

# The Warm Winds of April

*Recognizing the signs of the springtime of civilization*

BY MARJORIE KELLY

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## If I let go and trust, what am I trusting in? That's the \$64,000 question.

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thing is wholly trustworthy.

In my two hours with Harman, I felt in the presence of a great wise man, who told me the secret of life. You can't grab things and make them happen, he said; "let loose of the controls and just try to act in accordance with some kind of inner signal, and watch the feedback.... I couldn't believe when I was younger that life was really that simple. But now I'm convinced it is."

Equally interesting was that the meeting came at such an uncanny moment. We were desperate for someone to interview for March, because everyone we'd thought of proved unavailable, and even the old friend we *knew* would come through turned out to be en route to Sri Lanka. I was at my wits' end when the phone rang, out of the blue, with news that Willis Harman would be in town the next week. I just laughed. (I would have written about it in the March "Musings," but it was the absolute last minute when we got the interview into the magazine.)

It lingers in my mind—this concept of letting loose of the controls. But I keep wondering, what is this urgency that intrudes? Why can I sometimes grasp this thing about trust, while so many times it eludes me? It's like a faint song that is hauntingly familiar, but remains just beyond reach.

I was making a tape the other day of Bobby McFerrin's album, *Simple Pleasures*, with the song that got so much airplay a few years back: "Don't Worry, Be Happy." When I began to play it back, I had this sudden panic that the entire tape was ruined and I'd have to do it over again. I had to laugh at myself—worrying about my "Don't Worry, Be Happy" tape.

I can't seem to stop worrying. It's hard

to believe that if I just relax and follow the flow everything will be fine. After all, isn't life a bit like sailing, where part of the trick is the ability to tack into the wind: to go where you want to go, and not where the wind pushes you? Isn't the successful businessperson the one who grabs things and makes them happen? It's what I've been taught from the time I was a child: to set goals and work hard to attain them.

Letting go of the controls sounds nice, but some days it just doesn't work that way. After one particularly frantic day at work recently, I took to pounding the steering wheel in my car and shouting, "But I don't know *how* to let go, it's *not that easy*."

And yet I suspect that letting go is my task in life just now, and I need to learn it—it's just that I can't learn it in the way I've learned everything else. I can't simply study it intellectually, I have to surrender to it emotionally. And it's like trying to work a muscle I've never worked before.

The question is, if I let go and trust, what am I trusting in? And how do I know it's really trustworthy? That's the \$64,000 question.

**H**AVING ASKED that question, let me add that there are times I get hints of the answer—when that melody starts to crackle into clarity on my inner receiver. At those moments I know absolutely that I'm part of something larger. And such moments tend to come when I get clear on what I need and put out my hand to ask for it, finding suddenly that it's there. Like the Harman interview. Or the time years ago when Miriam and I were wringing our hands about where to get \$14,700 for a subscription mailing—and then my brother called to say I had just inherited exactly \$14,700. Sometimes the universe is so precisely attentive, it's astonishing.

Being president of a company can be much the same feeling. Unlike the early days of running a one-person enterprise, manag-

**I**T'S SPRING, and Minnehaha Creek is in full glory, surging under bridge and over rock, swelling but not overflowing its urban banks on these lengthening April days. I walked six blocks to the creek the other morning, watching the nervous pigeons flee the underpass at my approach, and seeing the more dignified mallards in their languid dance of intimacy. There's a spot where I always love to stop, there where the stream-bed dips and the water rushes under the bridge: showing in whitecaps and roar the springtime power of this unassuming creek.

Spring sets me thinking about change—its force, its direction, its hopefulness.

I've been thinking a good deal about change on the larger scale since the conversation I had two months ago with Willis Harman (Interview, March/April 1992), a man who is something of a prophet of change in our time. He's a former professor of electrical engineering who is now president of the Institute of Noetic Sciences in Sausalito, California, and author of the book *Global Mind Change*. His basic message is that our culture is going through the most profound transformation since the scientific revolution—shifting from separateness to wholeness, from a worldview based on mechanics to one based on values. In scientific terms, he says we must go back to our assumption that physical reality is separate from us. "What if we rebuild the whole structure on a different premise," he asks, "which is that everything is a oneness, everything is intercommunicating with everything else?"

