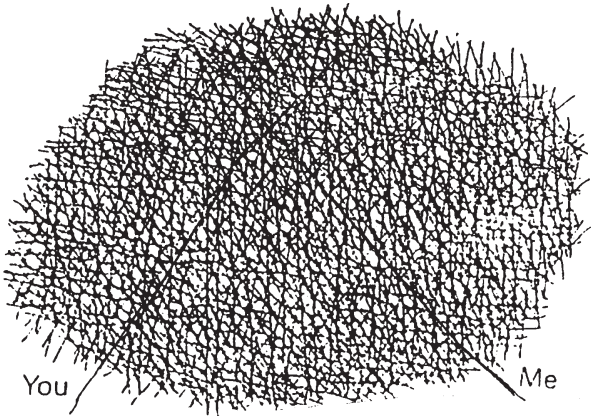
to particle, molecule to molecule and gene to gene – held secret in this newly formed infant – will enable Energy to be manifested throughout its life in wondrous but nonetheless restricted and particularized ways. After all, as tiny tots we know nothing by ourselves, and we will know only what we are taught. Oh, as youngsters, we may become aware of simple consequences: touch something hot – we won't do that again; nursing a bruised knee or scraped elbow – stay on top of the roller blades. If we take the largest piece of cake, and are not advised, we will naturally expect to have the biggest and best as our due. Why? Why not?

From the beginning, the newborn infant is sheltered and nourished, and gradually learns the guidelines that will progressively enable it to function on its own. Most of these lessons have to do with consequences.

Youngsters learn bit by bit that if they do or say 'this', then they can expect 'that' to happen. Even our very little ones can anticipate the effect of a cause. 'What will happen if I take the largest piece of cake?' 'If I talk back to the teacher or my parents, what might happen?'



Everybody and everything else



Consequences

## Challenge

When we are born, all that we can claim to possess is potential. Then, as the days pass, every great and small event that presents itself is a consequence that must be attended to. We are constantly reacting to initiatives that have had their beginnings either close by or far away. And it is reciprocal, for what *we* do and what *we* say ultimately affects others with whom we have no direct contact; the chains of causes and effects go out in all directions.

The students may enjoy the following story. Two women are shopping at the mall. As they pass the jewellery section, one of them pauses, turns to her friend and asks:

‘Did you ever receive a gift that was the most precious and most treasured gift of all, and do you remember who gave it to you?’

Her friend thinks for a moment and then replies, ‘Yes, I do remember such a gift, and, yes, I remember who gave it to me. It was given to me by my parents.’

‘What was the gift?’

‘Well, it was my life. My parents gave me my life.’

The children may transfer this story to their own lives and ask themselves, ‘What about *my* parents . . . and my grandparents? And what about my grandparents’ grandparents, and on and on way back in history? What part did those early people play in my being here now? Do we thank them too?’ And the discussion might take a turn: ‘What about all the *things* that have happened to me since I was born? Every sight that I saw, every sound I heard, every taste and smell and touch – did each increment make me what I am? Am I the sum of all these circumstances? If so, I had best be careful about my judgement of others, for I cannot know what consequences have shaped their lives up to the moment of our meeting.’



# Education and Competition

*Victory breeds hatred, for the conquered is unhappy.*

Gautama Buddha

Every age and time reflects the degree of Energy that can be made known in it. Every physical form enrolled in the mineral, vegetable, animal or human kingdoms shares in this endeavour. At one time our world was a silent sphere, dormant but infused with unknowable promise. Like a seed, waiting for the spring season, fruition bided its time. Today, after eons of incubation, our planet blossoms and life abounds.

## *Challenge*

The challenge that life presents is one of survival. Sustaining the equilibrium in any organism depends on the relationship of its integral parts to the function of the whole. Our world, before we came on the scene, evolved with incredible conformity – incredible indeed, for all life's forms interacted perfectly (well, ate each other) and balance was maintained. Then, after some long time, we knocked at the door, the door opened and we entered the fray.

