



LIFE ESSENCE: THE NEW GOLD STANDARD

Simon Davison

Thank you. I am honoured to be speaking with you here today and the ideas I am about to share and the possibilities they represent are very dear to my heart. When Neil McGregor then Director of the British Museum gave the first Bleddfa Annual lecture, he commented that: 'Bleddfa is the place where the big questions of life are asked'. Well - what I have to offer today came out of asking such a big question and it was in response to the nomination and election of President Barack Obama. He was elected on the promise of change and his election triggered a vast outpouring of hope around the world in even the most remote communities. I even heard that in a small village in Kerala, India a ceremony in the local temple was held blessing his election: unheard of for the election of an American president.

I thought at the time that perhaps due to no fault of his - the change he promised was unlikely to come about and that he would increasingly be dragged down by the trappings of office. Sadly this seems to be true - and yet - what remains true is the need for change.

So the big question is – How do we bring about real change?

Change that brings real hope to the multitudes who were touched by his election – change that provides a fundamental shift in the way we do things and conduct ourselves – change that allows us to address some core issues of our existence. Over the next 40 minutes I would like to share a concept that I think has the power to change the very fabric of our society and the world. A big claim I know – but this is Bleddfa.– and so – may we have an open heart and mind and listen with pure intent to the question: How do we bring about real change?

At a time of unprecedented global challenges, it appears to me that humankind lacks the intelligence to respond to address core issues effectively. This failure of intelligent response is perhaps the biggest threat to our existence, far bigger than any of the challenges facing us. Yet I do believe we have the resources and means to respond intelligently if we are willing to embrace the truth of our circumstance, fundamentally reappraise what we value, and out of this reappraisal - dismantle and change the systems and processes that devalue us.

What I propose is a fundamental shift in our thinking based on incorporating a concept of life essence value at the heart of our decision making. To make such a shift we have to understand how life essence impacts our existence and how to integrate life essence value into our value system.

So what is life essence? It may be interpreted to mean God by some or nature by others. For the purposes of this talk - for me - Life essence is the inherent relationality of all things. By relationality I mean the active principle of relatedness that links all things. There is nothing that is outside of this relationality. Everything is affected by and dependent on something outside of itself. It is important to acknowledge this fundamental truth and take responsibility for its implications as this is the key to unlocking the mechanism of change. Much of human activity does not acknowledge this basic truth of relationality – and as I will demonstrate - is actively non relational. However as the ultimate relational medium life essence is a force for equilibrium and it is in this context that it is most apparent and its action revealed. This is the area I will focus on today especially the relationship of life essence to human activity in restoring balance and how we can participate in this to our advantage and ultimate benefit.

What we value and why is a doorway into understanding the life essence relationship and some fundamental truths about how we live and order our society. Human activity can be measured by what we value. For example - what is the market value of a sheep these days? Albert - any



idea? The point is when you take some sheep to market you get money and that represents something to you – paying your utility bills, giving something to your spouse or child - whatever it is - it means something that is important to you in your life perhaps more important than the money or the sheep. This is what I call the relational value and is the initiating motive for selling the sheep in the first place. This is where you are invested and touched personally. This is the living part of the value equation that connects the two objects of value - the money and the sheep - being exchanged. I am often touched when someone buys a work of art in the old school gallery here in the Bleddfa Centre. They buy not for commercial gain. They buy because they are moved by the art – they relate to it – they are investing in the relational value and in themselves. Many of you here have been investing in yourselves in this way for some years! Both of these examples of relational value show an integrated process that reflects balance.

The challenge is - how can we stay true to the relational value when we are making value judgements on a much larger scale? When a government takes a decision that affects millions of people - like cutting public services and reducing the deficit - the relational value of the individuals making the decisions cannot be fully engaged and the objects of value take precedence – i.e. we must cut costs at all cost!

