

The Big Theories Underwriting Society Are Crashing All Around Us -- Are You Ready for a New World?

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The ideas and institutions that define our culture are breaking down -- and that's a good thing, say authors Bruce Lipton and Steve Bhaerman.



Many of the ideas and institutions that define our culture are breaking down -- and that's a good thing, say Bruce Lipton and Steve Bhaerman. In their new book, *Spontaneous Evolution: Our Positive Future and a Way to Get There from Here*, they write that today's crises are part of a natural process -- clearing out what no longer serves us to make room for a new way of being. Are they cockeyed optimists or do they see things others miss?

Reality is alive, dynamic and interconnected. Science has been saying so for nearly a century, and we experience it every time we walk on a beach or look into another's eyes. Yet most of our cultural, societal, political and economic structures act as if it's not so. We can no longer afford to indulge outdated worldviews. In order to deal with the crises we now face, we've got to act on the new realities and understandings revealed by science.

A cell biologist by training, Bruce Lipton taught at the University of Wisconsin's School of Medicine, performed pioneering studies at Stanford, and authored *The Biology of Belief*. Steve Bhaerman has been writing and performing "enlightening" comedy in the character of Swami Beyondananda for over 20 years. He is the author of several books.

Terrence McNally: Bruce, you first, a bit about your path to the work you do today?

Bruce Lipton: When I was very young I looked into a microscope for the first time and saw cells moving around. That vision ultimately led to my becoming a cellular biologist and teaching in medical schools. I was a pretty conventional biologist who thought of the body as a biochemical machine run by genes. I was teaching the genetic control of a molecular body to medical students, but at the same time I was doing research on muscular dystrophy and cloning stem cells starting about 1967.

My research proved so mind-boggling that it led to my leaving the university. I saw that genetically identical cells put into different environments have different fates. I'd start with genetically identical

stem cells, change some of the constituents of their environment, and the stem cells would form muscle; change the environment a little bit differently and genetically identical cells would form bone; change it yet again, and another group of genetically identical cells would form fat cells.

I was teaching medical students that genes control life, yet my research said that the genes were actually controlled by the organism's response to the environment.

That work ultimately led to *The Biology of Belief*, and presaged epi-genetics, one of today's leading areas of research in biomedicine. Epi is a prefix that means above. Epidermis means the layer above the dermis. Epi-genetic control literally means "control above the genes."

How an organism perceives the environment or, in the case of humans, what an organism believes about the environment, actually controls its genetics. If we change our perceptions or beliefs or attitudes about life, we actually change our genetic read-out dynamically. This revolution in science empowers you to recognize that your health is under your control.

TM: Now Steve, your path, which I assume may be even more circuitous than Bruce's?

Steve Bhaerman: I was a very idealistic young teacher in Washington, DC teaching during the late '60s-early '70s. I found some really fabulous ideas about how things could be, but how to put those ideas into practice escaped most people. I remember meeting a world-famous expert on communal living, but nobody could stand to live with him. For the last 30 or 40 years I've been exploring spiritual paths, learning about myself, and seeking ways of making our great ideas congruent with actual reality.

I thought it would be interesting to write a book about healing the body politic, applying a biological or medical metaphor to the wider world. When I read *The Biology of Belief* and met Bruce, I realized that he was the guy I was meant to do this book with. In *Spontaneous Evolution* we hope to help people see that many of the beliefs we've been living by are now burned-out stars, yet we keep trying to navigate by them.

TM: Steve, you left out the fact that a big part of your path has been humor.

SB: For the last 20-something years I've been performing and writing as Swami Beyondananda, the cosmic comic. Humor is a great way to allow new ideas to infiltrate, and I've learned a lot cohabiting with the Swami. As soon as I put the turban on [with Indian accent], oh then we've got a whole different set of wisdom coming out.

TM: Bruce, how did you decide to take on this collaboration?

BL: I got so caught up with cellular biology and the biology of belief that I kept putting the biological understanding of civilization on the back burner -- until Steve and I started talking.

