



Welcome. Thank you for coming. We are glad you are here. We don't know what has called you here. Perhaps you don't either, yet. But we are so glad you came.

We want to tell you a story, a story about how this book came into being. And then we would like to invite you to join us in an exploration.

For the past year, a group of us has engaged in this exploration. We are by no means the first group to undertake this journey; countless other individuals and groups have preceded us, helping to illuminate our path.

Our exploration has been supported by the Fetzer Institute. Work at the Fetzer Institute focuses on the importance of wholeness to individuals and communities. During the past decade, Fetzer has regularly convened small groups of leaders from the public, private and non-profit sectors. Through these gatherings, Fetzer has come to know and learn from a broad array of individuals and organizations involved in group work.

As part of an institutional assessment process between 1996 and 1997, Fetzer asked author Jacob Needleman to offer his reflections about the future role of the Institute. In his letter to Fetzer, Jacob offers a provocative image:

"I [believe] that the group is the art form of the future.... [E]very great culture has created forms of sacred art that were needed in order to transmit and...discover by experience the truths which were necessary to absorb into one's life.... In our present culture, as I see it, the main need is for a form that can enable human beings to share their perception and attention and, through that sharing, to become a conduit for the appearance of spiritual intelligence."

Jacob then underscores the urgency of this image, observing that "we obviously cannot confront this tangled world alone.... It takes no great insight to realize that we have no choice but to think together, ponder together, in groups and communities. The question is how to do this. How to come together and think and hear each other in order to touch, or be touched by, the intelligence we need."

How do we come together in order to touch, or be touched by, the intelligence we need?

This question, and Jacob's image of "the group as art form of the future," provided the principal catalyst for our exploration. This book is one small utterance in response to Jacob's provocation.

OUR FOCUS

We focused our inquiry on moments when groups of people experience touching, or being touched by, the intelligence they need, when they begin to function harmonically and fluidly, to experience a palpable sense of clarity and coherence.

Jacob's question led us to wonder whether such group functioning might be one of the primary forces necessary for the evolution of human consciousness, and what might be possible if individuals and groups could better understand how to access and sustain these transformational moments of clarity and coherence.

These wonderings led us to a core set of questions:

- What exactly is this phenomenon when groups touch, or are touched by, the intelligence they need? Can we begin to understand and describe this phenomenon more precisely?
- Do others share our sensing that more and more people are gathering together to experience and explore this phenomenon? If so, what are the implications of this?

The Group as Art Form of the Future

- Is a field of practice and study beginning to emerge around this phenomenon? A field that implicitly or explicitly understands “the group as art form of the future”?
- If a field is emerging, how is it evolving? Who are some of the people connected with it? What are the roots of their thinking, their values, their practices?
- If a field is evolving, how might we participate more consciously in its evolution?

OUR APPROACH

“Start anywhere; follow where it leads.” These words from Myron Kellner-Rogers became a touchstone for us. We started with the names of about forty people, people who had a depth of experience working with groups and a demonstrated passion for nurturing spaces of collective insight, co-creation and action.

Over the course of ten months our list multiplied tenfold, to well over 400 people recommended by their peers as sources of deep experience and expertise. We used a short survey and a “sociometric” exercise to invite people to describe themselves and their work, and then to describe some of their networks of relationships. To date, we have profiled more than 100 people, interviewed sixty-one, and have transcribed and studied over half of these interviews. This data is what informs the book you now hold.

As the data began to emerge, we first felt only the daunting tasks of trying to describe the indescribable, and of somehow organizing a very large and complex array of information. We were trying to render visible a phenomenon with subtle and intangible qualities, qualities most often discerned tacitly, indirectly. Connection. Relationship. Coherence. Wholeness. Wisdom. Emergence. Healing. Flow. Transformation. How can we really, concretely, describe such things?

As we immersed ourselves in the data, however, we were reassured by the words of George Washington Carver: “If you love it enough, anything will talk with you.” As we listened to transcript after transcript, story after story, more and more descriptions of lived-experiences, we began to hear and then see archetypal forms, expressive visual images, resonant quotes, signs, symbols and repeatable patterns. As we invited people to describe themselves and the nature of their work, we began to hear a deeper harmonic.

“Start anywhere; follow where it leads.”

THE BOOK

Throughout this book we have endeavored to reflect back what people said; to bring form to the images and energies that pulsated through the interviews and surveys; and to capture some of the textures and multi-dimensionality of the deeper harmonic we began to hear and feel.

At the heart of this book is an intricately woven braid of three strands of writing (pages 10–63). One strand of this braid is a series of eight *pattern stories* written by Alan Briskin. Each story is an excerpt from one of the interviews, followed by commentary from Alan highlighting some of the insights and paradoxes the stories reveal. We call these “*pattern stories*” because the themes, organizational elements, and group dynamics evident in each story appeared repeatedly throughout the interviews.

Interwoven with the pattern stories is a second strand of writing, *the principles*. Given form by Chris Strutt, these principles also emerged from the transcripts, and are organized into three categories: Elements of the Experience, Significance of Gathering, and Practices for Preparing and Opening. Descriptions of these principles with illustrative quotes appear on the right in column sidebars throughout the pattern stories. Page 59 summarizes these

principles, and pages 60–63 highlight the principles in the category Practices for Preparing and Opening.

The third strand of this braid is the *metaphor clusters*. Joan Lederman read and listened to every word of the transcripts, listening particularly with an ear for the natural and metaphoric ways people describe their experiences of collective intelligence and spiritual wisdom. We have placed Joan's clusters of metaphors on the left in column sidebars where they resonate with particular stories.

The list on pages 71–73 begins to render visible some of *the people* in this field—at least some of those who have so far appeared to us. We have also begun to paint a picture of whom they identify as thought leaders, teachers, mentors and guides. Pages 64–65 articulate an array of questions, entitled "*Field of Intentions*," gathered from the profiles that begin to intimate a nascent field of intention and thought and energy.

To illustrate the creative impulse that often vibrated in response to the listening and receiving of our inquiry, we have included an essay that emerged to Chris Strutt as she absorbed the stories and energies of the transcripts. Entitled "*Electricity and Groups*," this meditative essay inquires into the parallels between the phenomenon we are exploring and the laws and relationships that govern the realm of electricity.

Other forms are present as well: poetry; quotations; color; photography; archetypal images; original art. We have offered these multiple forms partly to respond to the multi-dimensionality of the phenomenon, and partly to honor the many different ways readers may choose to access information and create meaning.

Toward the end of the book (pages 76–79) is an essay of closing reflections entitled "*So What?*" Written by John Ott, this essay articulates some of what we are learning about this phenomenon and the emerging field, and some of what might be needed now to deepen the movement already underway.

OUR INVITATION

So...we invite you to "start anywhere and follow where it leads."

As you begin to explore these forms, here are a few questions you might take with you:

- What reflects your own understanding and experiences of this phenomenon?
- What surprises you? Delights you? Agitates you?
- How do you now understand this phenomenon?
- From your perception, is there a field of action and reflection emerging?
- What do you sense is wanting to happen now in the field? In you?

We invite you to hold these questions as you—in your own way—

We offer this book to you with the hope that it evokes and honors your own experience, and provokes and deepens your own process of discovery and discernment.

Again, welcome. We are so glad you are here.