

NEW RESPONSE

From IONS' New President

JAMES O'DEA

Somewhere between four and five years ago, heading south on Highway 101 toward San Francisco, I found myself responding to an impulse to take a turn off onto a country road. Soon, I was driving through the gates of 101 San Antonio Road. Although I enjoyed my walk, it felt as if the place had once had friends and lost them. It felt unfulfilled in some way. It reminded me of a large, beautiful bell without a tongue to sound its deep resonance.

A little while ago, as interviews were underway for the presidency of IONS, I shared this story with someone I “chanced” to meet while hiking on nearby Mt Tamalpais. He, too, somewhat mysteriously, had found himself driving through the gates of 101 San Antonio under similar circumstances some years back, before it became the new home of IONS and the future site of our Global Wisdom Center.

As I begin to settle into my work here, it is clear that many interesting people have been drawn to these hills over the years. The original native peoples loved this place, for sure. Now, others seeking to explore the nature of the gift of consciousness have arrived on land that seems to have its own needs and mysterious longings. Ah, good, we are part of a larger story!

To find one's home is to be graced, especially when it is a 200-acre campus in rolling northern California hills. We are deeply grateful to those of you who provided the vision and resources to manifest this major shift in our role and our capacity to become a conven-

ing presence in the cultivation of awareness and wisdom. We know already that, on the one hand, this new home is an expression of our deepening mission and purpose; on the other, it represents heightened responsibilities.

Our deepening purpose flows from the insight and conviction we have gained from thirty years of energetic exploration with a growing number of colleagues in the field of consciousness research, from leading-edge dialogue on scientific and philosophical paradigms, and from the cultivation of wisdom. In the best tradition of explorers, we are comfortable moving between certainties and doubt. Even as we find ourselves at the edge of discoveries that shake the dominant scientific paradigms to their very roots, we have remained true to examining the hard and sobering questions of seasoned skeptics. In this way, we move into new territory with both optimism and integrity.

We have often been asked whether the work of IONS might be a bit too theoretical, tangential, and lacking relevance at a time of grave international, social, and ecological perils, and even catastrophic health problems. We have to be able to answer in ways that clarify and reaffirm the centrality of our mission and purposes. I see this as an early task of my presidency. Having spent much time in my life witnessing the ravages of conflict and war, trying to curtail torture and the violations of people's rights, exploring our capacity for the societal healing of intergenerational wounds, as well as fighting specific diseases and promoting sustainable development, I hope I can be an effective and credible spokesperson for understanding our world and our planetary existence from a “noetic” perspective: one

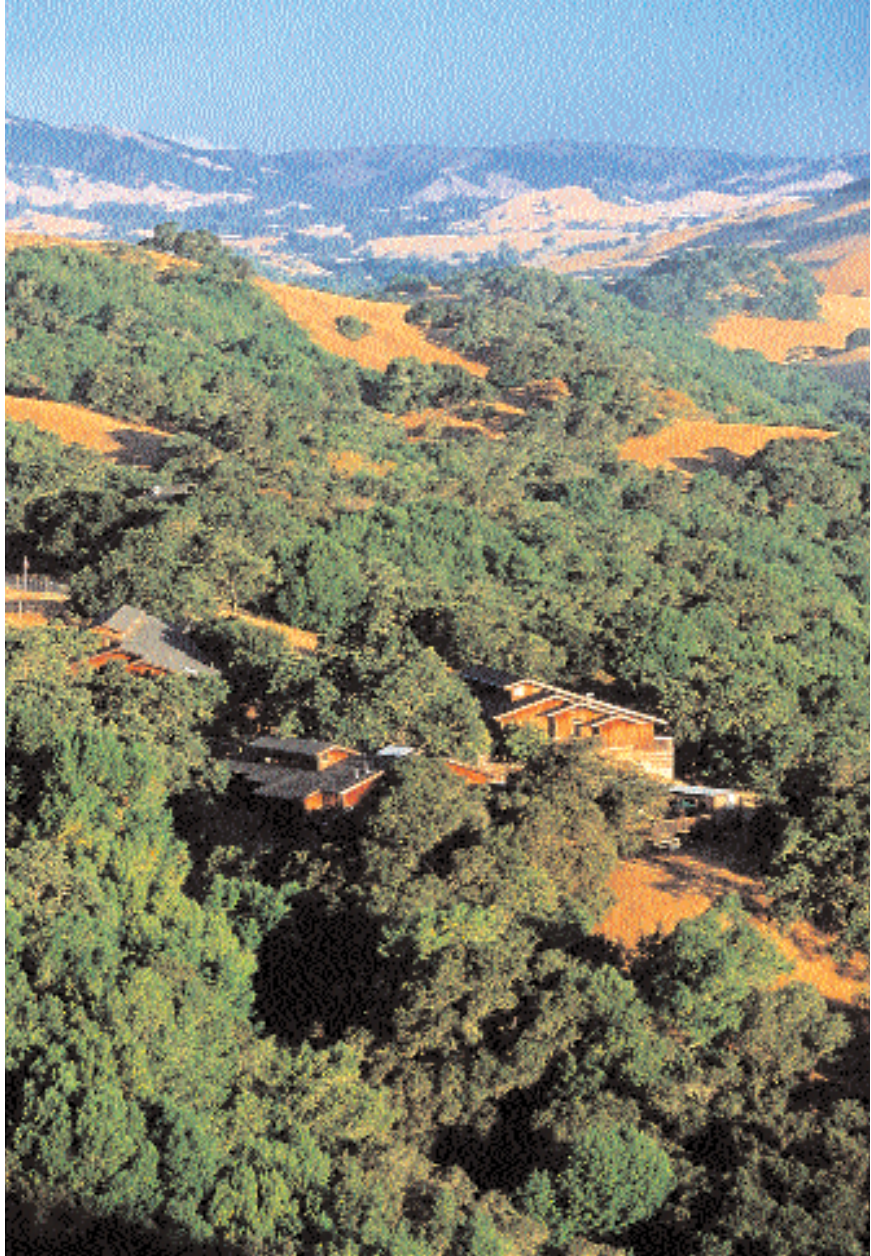
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that has the potential to reveal and stir the awakening of human capacities for health, healing and collective wisdom.