In olden times, when our ancestors were struggling to survive (even more than we are today), being distanced from each other offered some degree of security. The intrusion of another family, looking favourably at some nearby real estate, would have been a cause of considerable concern; Neanderthal housing projects were few and far between, and the accommodation a new family might be looking at, no matter how far away, was not far enough. If I had been one of those early people, tending the fire at the mouth of our cave, I'm sure my watchful eye would have been scanning the horizon, on the lookout. And if man or beast were to come into view, I would have grabbed my club (if I could have found it) and headed over there to tell the newcomers to get lost. When the burly fellow in charge saw me approaching, obviously not on a mission to borrow a pinch of salt for my woman's culinary venture, we two he-men, with hardly a grumble, would vie for position and commence to set it to set things right.

\*\*\*\*\*

Apparently such behaviour sticks with you when you learn it in an early age.

Over the centuries the blows have become less direct and more remotely delivered. The point of the weapon has extended further from the hand that brandishes it. From flint knife to axe to spear, from arrow to gunshot and missile to threatening to press the button, today the domination of an individual (or a nation) over another continues. We teach our children to be competitive, to measure their own capacities and accomplishments against the performance of others.

This idea presents a very different set of rules from the ones that ideally define the structure of the family where everyone is to consider as beyond reproach the innate capacities of everyone else. When they leave home and enter the classroom, how are our youngsters to reason that the one coveted prize belongs to the ‘winner’ when they, the ‘contestants’, are competing with varying and unequal capabilities? Of course the fastest runner will win the race, and the keenest mind will score the scholastic victory. A single standard, by which different and particularized capacities are to be measured, is a perplexing concept.

We have neglected to inform our children that an individual life is precious, and that mysteries are hidden within. We have kept secret the quest: that the material world is the matrix Spirit uses to manifest its presence and achieve its goal.

The observation here presented argues that we are neglecting to inform our children that life is more than it appears to be. Physical existence has the upper hand, for everything seems to have a substantial presence. It is not surprising if the children perceive themselves to be only corporeal. From the outset, advertising and other forms of commercialism present a lopsided view of what lies ahead. As parents and teachers, we support this impression by directing schoolchildren’s attention to the physical aspects of their journey. Learning the lessons, finding a career, raising a family, saving for retirement, securing funds for the funeral, where is the excitement? Where do the hopes and dreams fit in? When and where, in the present curriculum, does the thrill of discovery make its appearance? In the humdrumness of our teaching we have left out the romance. We are unduly cautious in protecting our children; we blink, look evasively at the meaningful aspects of life, because there is taint associated with matters other than factual matters. This yielding implies disquietude or (hopefully not) indifference. In our vigilance to protect our children’s freedom, it is difficult to understand the sanctions we have imposed on their freedom to experience the value and significance of creative thinking.

\*\*\*\*\*



## *Challenge*

It is here proposed that the school curriculum include a time period devoted to rational thought and independent investigation. It would accompany the students from the first grade on up. The youngest children would be taught the principles of ‘consequence’, and through this knowledge they would gradually understand that things do not just happen, but are brought about by a cause. All kinds of subjects could be incorporated in the discussion. ‘What might happen if I took the biggest piece of cake at Mary’s party? Well, the other kids wouldn’t like it; they would think I was being greedy.’ Or, ‘If my mother heard about it, she would be disappointed.’

