

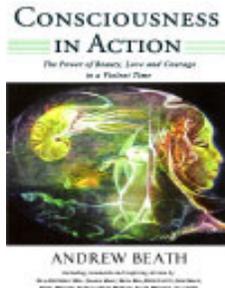
Conscious Activism

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CONSCIOUSNESS IN ACTION

Andrew Beath

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Subtitled 'the power of beauty, love and courage in a violent time', this book situates the reader at crossroads in the evolution of consciousness. It sees the possibility of two different futures, depending on how we handle technological development and relate ourselves to the web of life. Andrew Beath's background is in social and environmental activism. Here he draws not only on his own experience but also

on that of numerous other leading activists in various different fields such as Joanna Macy, John Mack, Barbara Marx Hubbard and Ralph Metzner.

The book focuses on seven attributes of consciousness deployed by activists:

- Nonviolence - kindness in the midst of passion
- Not knowing and spontaneity in the moment
- Introspection for self-discovery
- Eros, the art of loving-kindness
- Co-creating a healthy world - there is no enemy
- Vision, free of reaction
- Joy without attachment to goals.

It is divided into three parts: the challenge and opportunity of our time, preparing the ground of being, and courage and skills for co-creating a different future. Much of the ground in part one will be familiar to Network readers: the argument that our planet is alive, that our cultural perspective needs a reality check, that individual well-being is not separate from the health of the planet, that we are in the grip of a rampant consumerism and prey to a sense of isolation and meaninglessness. The book comes alive with stories of vision and perseverance.

A striking example is the account of Julia Butterfly Hill who spent two years sitting in the top of a Redwood tree in order to prevent a logging company from chopping it down. The company stopped at nothing in trying to dislodge her, even attempting to blow her out of the top of the tree with a helicopter. She writes that the experience gave her an unshakeable belief in the interconnection of life, because the only way she could survive was to become one with the tree, to merge with it, to absorb it, and to have it absorb her. She learned that the tree becomes one with the storms rather than fighting it.. She also learned about the transformative power of love and forgiveness through direct confrontation with hostile forces.

A widespread evolution of consciousness is required if we are to break out of many of the vicious cycles in which we find ourselves. Martin Luther King is quoted in the chapter on non-violence as observing that the ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. 'Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only the light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.' I suspect that Beath is right in suggesting that worldwide ecological degradation is the necessary impetus for the evolution of our sensitivity.

Beath discusses the expansion of personal consciousness and offers his own model of transformation. The first stage is normal awareness, which is followed by awaking experience,

which it then becomes integrating awareness. As perception of separateness falls away you enter into the dance, culminating in gracious awareness. The capacity to be present in the moment runs through many of these attributes, for instance joy and non-attachment to results. The joy is an expression of life itself, of its dance and rhythm. And at the centre of conscious activism lies the human heart, which represents empathetic connection and a sense of independence. The equating of Eros with loving-kindness is somewhat curious, when there are two other words in Greek -- *agape* and even *philia* -- which lie closer to its meaning. However, the author wishes to stress the sense of connection implied by Eros.

Many inspiring quotations are woven into the text. Here is Wendell Berry: 'the first thing we must begin to teach our children and learn ourselves is that we cannot spend and consume endlessly. An economy based on waste is inherently and hopelessly violent, and war is its inevitable by-product. We need a peaceable economy.' Taoist philosophy, with its emphasis on harmony and going with the flow, is never far away. 'The soft that overcomes the hard in the world as a gentle rider controls a galloping horse.' And 'Can you give the wisdom of your heart precedence over the learning of your head?' And a poem from Li Po:

*The birds have vanished into the sky,
And now the last cloud drains away.
We sit together, the mountain and me,
Until only the mountain remains.*

If we are anchored in love and stillness, we can act with integrity from the centre of our being. Or, to quote the Dalai Lama on how to handle personal attacks: 'what I do is to become as clear and conscious as possible of my intention, of why I am doing what I am doing. Then, for the rest actually I don't let what others think about me affect what I do.' This book is a valuable guide to the inner-outer interface.