Most people get caught up in, "Oh my God, crisis here, crisis there. What are we going to do? The sky is falling!" For the last few years Steve and I have been crafting an understanding that says we're in a transition. Rather than focusing on what's coming apart, we want people to understand that this crisis makes it possible to move to a much higher level of evolution.

TM: Let's pull apart some of the threads that you deal with in the book. You say 1) there are three perennial questions that any belief system needs to address; and 2) that the answers to those questions have changed. What are those three questions?

SB: Why are we here? How did we get here? And now that we're here, how do we make the best of the situation?

TM: And how have those changed?

SB: If you look at recorded history, we began with animism -- simply "I am one with everything." There wasn't much of a distinction between the spiritual world and the material world, and indigenous people were able to navigate these two worlds fairly easily. Had we stayed at that point, we would be little more than human animals in a cosmic petting zoo. But we ventured out to explore.

We then began to see that there are many forces. We recognized the "me" and the "not me," and we began to assign powers to various gods. So we had polytheism. Then came the monotheistic view that there is only one God and one power. The institutionalized version of monotheism through Christianity was very powerful throughout the middle ages.

TM: You single out the institutionalized version of Christianity, not Judaism or Islam?

SB: Christianity is most powerful in terms of its impact on Western society. Christianity's worldview eventually gave birth to scientific materialism as a challenge to the institutionalized version of the infallible church.

The first little chip to fall: Copernicus recognizes that the earth actually revolves around the sun. It takes over 100 years for that belief to be integrated throughout even the thinking world.

As the church loses its infallibility, we see the rise of the current dominant paradigm: scientific materialism, the material world is what matters. Newton, Descartes and the rest say that the universe is a machine.

We are now at the threshold of a new understanding which we call holism, in which what we call "science" and what we call "spirit" are part of the same thing. Yet our institutions are still based on scientific materialism, on beliefs that have actually been disproved by science.

TM: You point out myth perceptions: unexamined pillars that support modern thought. In science, some of these have been proven wrong, but the public hasn't been let in on that yet.

BL: When the general population accepts particular answers to perennial questions from some group or entity, they tend to turn to that same source for other truths about the world. When the Church was running the show, if you wanted to find out about health or what's going on in the future, you turned to the priest or the Church for answers.

TM: Or prior to that, the medicine man.

BL: In animism.

When science took over, we started saying, "You want truth? You don't go to the Church anymore. Now you go to the science people." The flavor of the answers flavors culture and character. When the answers change, civilization changes.

In the current vision of scientific materialism, belief in matter is primary. The Newtonian belief that the universe is a physical machine takes our attention away from the invisible realm. We focus on material acquisition as a representation of how well we're doing in our lives. We take the earth and

the environment apart seeking more matter. The more matter you have, the more effective you are in this world. He who dies with the most toys wins.

Over 100 years ago, quantum physics said, "The invisible realm you ignore is actually the primary shaper of the physical realm."

TM: I hear you expressing a kind of duality: "We were paying attention to matter, now we've got to pay attention to the invisible." But holism doesn't pay attention to one or the other, it realizes they are in fact the same.

BL: Exactly. That's the conclusion we come to. If it sounded like we were emphasizing the spiritual over the material, it was only because that's the piece that's missing in today's world: the piece that says "Wait there's more to us than this physical plane."

Look over history. The primary differences between civilizations is whether they emphasize the spiritual or the material. With animism, both were the same thing. We're coming back to that. After taking civilization to the spiritual realm under the Church and then into the material realm under the sciences, science and spirituality are coming back to a midpoint, recognizing that they are both critical.

TM: What is the old belief and what is the new belief?

BL: The old belief: Genes predetermine our fate and control who we are. We didn't select our genes and we can't change them, so our lives are beyond our control. That kind of science says I'm a victim, so I need a rescuer. As victims, we turn over our healthcare to other people. But the new biology reveals that our thoughts and beliefs and how we interact with the environment control our genetics.