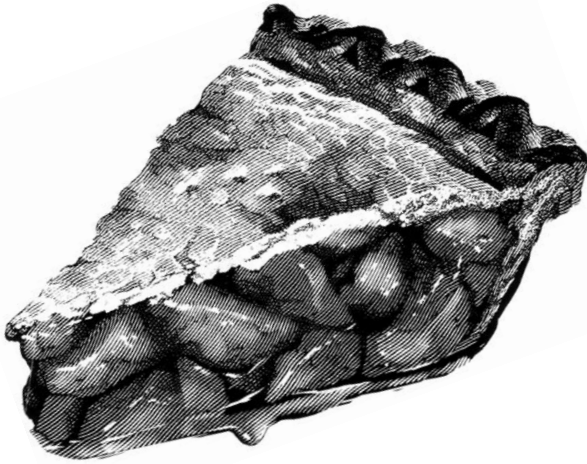
Later on, other leading questions might come to mind: How do people living in very difficult geographical environments survive? Why did some cultures develop technology, and others did not discover the wheel? Rosa might ask, ‘In the structure of the family, what part does “sacrifice” play in its functioning; what do parents and children have to “give up” to be participants? And is there a comparison that would apply in the relationship of nation to nation?’ And Kara: ‘Could competition and the importance of winning, say, in sports, support the idea that for boys to become men they must be aggressive and dominate? And might this learned behaviour lead to all the fighting inside and outside the home later on?’ And Sylvie: ‘Why did religion play so important a role in people’s lives that civilizations were named after them? And, how did arithmetic come into being?’

The subject matter is not as important as the speculations that might be induced. This approach to teaching would bring into context the physical factors (memorizing and remembering), and the non-physical aspects (thinking and processing and applying) that enable such knowledge to be meaningful. When we inform the children that the factual material, and the abstract use of this material, are the two parts of education, they will understand the importance of all those facts and figures.

It is suggested that there be no right or wrong answers, no papers to hand in – unless someone is so excited about his or her

## *Education and Competition*

discovery that copies will be handed out to the other students. The children would, perhaps take notes. Then, when Elizabeth poses her question, 'I know when I feel sick, but what part of me is sad?' her classmates will add this question to their stockpile and perhaps, some day, independently find the answer.



## From Atom to Art

We do not normally consider what we do as art. Those of us who are lawyers or chemists, sales managers, bankers or bricklayers, may be of the opinion that art is a gift bestowed on painters or poets or musicians and we, the common folk, feeling perhaps disadvantaged, are left outside. If someone mentions that he or she is an artist or musician, predictable responses are triggered: ‘How wonderful! Me, I can’t draw a straight line,’ or, ‘I can’t carry a tune in a basket.’

Most of us start our journey with no particular agenda. We play soccer with friends at school or plan some back-yard adventure, but few of us, in our early years, find a compelling interest in, say, playing the piano. We are, for the most part, quite passive; unmindful of the learning process that is quietly at work. Unaware of the influence of countless twists of fate, we gradually, perhaps unwittingly, find interests and aptitudes that are hidden within, and it is then that our lives become meaningful. Secretly, we are tapping into the flow.

But the ‘we’ part is the puzzling part, for we are more than the effects we make happen. Some of us are musicians, but what are we, the ones behind the music? (This was Hamid’s question.) What might we call ourselves – we who aspire to foresee and then direct eyes and ears and hands to make the dream real? We *mentally* conceive, then *physically* give birth to the vision so that our intent can be, with wonder, acknowledged.

We make music, and what might the music (the effect) call us other than its maker (cause)? And as such, might we not consider ourselves, as well, the effect of a cause that cannot be fathomed? Although what we are is a mystery, what this mystery does is real and true. Our physical make-up, configurations composed of smatterings of those 110 elements (arranged as enabling molecules) serve us as tools. Voices, ears, eyes, hands and feet – look at us go!

Baking a wonderful pie is not what it seems. It is actually a mystical happening! The pie itself is a puzzle; why should such a conglomeration of atoms taste so good? But more remarkable is the chain of causes and effects bringing it to its place on the County Fair Home Arts table. Look at the variety, and don’t they all look delicious? Over there we can see the contestants standing off to one side anxiously waiting for the judges to make their decision. If we listen carefully we can hear the pie-lady in the blue sweater: ‘Well, it looks to me like Ada’s pie is going to win again.’ To you and me, Ada’s pie looks pretty much like all the others, but those who know pies will be able to affix the blue ribbon to the best one. It’s a ‘spiritual’ thing. Ada and her pie somehow validate and entitle each other – Ada makes the pie, and what does the pie do? The pie makes Ada a pie-maker.