When the objects of value take all the focus of attention they become increasingly disconnected from relational reality and the value equation becomes imbalanced. How many times have we heard politicians justifying their position? The more imbalanced the policy becomes the more adamantly they defend the policy in an attempt to maintain stability and control. This is understandable when they cannot draw on their own personal relational value for the support that would help them integrate their position. This is where a concept of life essence value can be introduced and acknowledged as a higher value into the value equation. Life essence value carries all the inconvenient truths that complicate policy making but it also raises consciousness of how non relational any given policy or action is, and highlights that whatever is excluded will later be a destabilising element seeking inclusion.

The key point I want to make is that life essence is present in every value judgement we make and if we ignore this fact and identify only with the objects of value our behaviour becomes disconnected from life itself. By understanding how we assign value and our motives we can follow a thread of truth that reveals the value and relational movement that underpins our reality and the role life essence plays in maintaining balance. Relationality and value is inseparable and is a force of nature that seeks to restore the life equilibrium in any given context, from human relationships to and including our systems, processes and structures. In absolute terms life essence cannot be destroyed but its relational value in terms of our quality of life can be and is diminished. Understanding the importance of relational value empowers us to act intelligently. Ignoring relational value is the blind spot that perpetuates unintelligent action and decision making.

I would like to say a little more about the affect of adopting life essence value as an active participant in our decision making. Life essence is immeasurable, and therefore its value cannot be measured or calculated. For example, on the interpersonal level, when we really care for another person we do not make a calculation to care for them. We use calculation to assess how best we may care for them. The dominance of the calculating human intellect needs to be challenged and subjugated to incalculable life essence value on all levels. Then the intellect will have a more wholesome role as a vehicle of insight and discernment as part of a bigger, more integrated movement that reflects our deep interdependence on each other and the earth. Fostering and nurturing human values to underpin our society would not be so



difficult or so readily sacrificed when faced with the hard choices we need to make in response to our over externalised mechanistic world. This is a way we can invite the intangible essence of what it is to be human to participate and allow immeasurable qualities that give value and meaning to our every day life inform our decision making.

So by including life essence value as part of our concept of valuation we can fundamentally reassess the value equation and establish a fair value exchange. For example what is a fair rate of exchange between a living entity and a dead, albeit useful product? Production so often increases commercial value at the cost of living value creating distortion and imbalance. The effects of this are usually stretched out over time until the underlying natural dynamic of this process seeks to rebalance the distortion and restore equilibrium. Cutting down a live tree and making furniture is said to add value in spite of the loss of value of the living entity. This loss of value is not merely the loss of the physical tree. It is a diminution of the relational life essence that we all feel when in the presence of nature. We need to find ways to respect life essence value in the value equation. This imbalance needs to be redressed if we are to articulate enlightened sustainable policies. For example if the analogy of the tree is taken further we can see that with rebalanced valuation we would not destroy equatorial rainforest wealth in order to produce cheap beef, soya beans and palm oil etc. and the world would have a major carbon sink and an oxygen supply that remains intact.

We see the same inherent valuation imbalance in education and healthcare. So much of education is focussed on imparting facts, knowledge and skills, yet the parallel meaning of education, to bring forth that which is living and innate, is largely ignored. In healthcare, so much attention is given to the disease, the treatment, and the cost, that the living entity, the patient appears incidental and often a victim of the system. These examples would suggest the value of living trees, innate creativity and healthy people is not given adequate weight in our value system. Yet a sustainable environment, creativity enshrined in learning and healthy people are foundational for a flourishing world.

In short, our current systems and processes put us on a divergent path to life. We have been cloning products and consumer goods at the expense of innate life for over a century. "Economy of scale" in production has come to mean how cheaply one can reproduce a product to make a bigger profit. A real economy of scale would be to factor in the balancing loss of relational life essence and innate value that is commensurate with the size of the reproduction process: the more that is reproduced the greater the loss of innate value. This is a reverse pull that is set in motion and eventually emerges as a balancing force. The effect of this can be so strong that it makes the production process unviable to continue in its existing form or the production process itself, self destructs over time as it has no inherent life essence support. The developed world has sought to contain the impact of these balancing forces by diversifying, using cheap labour, exporting the negative effects and letting the environment absorb the cost. This economic model is deeply flawed and unsustainable. If the real cost of relational life essence to production is acknowledged, few businesses at present would come out well. This should be a source of humility rather than the arrogance and usage that presently passes for success.

