
Marilyn Ferguson

set the tone for the late New Age with the 1981 publication of her book *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s*. Her remarks here will appear in her new book, *The New Common Sense*.

"Without vision," said the prophet Isaiah, "the people perish." Vision builds the sinews of will and cultivates courage. By coming to respect and act on our visions, we entrain a fluent guidance system.

Innovators live at the edge of the cultural habitat. They operate at the further reaches of the known world — and the known self. They explore their highest natural abilities. They challenge themselves to develop their weak traits. They know that they cannot indulge themselves for long and keep surviving at the edge.

As greater numbers of people are living at the edge, our societies may have to borrow practices like the traditional vision quest of Native Americans. Our societies will require training that enables us to live at the edge.

Vision quests are undertaken by tribal leaders or by young males, as a rite of passage. The individual goes alone and without food to a mountaintop or other remote site and does not return to the tribe until he has had a vision.

In a way, the vision quest is a tradition of renewal. The questing person leaves behind the community, its structure and beliefs, and his own customary perceptions. In so doing he may find a part of himself that has been obscured by his habits and history. On the quest he looks outward across new vistas, he looks inward for new images, and he looks forward to carrying his vision back to the group.

Or, as expressed by a character in Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*: "We do not receive wisdom. We must discover it for ourselves after a journey through the wilderness, which no one else can make for us, which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world."

Vision trains us to self-correct, self-organize, and self-transcend. By giving direction, it promotes health and a desire to learn.

Imagination — positive or negative — sets the tone for real-time experience. It can tyrannize us or liberate us. *We are not so much run by what happens as by what we expect.* Vision can solve a specific problem, and it can also help us discover our possibilities and purpose.

Indeed, many people, having noticed their greater vitality in the visionary mode, have learned to seek out opportunities to envision and act on their visions. We have all known times, however rare, when we did not simply watch a cresting series of events but rode the wave. Moved by an idea, a glimpse or an instinct, we advanced into the territory of intelligent risk. However briefly, we felt in charge rather than passive or buffeted by circumstances.

Like any other capacity, vision is strengthened and refined by experience. As we learn from disappointments and successes, our foresight evolves. Re-vision is essential. This may seem a contradiction to the idea that visionaries are intent on a specific outcome. But remember that they also talk



about *feeling* as well as seeing the goal. The visual impression is less important than the felt sense of rightness at each step along the way. Needs change; timing and other circumstances open and close doors. *Visionaries are satisfied if the outcome serves the purpose.*

Visionaries belong to the group that Henry Miller called the *Granzevoik*, border people. They are the culture scouts. Edges may, in fact, be the key. According to one theory, evolutionary changes occur in a surprisingly short time under certain conditions of stress. Species living at the edge of their normal habitat tend to mutate more rapidly.

What I am calling the New Common Sense is an engagement with the future, an acknowledgement that our brains were designed not merely to survive but create. In part we have been confused and frustrated only because we did not know the way in. And now vision itself may lead us to the reconciling not only of our troubled world but of our troubled minds. Eventually we can find home in the vision itself. We belong to the future that draws us.

Remember Rilke's promise to a young poet: ". . . and if we hold to what is difficult, then that which now seems the most hostile will become what we most trust and find most faithful." Visionaries discover an empowering paradox. If you make peace with the unknown, it becomes your guide. They begin casting lines into the future. The guessing, refined by the feedback of experiment, becomes intuition. Intuition, explored and acted upon, becomes high instinct. They seem to be remembering the future, moving toward some target that the culture has not yet articulated but that can be sensed by the sensitive.

And vision becomes a state of mind — perhaps eventually a state of grace. ■

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