

FUTURE

The Spiritual Story
of Humanity



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By Glenn Martin

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Table of Contents

Foreword	1
Preface	4
1 Human history	5
2 Old knowledge.....	7
3 Evolution	9
4 Population	12
5 Violence and technology	14
6 Making cities	16
7 Histories of humanity	18
8 The city as predator	21
9 A little history.....	23
10 Religion.....	26
11 Civilisation.....	31
12 Ancient civilisations.....	35
13 The Ten Beings	37
14 Slavery.....	42
15 Growing consciousness	45
16 Indigenous peoples.....	49
17 A view of the present.....	52
18 A brave adventure	54
19 Optimism	56
20 Almost gods.....	59
21 Progress	61
22 Hiroshima.....	65
23 The ancestors	68
24 Technique	71
25 Spirit	77

26	Harmony	81
27	Being here now	83
28	Past, present, future	86
29	Correcting the self.....	89
30	Bliss	94
31	Lessons of the ancestors.....	98
32	Time as a circle	103
33	Victories.....	107
34	The Ancients.....	111
35	Ancient knowledge.....	115
36	Not knowing.....	120
37	Lament for the Earth	125
38	The conscious universe.....	126
	Addendum: Knowledge in a time of crisis	130
	References	133

[We live] in an era that has little deep concern about the future.

Peter Senge

You need to be a lover of mystery with a beginner's mind, rather than arriving as an expert determined to solve a riddle.

Richard Rudd

If one changes one's own life, then there is hope for all life.

Hua-Ching Ni

Foreword

This book has been written, not because I see myself as an authority on history or predicting the future, but because no one else has written this book, as I will explain below. It has also been written because I have been quiet about the things in this book for a long time, and someone from my generation should have something to say about them. (I am seventy; I believe I was born at the right time.)

I wrote this book, not because I knew some things, but because I *wanted* to know these things – to see them clearly and say them clearly. Accordingly, in writing the book, I was letting things come into focus, step by step, narrowing down what it was I wanted (and needed) to say. Accordingly, the logic or the message may at times seem obscure. Bear with me; the messages are always there in the heart and emerging.

However, I can give you some signposts. There were five key factors that led me to write the book.

1. All of the popular histories of humanity put the final emphasis on modernity and technology. My question is, is this how we all see ourselves, as apologists for technique and machines and their inventors? That seems wrong to me, alluring as it is. Machines are shiny.

2. Spirituality is either ignored in these histories or it is presented as something that is outdated and irrelevant. The books give us the stories of the major religions as a sidebar to the main story of progress. By the time the books are finished, we understand spirituality only as a synonym for religion, which we now see as quaint, naïve, parochial and probably riddled with superstitious beliefs.

I have been deliberate in choosing the sub-title for my book: the spiritual story of humanity. The most accessible way I can introduce spirituality is to say we are ‘of spirit’. We are not mere matter. I don’t

mean merely to say spirit is a manifestation of emotion; that is a common failing in these times. I mean to say we are, in essence, of spirit, and there is meaning and purpose (and morality) in that. But if we are of spirit, then this ought to be reflected in how we write our history, just as it should guide us in how to face (and choose) our future.

3. To follow the previous point, the purpose of writing about history is to give us some sense of our likely future. Admittedly, many writers are simply enthralled with the very cascade of events in time – this happened and then that happened, and then we got here. The more astute writers manage to derive some sense of where this is all going. Given that we are of spirit, we long for some sense of meaning and orientation, so that we can go forward bravely, cheerfully, or with caution, into our future. Indeed, my book is called ‘Future’.

4. Now there is a critical factor. Despite all the knowledge we have acquired, particularly in the last, say, 200 years, there are vast realms of life where we have only a crude or hypothetical understanding. And we don’t like this, so we tend to fill in the gaps all too readily. So often the future proves our theories wrong. I give some examples in the book; one is the case of the atom, which was considered to be indivisible for a long time. Now we know that it has an elaborate internal structure that is of fundamental importance to the nature of the physical universe.

The more important example is the existence of structures all over the world that date to the remote past, structures like the pyramids of Egypt, and Stonehenge. We do not know how they were built or what their purpose is. We are learning more as we go, but this is not ‘hard science’. I assure the reader that I do not subscribe to theories of aliens. It is worth wondering, however, how the people who made these structures made them, and who they were, and what they knew. And in the context of a spiritual story of humanity, it matters rather a lot.

5. Finally, there is a message that proceeds from all the above factors. It is that each of us is ‘of spirit’, and that is the essence of spirituality, not the public creeds and rituals of religions. So there is a necessary place for spirituality, given that it is who we are, not the external features of power and convention, or the trinkets of

material wealth. In this context, having some sense of our past is integral to who we are. This makes you look at the past differently. I follow the trail back through my personal ancestors and their stories, and think it all the way through to the Ancients.