We live close to the edge of a real science that can once again contribute to humanistic values; a science that does not displace the primary significance of our own subjective awareness and experience. It is a science that can, with humility and skill, throw light on and even understand how science, itself, is informed by what we have come to call the realm of spirit.

In our work at IONS we have moved deep into the territory of exploring how profoundly and subtly we are connected to each other, and how consciousness, as it grows, gathers us together in a story that promises so much more wholeness and relatedness than it does dominance and division.

We know that our world with all of its hard and tactile surfaces is soft and fluid at its subatomic core; that what in our experience is separated in the macroscopic realm, at another level, arises from a whirling ocean of connection; that what is precisely located here has its roots in a universe that seems to operate in decidedly nonlocal ways; that what is fixed and static in the ➤



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concrete world of objects is constituted of energy and movement. We know that the very quality of our thoughts, feelings, and intentions can affect our own health and the healing of others. We know that inner perception or “viewing” across space and time is not freakish but rather a capacity that may be more broadly developed. We are coming to know that evolution is more collaborative than it is competitive, and that a complex “web of life” is intimately interrelated. As we come to know more the nature, depth, and dimensions of our connectedness, we will cross so many of the illusory borders that continue to separate human beings.

Our heightened responsibilities arise out of a need to manifest a greater capacity to conduct and catalyze key research, develop a curriculum in human capacities and transformational learning, and convene public dialogue in these exciting new arenas. We have a global perspective, and our campus will house a Global Wisdom Center. We have accepted the charge to mobilize more resources and, with our strategic partners, play a more prominent role to achieve these ends. This charge calls for wide and energetic participation at all levels of our membership. I ask all of you to help move us into the flow of resources needed to accomplish our mission.

Many of us feel a powerful longing to move beyond constraining and divisive old polarities, and some have teetered on the edge of depression and despair. Yet it is precisely at this moment that we must mobilize resources for new ways of seeing and being in the world. I believe we will rise to our new responsibilities to the extent that we stay rooted in our purposes, convinced of their magnitude and of the significance of the contribution we can make to the exploration and communication of research and ideas that will best serve human evolution and planetary peace and survival. We will be given further responsibilities to the extent that we as a commu-

nity, an institute with a growing membership, cultivate wisdom and a steadfast commitment and openness to new scientific and philosophical paradigms.

My experience shows me that wisdom is based in humility. Both the scientist and the mystic—and increasingly the mystic-scientist—stand humbled and in awe of each discovery that reveals one more aspect of the nature of reality. Scientist and mystic both serve a rigorous process of truthful inquiry, and yet both are imaginatively engaged in the quest for knowledge. Increasingly our search for knowledge is akin to what the Greeks called “gnosis.” It requires our full participation. It requires both our hearts and our minds, and the fullest expression of our wholeness.

And so it is in this spirit that I come to serve IONS, knowing there is a growing community of people who are willing to give themselves fully and passionately to this work. I have already discovered that there is more joy and beauty in this work than I had imagined. I have already met so many members, volunteers, board, and staff who, despite the perils of these times, have communicated their sense of miraculous possibilities for a fundamental shift in human consciousness. It is you who are giving voice and resonance to the longings that live in the soil of 101 San Antonio Road. It is you who are giving tongue to a bell that calls us to a deep remembrance of who we are and what we are called to be and to do for our common home. This work is equally for planet Earth, our common home, that has its center in the most mysterious of all places—the human heart.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve.



JAMES O'DEA is the newly-elected president of the Institute of Noetic Sciences. Since 1995, he served as executive director of Seva Foundation, an international health and development group, headquartered in Berkeley, California; and served for seven years as director of the Washington office of Amnesty International.