Another scenario: Back around the turn of the century, Nashville, Indiana (Barbara’s and my hometown), was a small country village nestled in the hills of Brown County. Washboardy roads paved the way. We can picture Jake’s wagon shop situated a quarter mile east of the centre of things. A typical hot summer day, flies are buzzing, and Jake and his cronies are idly talking, not much

## Challenge

going on. A man approaches toting a broken wheel, the rim is bent and several spokes are missing. No one says anything, but they all study the wheel. Jake finally says, 'Well, this is a job for Jim,' and he turns his head and calls over his shoulder to the back of the shop, 'Hey, Jim, come on out here.' Jim stands quietly, pondering the wheel, arms sort of folded, one hand at his chin, and he says, 'Yeah, I can do that.' Well, why can Jim fix the wheel and the others cannot? It is because Jim and his work are one. Jim gets out of the way, the Energy flows through, and the wheel is fixed.

And one more: How many times has a gallery guard, watching the masterpieces in the Louvre, heard whispered, 'Oh! Look at Cézanne!' 'That's Van Gogh!' Well, yes, they *are* wonderful, but they *are* dead. However, what they did when they were alive was to so put themselves into their work that their signatures are not necessary. Like Ada's wonderful pie, the paintings identify their makers.

All these interesting people are Energy channellers, and what they do is the consequence of how they are put together – how their atoms and molecules are so arranged and synchronized as to allow Energy to express itself in such particular and marvellous ways.

A pie-maker may be a pie-maker and an artist may be an artist, but without producing a masterpiece, who would know? Without the evidences displayed, Ada, Cézanne, and Jim the wheelwright would join the ranks of undistinguished common folk. This lesson is directed to our children. If they quietly sit in the corner, watching TV or clicking at their computer games, *they will not be noticed*.

It may be reasoned that life displays Energy in specific and measured degrees, enabling distinct and definable attributes to be known, *but what is Energy*, and where does it abide? Certainly the atoms and molecules are not in control of their own destiny (for they cannot know if they are being called upon to shape a rock or form a thought). And certainly *purpose* is involved, for all definable systems fit together in such a way that order, rather than chaos, is maintained, and a degree of completeness greater than their own is manifested. And, we can hardly avoid the question, called upon by what or whom? There are few options; the conclusion we arrive at

## From Atom to Art

must be stated something like this: Some universal enabling factor is at work controlling the constrained capacities of physical matter.

\*\*\*\*\*

This discussion brings us to the place of art in our lives, particularly in the lives of our children. Not art as it is taught through lessons concerning composition and colour, but more importantly art as a *natural* fruition of human initiative and creativity – art as an evocation. When Energy flows through us, art is born. The alerted mind conceives, then calls upon the intermediate tools – and what happens? Prizewinning pies and fixed wheels come into existence.

Little children are fundamentally innocent. They are not inherently instilled with knowledge; it is an acquired attribute that must be learned. In our schools, numbers and letters are taken care of quite satisfactorily, but the children are not told, and they do not know, that there is another side to the knowledge equation. They are unaware that they are luminaries, each one holding the torch of progress, which when held high will light up the world.

\*\*\*\*\*

We have another challenge. Attaching definitive significance to the lessons and assignments by which knowledge is acquired is of little consequence. Mathematics, social studies, language arts and physical science are the *means*, the intermediate tools for learning, but they are meaningless if they fail to facilitate understanding and perception. The children are unaware that wondrous *non-physical* aptitudes and talents are hidden within their *physical* substance – unique capabilities instilled when they were conceived, endowments waiting to be set free – each and every one an art form. Tragically, these will remain unrealized, a mere potential, if the children are not informed of what it is that they are – and how the lessons and assignments will ultimately enable them to touch on meaning and purpose. When they ‘step aside’, let Energy flow through naturally and freely, they will become wellsprings of progress. Channelling their Energy, they will establish the culture of their time.



## The Mischief-maker

At this point, I would like to tell one of my father's stories. As I recall, he would begin by saying, 'This is a Turkish story.'