I find Harman's theory compelling, but what has stayed with me is his *presence*. At seventy-four he has mastered what at thirty-eight I strive for: a kind of serenity that is the opposite of worry. I might have called it "calmness," thinking it a product of stress control—but I'm beginning to realize how bound up it is with trust in life. And how that trust seems to flow from belief: the belief that we're not alone, that we're part of something larger than ourselves—and that this some-

ing a company is an experience of having to rely on others for what is absolutely essential, of having to work as a team and trust my teammates. And if on a bad day that sets me to nagging people, on a good day it feels miraculous.

In a more transcendent sense, there have been moments when I've felt the earth itself supporting me. There's a kind of personal mantra I use in moments of fear, saying, "I feel the earth beneath me, I feel it holding me up." I think of it as a metaphor, but there was a time that metaphor came to life. It was one afternoon years ago in the desert outside Albuquerque.

Some friends and I had climbed to the top of a mesa, and as far as we could see in every direction, there wasn't a sign of civilization: no cars or voices, no hum of electricity—only the vast silence of the desert and the sky. I became aware, then, of a rich and subtle humming, picked up not by my ears but by my body. I had a visceral feeling of the earth's presence, the way I might feel the presence of another body. And I remember saying: "It feels like love."

It was a powerful experience, but one that has no explanation in the worldview I was taught: seeing the ground as just dirt, the planet as a rock circling the sun. But the worldview that's emerging today does give it context. Harman's metaphor of us as organs inside a larger organism is another way of stating James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, which says that the earth is alive in the way a tree is alive: as an inert core encircled by a thin layer of living matter. In Lovelock's view, the earth is a creature with built-in adaptive mechanisms—like the recent eruption of a volcano in the Philippines, which spewed enough dust (which reflects the sun's rays) to counteract the effects of global warming for years to come.

In our old view of the earth as a rock in space, this would have been nothing more than a lucky accident. Just as in a dog-eat-dog world, trust is nothing more than a leap of insanity. For in an existence ruled by mechanics, trust has no function, only force makes a difference. But in an existence based on oneness, trust is the ground of being: not simply a pleasant feeling or a way of approaching life, but the




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essence of life. We are literally all connected. Of course we work together.

Force is the grammar of a mechanical world, cooperation the grammar of a unitary world.

**I**F LOVELOCK SEES EVIDENCE of this new paradigm in the scientific sphere, Francis Fukuyama sees it in the political sphere. In his book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992, The Free Press), he argues that the recent upwelling of democratic revolutions demonstrates that history has a direction: It is moving toward democracy as the final form of government, as the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution." Now, whether or not we truly have reached the end of history, the compelling truth in Fukuyama's thesis is this notion of historical direction. For it implies an organism that is intelligently evolving rather than randomly mutating.

In two especially interesting chapters on "The Weakness of Strong States," Fukuyama explores the fall of authoritarian leaders like Franco in Spain and Marcos in the Philippines—showing their seemingly invincible regimes to be essentially weak, lacking the legitimating base of the popular will.

Fukuyama demonstrates in historical terms what Harman formulates in personal terms: One part of the organism can't enforce its will on the whole organism indefinitely. Or as Harman put it, you can't just grab things and make them happen; you have to listen to the larger rhythms and act in accord.

We do indeed seem to be moving toward greater unity—but that's not to say that someday we'll all hug and live happily ever after. I suspect that where we're heading is more like a democratic community than a big mush of oneness. For as those of us in one of the oldest democracies know, democratic fellowship isn't all

smiles and embraces but a good deal of butting heads and negotiating differences.

Caution is appropriate, for a philosophy of trust may be most healthy when tempered with vigilance. Trusting is not the same as abdicating. And at thirty-eight, I suspect urgency also is appropriate, for my task is different than Harman's at seventy-four. While he reflects on his life, I'm still creating—because enterprises do fail, opportunities can be missed, people do take advantage of one another. My task isn't to eliminate urgency but to keep it from disintegrating into panic, and even in the midst of urgency, to still feel supported.

I'd like to be able to feel that support all the time—to learn better how to work this muscle that surrenders. For what's unique about the transformation in our time is that we can't grasp it entirely with our intellects; we have to feel it as well. We may start by gathering factual evidence of interconnectedness, but we must end by feeling connected.

And, I think, by feeling hopeful—knowing that the earth can bring greenness out of the brown hillside in a single miraculous month. Like Minnehaha Creek, the changes underway in our time have an irresistible vitality, rushing forward with a force much like that of spring but larger, more expansive. More permanent.

Einstein said that there's really only one question yet to be resolved, and that is whether the universe is friendly. Even on my crankiest, most anxious days, I have begun quite strongly to suspect that the answer is yes. ☯