I leave you to enjoy the book with a question, and it may turn out to be the critical question of our lives: who are the Ancients?

May we all be old souls in this modern time.

A further explanation: I have referenced where ideas have come from as appropriate, with this exception. Wikipedia has become a universal reference tool, despite the general disdain of academics. I have great respect for it, used appropriately as a starting point for knowledge acquisition. If I have not given a specific reference for a set of facts, please assume I have been there and do likewise. It's just a question of using appropriate judgement.

And one last thing: if you are acquainted with the I Ching you will notice that elements of the I Ching pervade these pages. I have been using the I Ching for nigh on fifty years now, so it is integral to the way I think. Yet this book is not about the I Ching, so its presence is, not inadvertent, but ancillary to my main purpose. Perhaps one day I will write more explicitly about the I Ching, not because I am an 'expert', but for the same reasons outlined in the first paragraph.

Enjoy. I am not preaching, but I may be teaching.

Preface

FUTURE is the spiritual story of humanity. The story of humans is different depending on the point of view you take. Some writers are excited by the adventure of it – explorations, civilisations, wars, empires, inventions, and the modern age.

FUTURE wonders what an inquisitive spiritual perspective would find.

Our history has featured violence, cruelty, greed, unequal societies, oppression, and today, unregulated economics and unbridled technology. In the face of these failings, what hope is there for the future? Indeed, will there be a future at all, or will our poor relationship with ecology lead to global catastrophe?

There is a notion that humanity is a tide, and the tide is unstoppable. There is another notion, that what we are seeing now is a rush to oblivion. What you will find here is not an objective solution, if that means one that could be imposed on the planet.

However, there is a recommendation – to start with the self. We need to look at ourselves differently: we are ‘of spirit’. Thus we will see our past differently, and it will take us all the way back to the Ancients. Mere myth, or, in spiritual terms, significant?

Back in the present and hoping for a future, it may only be our awareness individually and our attention to right living that will save us all.

1 Human history

In the old, old days things were different. There was a time before people. There were other creatures, some of them very large, like giant lizards and dragons. Some of them flew in the air, and others lumbered along the ground, their feet crushing lush green undergrowth.

There were changes, and long passages of time. Into the landscape came creatures we would recognise as being related to us – like us but not quite us. They had similar bodies and arms and legs. They also had massive jaw bones, good for biting and chewing. They had no foreheads but two thick ridges above the eyes. That did not suggest deep thought, although looks can deceive. These people learned to use elementary tools, and hunt for food.

Among them were the people who have become us. These people also learned to communicate with each other, more than just making noises like grunting or the music of birds. They talked. And they drew pictures on rocks and the walls of caves. What did that mean? It suggests an appreciation of significance. It was not art, not as we know it, to make something pretty, or to draw it like science, a faithful representation. No, it was more likely to be wonder, or the desire for power – magic.

The ages passed, and the world became warmer. On our measure of time, it was around 12,000 years ago. The people learned to grow plants deliberately for food, and tame animals such as sheep, dogs and cows. This made a difference; there was greater stability and variety of life in that transition. It changed the nature of living.

But still the people were scarce on the earth. They lived in small groups, brought together mostly by the need for defence against wild animals, and the need to coordinate their activities. They learned how to build houses with the skins of animals, mud and clay and sticks and leaves. They learned the use of fire so they could cook.

After long ages, they learned the use of metals like copper, tin and iron to make tools, weapons and implements. They made pots which they baked in their fires.

In time, some of the settlements became larger, with more people, who lived there permanently – villages and towns. People began to specialise in their labour – the hunter, the farmer, the maker of clothes, the trader, and others.

And these people saw themselves as being in relation to the world of spirit. It was a Sun God, or the God of the Heavens, or there were many gods – the river, the mountain, the great mother, the lordly father. The gods (or God) were loved and feared.

Priests and wise men rose up to mediate with the gods. God might be an angry spirit who needed to be placated. Or the god could be the provider of food and life through the sun and the rain. There were rituals.

Let's say we are marking the time at around 3,000 BCE. At this point, networks of villages had been augmented by larger towns and cities at occasional intervals. As well as the separate, isolated tribes of people, there were rulers – kings and governments of a sort. The reach of these kingdoms was limited but growing.

Early cities developed in a number of regions, from Mesopotamia to Asia and the Americas. The very first cities were founded in Mesopotamia after the Neolithic Revolution, as long ago as 7,500 BCE. Mesopotamian cities included Eridu, Uruk, and Ur. At Gobekli Tepe in Turkey there is a collection of buildings signifying some kind of community dating from around 9,000 BCE. Another settlement in Turkey was Catal Huyuk, which thrived from around 7,000 BCE.