Long ago and far away there was an owner of a great estate. The barns and pastures and the hills beyond were his, as was the wonderful mansion nearby. One would think things were going well for a man in his position, but he was troubled; the daily chores were without end and try as he might, he could not find enough servants to help. One day while he was working in his garden, worrying about his plight, he looked up to see a young man coming up the path. He looked strong and amiable; his stride was brisk and he was smiling as he approached.

They exchanged greetings and the traveller asked if he might see the owner of the estate, as he was looking for work. The owner replied that he was the master, and, 'Yes, how wonderful that you

### *The Mischief-maker*

should come by at such a time when I have so great a need. I can put you to work right away. What terms might we agree upon?’

The young man replied that there were two stipulations, and that both must be complied with. One was that he must be kept busy, and the other was that he was not to be paid a wage. The owner was puzzled, but he agreed and they clasped hands closing the deal.

The estate owner thought and planned for a moment and then told the young man to start his chores by cleaning the stables and barns. The fellow set off with a lively step and the gardener returned to his plantings, musing on his good fortune. Just a few minutes had passed when he looked up and there was this smiling fellow asking what his next job should be, the barns are clean. The owner was taken aback and went to inspect the work. It was better than he had hoped for. He was perplexed, but he turned to the young man and told him to fetch water and feed for the cattle, and then groom the horses. And off the fellow went humming a tune.

A short time later he returned; all the work had been done, and he asked for his next assignment. This state of affairs continued on into the afternoon and when the fellow returned from his last task, the gardener was confused and undecided and told him: ‘Sit over there and wait a minute; let me think.’ The young man said that this would not do; the agreement was that he must be kept busy. Desperate, the owner instructed him to move the far hill to the east side of the estate; the drainage would be better and the view from the manor house would be more beautiful.

The worker headed for the hills with shovel in hand, but was back within the hour; the work was finished. The owner now was deeply troubled and said that he needed a moment to decide what other work needed to be done. ‘Sit and rest while I consider.’ Dejected, the young man turned away, and, after a moment, the gardener heard an uproar – shouting and yelling. Looking up, he saw one of his barns on fire. Frantically, he ran to the scene and there, inside the barn, this young fellow was busy setting another fire. ‘Here! Stop that!



## Challenge

Run and get water and call for others to come and help.’ The young man immediately dropped his torch, sounded the alarm, and rushed to the pumps for water.

In the midst of all this confusion, another traveller approached the landowner. He was very aged but his eyes were bright and his countenance betokened great wisdom. ‘Well, stranger, it looks like you have got yourself into a bit of trouble.’ The owner then related the story of the young man’s arrival and the problems that had ensued. The old man replied, ‘You don’t know who this young man is, do you?’ The estate owner replied that he thought he was just a fellow looking for work. The wise one said, ‘Let me explain, but first, as the fires are almost out, call him over here. I will tell him what to do and your problems will be over.’ The amiable young man approached and the old traveller told him: ‘Go over to that pole and climb up and down until your master tells you to stop.’ The fellow rushed over to the pole and started climbing.

‘Now, let me tell you who this young man is. He is called the mind, and the pole is his hobby. Unless the mind is kept busy, it creates mischief.’





The child in the womb has not asked to be there, nor is the newly conceived one free to choose the bestowals that are to define and oversee its journey.

Does it not seem unfair that this little one, untouched and pure, designed for particularity and gifted with unknowable promise, should be enrolled in a competitive world where predetermined and impersonal standards of excellence are to measure its worth? Can we imagine the anguish of such a soul? Conformity stifles initiative, and sameness is the enemy of diversity, the wondrous attribute that lights up the world.

Diversity is the fabric of life and is inherent in all systems, *tangible and intangible*. Life's spectrum not only reflects all knowable configurations, colours, shapes and sizes, but, as well, the indefinable things like thought and behaviour, compassion and love. Through the employment of these two fundamentals (i.e., the physical and the non-physical), knowledge is enhanced with understanding. It is then that the child will find *meaning* hidden within the incredible display and, though difficult to define, he will acknowledge it as real and true.

