

DO YOU WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD?

The Spiritual Attributes of Study Groups

By Sheila Keene-Lund

Last month my husband and I attended a church service where the pastor after reading an inspiring passage from the Bible turned to the crowd and yelled: "do you want to change the world?" "I want to change the world and I want you to join me!" People clapped frantically clearly touched by the preacher's appeal to their emotions. I was no exception! We are moved by speakers and books that open our eyes, touch us, excite us, extend us! And this preacher was no exception. Listening to him I wanted to follow him - to become a member, to join a ministry. An hour later I was back in the swing of everyday life; the excitement faded into the background but the question "Do you want to change the world?" kept ringing in my ears?

The goal to change the tribe, the country, the world has been the goal and responsibility of spiritual seekers and leaders throughout history. They have interpreted our holy books and provided us with techniques aimed at uplifting ourselves so as to uplift society. Yet history is full of violence imposed on others by God-knowing people. In our world today, violence and indifference towards others keeps escalating and suicide statistics are on the rise.

So where are we falling short?

Jonathan Swift, the 18th century Irish author who wrote *Gulliver's Travels* made this insightful remark:

"We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another."

Most people actively engaged in transformation are motivated to do so because of a major crisis in their lives: drug addiction, emotional turbulence, social problems are great catalysts of change. But self-transformation for individual gain does not have the spiritual power to transform society. Nor does the spiritual complacency of God-knowing individuals who are unwilling to stretch themselves out of their comfort zone.

Meaningful change in the community begins with meaningful change in the individual and requires three things:

1. a high purpose that remains fixed. For example, the intention to transform oneself for the sake of growing in love of God and one another, rather than transforming for a personal reason.
2. Being open to stepping out of the comfort zone – intellectually, philosophically, and spiritually. To some this means being open to exploring their beliefs in the light of the latest revelation given to humanity, to others it means being open to appreciating the truth in the beliefs of others, or questioning their own.
3. Having an intentional framework for growth that is supercharged with the insights from epochal revelation to accelerate the growth of cosmic wisdom and capacity to love.

When we develop the mind in a balanced and deliberate manner, we increase the capacity for God-consciousness. In the process, reasoning becomes increasingly more objective, inclusive, moral, loving, and selfless. As a result, decisions become more effective, socially progressive, and peace-enhancing. To develop the mind is to develop cosmic insight, moral awareness and spiritual perception:

- a. We develop cosmic insight as we expand our reasoning, feeling, and reflective abilities. It is in the intellect that we explore the *idea* of God - questions such Does God Exist? What is God's nature? Can God be known without faith and revelation? And finally what is my relation to God and the universe?

Each time we study a Paper, the spiritual forces have something to reveal to each individual involved. Reflection and conversation activate the process whereby the Thought Adjuster and the Spirit of Truth enable us "to grasp the reality of spiritual values and to comprehend the philosophy of universe meanings" (17.2).

Critically exploring our beliefs and the beliefs of others in the light of epochal revelation is one of the most important activities to foster cosmic insight because it enriches spiritual affiliations and aids the movement of all religions towards spiritual unity. Other activities that can likewise help expand cosmic insight are those that foster sound taste, improve the quality of thinking, and cultivate appreciation of the body as a temple of God.

"A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions."

But focus on development of cosmic insight is not enough. Without activities that develop moral awareness and spiritual perception, study group members remain barren, devoid of the inspiration that ignites creativity and expansion of the group.

- b. When we develop moral awareness we grow in soul consciousness. We progressively realize the *ideal* of God. When we are developing moral awareness we are mastering our human nature and cultivating our divine nature. It involves the continuous making of choices that are guided by our highest spiritual ideals. It means going out of our way to serve others. Activities that help develop emotional maturity are essential to strengthening the capacity for moral awareness.
- c. To develop spiritual perception is to realize the *spirit reality* of God. It involves developing our *feeling* mechanism, our emotional life which can reach upward through worship and wisdom to the spirit level. When we develop spiritual perception we develop sensitivity to spiritual realities including our spiritual guidance. Spiritual perception allows us to be grounded in faith, raises the quality of our emotions and empowers us to recognize true revelations. Activities include prayer and worshipful meditation.

What does this have to do with UB study groups? The UB reminds us:

"A social group of human beings in co-coordinated working harmony stands for a force far greater than the simple sum of its parts."(1477.1) 133:5.6"

"Intellectually, socially, and spiritually two moral creatures do not merely double their personal potentials of universe achievement by partnership technique; they more nearly quadruple their attainment and accomplishment possibilities."(494.10) 43:8.11

If the Bible has transformed millions of lives since its publication - The Urantia Book in turn can uplift the whole of humanity one generation at a

time to new levels of expression!!! and it can do this because its intent is fixed - to expand cosmic consciousness and spiritual perception - and provides a practical and complete framework for living the golden rule from its highest level of interpretation. When this book is applied in a group setting, the force of the spiritual power that it generates has the potential to change the world, one person at a time.

A UB study group has to be more than a social gathering or a venue for reading the book, exchanging ideas and helping one another understand content, which is what a regular study group is about. For UB study groups to emit great spiritual force, its members must be infused with a high purpose that is in alignment with the intent of The Urantia Book. This means that readers must be actively engaged in developing the three endowments of the human mind for the sole purpose of cultivating a "majestic and well-balanced personality," essential to changing the world. In a group setting it is possible to engage in this practice:

1. **Cosmic insight:** Study, reflect, explore, question
2. **Moral Awareness:** In a study-group setting, it means being sensitive to how others are feeling and to opportunities for service; refraining from negative criticism; offering to pick up a fellow reader or dropping them off at home.
3. **Spiritual Perception:** Intentional prayer and/or meditation before and after the study session. In turn, the study group experiences more focus, compassion, and creativity, and less stress and anxiety among its members.

When as Urantians we commit to the harmonious development of the three endowments of the human mind, we gradually come to the realization that the only way to change the world is to be grounded in the highest intent, and to engage in conscious efforts to develop the human mind - for that is the only way that we can be *fully empowered to contribute one's best to the advancement of civilization*. This is the only way we can change the world and it is the responsibility, challenge, and privilege of every generation. The Urantia Book Study Groups give us a perfect opportunity to develop these three endowments of the human mind and all we have to do is to realize it and apply it.

Do YOU want to change the world??

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