The city of Mohenjo-daro arose in the Indus Valley (present-day Pakistan) from about 2,600 BCE and had a population of 50,000. In the ancient Americas there were also early cities, in the Andes and Mesoamerica, which flourished from as long ago as 3,000 BCE and up to 1,700 BCE. This is apart from the Egyptian civilisation that was established around 3,000 BCE which produced the enormous pyramids.

Were these cities a natural development from the establishment of agriculture? Yes, but early urban centres are notable for their diversity. Some cities were primarily political capitals and did not

have large populations; others were densely populated trade centres, and still other cities had a primarily religious focus.

China's cities date from around 2,000 BCE. City-states emerging at this time used geomancy to locate and plan cities, orienting their walls to the cardinal points of the compass. Symbolic cities were constructed as celestial microcosms, with the central point corresponding to the pole star, representing harmony and connection between the earthly and other realms. In Chang'an the imperial palace lay to the north, facing south, absorbing the light of the sun, and royalty slept with their heads to the north and their feet to the south.

* * * * *

2 Old knowledge

Even to write this much is to infer that early people had a wealth of ideas, a wealth of knowledge. We come with the prejudice of our present; we think the people of the past must have been cruder, more ignorant. Yet the indications from the very earliest cities are teasing: their diversity suggests different purposes at work, not a uniform development from hunting to growing to commerce. And to have knowledge of the cardinal directions and to accord them significance to their lives....? What does that suggest?

Then you can read a piece of history, how there was a plague, a natural disaster or a violent skirmish, and everyone died. So everything that was known by those people was lost forever. And meanwhile we might wonder if those people who died did not know wise things, amazing things? We are the inheritors of loss as well as gain.

But we are triumphalists; we worship progress, and place our hopes in that. We think that anything that was lost was learned again, or was not worth knowing. The ancient people may have been

devoted, but they were mistaken. They were superstitious, believing in dark spirits and magic. We have learned knowledge, and we know that magic is only tricks and sleight of hand. We know that there is no evidence for the things of spirit. No one has found Atlantis, no one has found the fairies at the bottom of the garden. That has even become a joke. We are modern.

Yet, even when the first cities were made, there were memories of times no longer known. The first books of the Christian Bible were written after the ninth century BCE, long after the first cities had existed. In Genesis we are told that the whole world, with animals, birds, plants and humans, began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This is the story that came to endure over much of the world since then.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of god was moving over the face of the waters; and God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.”
(Genesis, chapter 1)

There were five more days, culminating with God creating humanity in His own image: “In the image of God He created them, male and female, and He told them to be fruitful and multiply”.

In ancient China the story goes differently. In the mists of the Kunlun Mountains, the First Ancestor was born when Lady Yuan of Jiang trod on the big toe of Di’s footprint and swallowed the egg of the Dark Bird; she conceived in awe. She gave birth to Prince Ji and to Hou Ji, Ancestor Millet. This happened at the Hidden Temple below the summit where the Tiger Spirit dwells.

In Australia, the world before the world began was, as in the Bible, without form and void. In the Dreamtime the land was first shaped and all the forms of life came into being. The totemic beings, such as the Rainbow Serpent, transformed the landscape and still live as the rocks and hills and watercourses. The moon and the sun and stars came to life. The tracks for following animals wove their way through the land, and there were ceremonies and rites for the maintenance of the health of all things.

I learned about Creation at Sunday School. We coloured in pictures of Adam and Eve in the Garden, enjoying the free gifts of the fruits and herbs. Often there were two pictures, the first of which was trouble-free. We were allowed to enjoy that for a brief moment. Then we were given the second picture, and a conundrum too hard for a child – there was one fruit that was forbidden, yet Adam and Eve ate of it. It contained the curse of knowing good and evil, and Adam and Eve were cursed and sent away from the garden to spend their lives in labour and in pain.

It was a hard lesson. Eating the apple was wrong, but we were told by our parents to eat apples every day because they were good for our health. And I never understood why it was wrong to know the difference between good and evil, and our parents reminded us of the importance of knowing that every day too. It was only years later when I read the *Tao Te Ching* that I understood.

“When people see some things as beautiful, other things become ugly. When people see some things as good, other things become bad. Being and non-being create each other. Therefore the Master acts without doing anything and teaches without saying anything. When his work is done he forgets it; that is why it lasts forever.” (Chapter 2; Stephen Mitchell)

I learned early that some things will never be explained to you. The dominant requirements are to remember and to obey. The older knowledge was obscured.

* * * * *

END OF SAMPLE

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