## Challenge

Ideas themselves are mystifying; they come into being unannounced, without our beckoning. Sitting quietly, perhaps reading or watching TV or drying the dishes, suddenly we are changed, different from what we were before the interlude. Some inexplicable transformation has taken place and we look at things in a new light. The revelation is so momentous that we realize we will never be the same, and we cannot but wonder from whence such insights come?

But some ideas do identify their beginnings. The principles outlined here are easily traced to their source. It would be unfair to claim them as my own, for they embrace a universal perspective that is beyond my field of vision. These principles, proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, and exemplified by His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, bring into context the two polarities of science and religion, points of view that have troubled us for so long. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's discourses and writings clearly define the reciprocal relationship of the physical and the more-than-physical aspects of existence. With simple but profound explanations, a theory of evolution is clearly defined, and the proposition that *cause* and *effect* are inherent in every facet of life cannot but be acknowledged.

Yes, ideas are wonderful, but these are special because they address the fundamental needs of a divided world. Old concepts, coveted for their past service, now stunt our growth. Our great need is to find a common discipline that will align our Energy to a single purpose and then hold us to the line. As we cannot explain the phenomena of fresh concepts infusing and alerting our thoughts, we must concede that their disclosure comes *through us* from an Energy source beyond all reason. So, let's give revelation a round of applause, for it ultimately enables us to find our way.

Today, our scientists are busier than ever before, delving into the materiality of life in their attempts to find the 'unified field' behind everything. Every so often they share their excitement; they are 'getting closer', but then the answers seem to slip away, retreating further and deeper into complex intangibles. And religion, content to relegate the mysteries of life to the province of an unknowable

## Conclusion

omnipotence, continues to hold fast to practices that increasingly dissipate the indivisible Energy that connects us to the greater realm. These two schools may be satisfactory for their followers, but what about the rest of us who are bothered when their two truths are in contention with each other?

History records that, apparently, a determined allotment of knowledge is made available for our use at any particular time. We cannot step ahead of the game. Throughout the ages, great thinkers discover new, timely, and often outlandish ideas that change or replace the old outmoded ones. Their dreams, however fanciful at the time, become manifest, and in due course are instrumental in furthering our progress. In earlier times, superstition and dogma clouded our vision, but when science came on the scene, with its reliance on reasonable proof, our understanding of the workings of life changed completely. Now it is clear that the physical presentation cannot be known other than by and through its non-physical attributes. In one sense, we *are* ahead of the game for (because of science) we are privy to a perception which science itself is, for the most part, still reluctant to explore. We must thank the biochemists and genetic researchers for helping us touch on the mystery of life's dual nature, for we common folk could never have found the mystery by ourselves.

At this point, my argument would appear to have little to do with religion, but carrying it a bit further we must concede that advancement, the movement forward toward specific goals, is reflected by all systems, mankind included. The employment of abstract thought has exerted so great an influence on our progress that civilizations have been named after the religions that gave them birth. From cave to nation, the structure of the social order has built on principles that have focused the Energy of diverse peoples on the achievement of a unified progress. Expanded understanding has resulted in new and advanced technology and art. It is interesting, but perhaps not surprising, that religion, using the logic of science, should in this day lead the way and construct the bridge connecting the two worlds.

## Challenge

The two courses of study that will help our children fit into this, their era of enlightenment, are, it is here proposed, *independent investigation of truth* (through the asking of questions and the assessment of answers), and *an understanding of the oneness of the physical and non-physical aspects of life*. Then, when Elizabeth and David face the challenge of a new and reasonable premise, former perceptions will change or be enhanced and they will see more clearly. They will, with intent, become participants in the evolutionary process.

This proposal does not entail the building of new schools. It changes the perspective, redefines the goals that public education aspires to achieve. It is a gift that we can, with great love, share with our children. We will teach the facts and figures; they will use these tools to find meaning and purpose and everything, *everything*, will change.