TM: Until fairly recently I thought that I was born with a blueprint that would play out for the rest of my life. I think that's a common misconception. You're saying that, though we're born with a particular genetic structure, it's not a blueprint or a done deal. Again, not a simple either/or.

BL: The scientific story we've been living says we have no power. But we say we are all active participants in the unfoldment of our own genetics, our own health, and the health of the world that we live in.

TM: You say that from a position of science, not from a position of belief. We've talked about two of the false beliefs: Newtonian physics, and the belief that genes control our lives. What are others?

BL: The premises of Darwinian evolution: that random mutations got life going and that life is based on a struggle for survival of the fittest. Those are beliefs that influence our culture well beyond the realm of science. As a consequence, we live in a world based on competition and struggle. But we have to ask: Is the world really that way or did our beliefs create that impression?

Now we learn that the entangled community called the biosphere is driven not by competition but by cooperation and community. This means our competing has been anti-evolutionary.

Humans evolved over a million years ago. What's evolving now is not the individual human, but the living superorganism called humanity. We are all cells in the body of one living thing. So we need to come together and recognize our unity.

The cells making up humanity will keep killing each other -- as in an autoimmune disease -- until we realize that we're all part of one organism and cooperation is key. The way we live in our world today mimics some of our biggest health issues: autoimmune diseases like arthritis, Alzheimer's and cancer. The fundamental underlying issue in almost all illnesses today is stress. When stress hormones are released into your body, the same hormones that get you ready for fight and flight, also shut off the immune system.

TM: In the old days, fleeing or confronting a tiger, you didn't need immunity or digestion or much intellectual capacity. You needed speed and force. And so the body turns off certain things and turns on others. In modern society, however, those stressors are often symbolic and constant. What about the notion of random evolution?

BL: "Why are we here?" If you start from random mutations, we're just an accident, a genetic crapshoot. That belief disconnects us from the biosphere and all the other organisms on the planet. But the fundamental nature of evolution is that every new organism emerges into the biosphere to bring greater harmony and balance to the environment.

TM: You're saying evolution is not about individual organisms, it's about larger and larger ecosystems.

BL: We started this whole cycle of civilizations with animism and we have to return to that kind of awareness. Belief systems that allow us to pollute will go away when we realize we're part of an intricate and delicate network and web of life.

TM: You conclude that the crises and breakdowns we're facing are in some ways a good thing that will allow the rise of new and better systems. That may not be such good news to a lot of people who are hurt in the process.

SB: Survival of the fittest is a dominator belief system. We must move to "thrival of the fittingest" where we disperse resources in such a way that everybody benefits and we build a common wealth.

When we allow every individual to thrive in a local garden, we allow them local energy, local autonomy, local sustainability. All of a sudden, every group makes a contribution, and we spend less time, energy, money and attention protecting ourselves from one another and fixing things that could have been prevented.

Underneath our skins we have a 50-trillion-cell, highly functional community with technology that far outstrips anything that we've invented with our human minds. When we're healthy, this system is so impeccable and harmonious that within us we have full employment, universal health care, no cell left behind. The organs cooperate with one another so that the whole system can thrive. You never hear about the liver invading the pancreas demanding the islets of Langerhands. It just doesn't happen.

We need to begin to imagine how to put these ideas into practice in our lives, our communities and our world. Awareness is the first step. Every phase of evolution involves expanding awareness and expanding connection.

TM: Are you saying that even evolution that appears to us to be simply physical, arises through awareness and connection?

SB: When single cell organisms "decided" they didn't want to be single any more, they combined in

community. And the process of combining as a community enhanced the awareness of each cell. Each now had access to the information that was being gathered and used by other cells. Then we had specialization of cells, and some cells would never see the light of day but would get signals about what was happening out in the world.

Each of us is a community of 50 trillion cells working in concert. At this stage in human evolution, we don't need to grow another arm or a bigger brain. We need to grow greater awareness and connection in community.

What are the implications of that? How do we live our lives? How do we relate to other people? Politically we've been divided -- as if the liver said, "I'm not talking to the heart, to hell with him!" Can we begin to recognize that every nationality, every cluster of human cells, is an organ in this one body of humanity?

What would it be like if our systems -- the organization of money or health care or the law -- actually worked in concert with one another rather than in competition? These are important questions to begin to ask as we take the first steps of new awareness, as we lift ourselves outside the matrix of invisible beliefs that we've mistaken for reality.

TM: What would a person want to know or learn or do to begin to participate in this spontaneous evolution?

BL: We have to start recognizing that our belief systems are controlled by our mind, and that most of our mind is not under our control. We have a conscious mind, the creative mind, home to our wishes and desires, and we have a subconscious mind, a habit mind with programs downloaded. We generally believe that we're running our lives with our creative minds. A lot of people say, "We're facing a crisis, let's create answers and solutions." But 95 percent of our life comes from the habit mind, programmed primarily by other people and our culture.

TM: So even with the best of intentions, we miss 95 percent of where the action is.

BL: Absolutely. That's why we struggle so hard to get to where we want to go. We're operating from invisible beliefs about how life works that were programmed into us before we were six.

In the first six years of your life, you see the stresses and struggles your parents go through, and that becomes a behavioral program in your subconscious mind. Then when you're older, you say, "Let's have a life that's wonderful and joyous and happy." But 95 percent of your life is coming from behaviors downloaded from your parents.

Until we become aware of these invisible programs that undermine us, we look like we're victims to the world. If we want peace and love, harmony and health, and we don't get it, we may conclude that the universe is against us. But from the perspective of the new biology, we undermine ourselves with the acquired beliefs of our culture. We have to rewrite those beliefs to re-empower ourselves.

TM: I knew we were facing lots of crises. Now I learn that 95 percent of what I do is out of my control. Where's the good news?

BL: The good news is if we become aware of it, we can do something about it. Being forewarned is being forearmed.

TM: What can I do about the 95 percent that's habitual?

SB: Once we recognize how much of our reality is programmed, we can begin to forgive ourselves and forgive others. We can begin to recognize that one thing we have in common is that we're all programmed. That recognition is a first step outside the matrix of controlled beliefs.

I've been told that a person out there is my enemy. We've both been programmed, but with different programs, therefore we disagree. So the first step is to recognize that we are all programmed.

The reality we have in common is not in our heads, it's in our hearts. Scientific studies have shown that we can walk into a room and begin to entrain with one another.

McNally: We begin to have similar heartbeats?

SB: Like a tuning fork, we begin to harmonize. When you create situations where people can communicate and listen in a respectful way, an interesting thing happens. We begin to focus on what we have in common as humanity. We begin thinking like a species instead of like individuals.

We're in a similar situation to a caterpillar in the process of transforming into a butterfly. Most of the news is about the caterpillar that can't be fixed. Our book is about the emergence of the butterfly. While still a caterpillar, the imaginal cells of a new butterfly begin to communicate with one another, allowing new structure to emerge as the caterpillar collapses.

We face a choice of focus. Do we focus on the Titanic sinking or the party boat doing fine?

TM: The premise of all of this is holism, yet out of habit we end up with dualism. I don't accept that it's a choice between this or that. I'm not going to be satisfied focusing on the party boat and ignoring the hunger and inequity around me.

SB: It will take a new structure for that hunger to be solved. We can't solve it at the level that we've created the problem.

TM: So you're not saying to focus on where the goodies are, you're saying focus on the possibility of evolution and transformation.

SB: We're not saying to ignore the problems in the world. We're simply putting our attention on what we're building instead.

BL: Today we write off whole populations because they don't fit into our economic models. There's hope in our future, because the breakdown is necessary to build a more sustainable foundation. Some people will have terrible problems and others will have great success, yet they're both part of a community.

In your body, no particular cells go hungry. Every cell must be fed for the body to be in harmony. When we begin to treat all humans as cells in one body, and make sure that they all get the basics in life, we create the foundation on which to build an exciting future.

Every cell counts. Every human counts.

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