Changing our thinking on valuation goes to the heart of addressing not only the economic issues but all areas of governance: politics, justice, security, education, healthcare and the environment. It will confront and threaten vested interests and current deeply held beliefs. Yet it is a doorway that will lead us into a deeper understanding of the structure of our human existence and establish new ground of common purpose. Having the honesty and courage to go through this doorway will engender qualities that we will need to succeed in initiating this



endeavour: commitment to truth, humility, humanity, love of nature, participation, cooperation, freedom, justice etc. The present world situation offers us a rare opportunity to alter the relational dynamic of entrenched patterns and integrate living values into the fabric of our processes. Such a commitment will fundamentally change our relationship to the issues and problems that we face and give us strength and clarity of purpose to enact intelligent policy decisions. This is the important, creative, catalytic ingredient: the operational ground from which we need to move and act. There are plenty of innovative ideas emerging. What needs to change is the ground from which we approach these ideas and the qualities we bring to the relationship. Like deep love between two people opens doors and possibilities, similarly a passion and commitment to life makes the unthinkable achievable. Terms like truth, love and care are not often referred to in relation to the practical aspects of world politics or a global economy. Yet these values and others underpin the fabric of civilisation. It is time we allowed them to inspire and inform our decision making at a profound level. We need to act like this relationship to life matters and give it the quality of attention it needs. The revaluing and reordering of our societies will take time. There will be a lot of pain in the readjustment. The truth of life essence and relational value will help unify and sustain us in this transition and translate into enlightened action. At present our way of living is not sustainable and our future hangs in the balance. Deep needed reform of our structures and systems will not take place from our existing vantage point. As pressure on resources increases and existing structures fail to adequately cope, there is also an increasing likelihood that Governments will act precipitously out of desperation with retrograde consequences. Establishing the value of life essence at the heart of our decision making processes changes the whole operational movement allowing for greater insight and understanding to take root and initiate the healthy reforms we need. It will change how we see ourselves and therefore put us in a different relationship to each other and the problems we face.

So to recap – Relationality is the living part of any value relationship and reflects the inherent presence of life essence. Staying connected to life essence ensures balance and participation.

I would now like to give 6 examples of how incorporating life essence value into our thinking could affect policy. These examples illustrate the application of the life essence premise and how this kind of shift in approach could reframe our systems and processes. Remember some of this content was originally written for a United States President so some of it will have a United States bias.

My first example concerns economics and refers directly to the title of this lecture. Life Essence Economics and the New Gold Standard is a proposal to create a new economic model based on life essence principles. Life essence economics makes life essence value the ultimate immeasurable value: the gold standard against which all other value is measured. We cannot have a gold standard value based on the US \$ or gold bullion - that can be measured and accumulated to give more power over different countries and communities without perpetuating discord and imbalance. Life essence value restores order and maintains balance. This is not to say Individuals, organisations and nations will not continue to accumulate differing and unequal amounts of manifest resource value: money, assets, products etc. Yet this value needs to be superseded and not allowed to dominate and irrevocably deplete relational life essence value. Mass production and the depletion of relational life essence is an economic fact that we continue to ignore at our peril. We assume there should be no limits to growth and that imbalances will right themselves without adverse effects. This may be assumed to be true in prevailing current economic theory but woefully inadequate in the real world. Unbridled activity destroys participation and relationship, without which growth begins to lose meaning. Establishing life essence value as the gold standard will introduce a living system and an



integrative financial model that will provide natural restraints to monitor and manage our activity and will allow the release of huge growth opportunities that are balanced and sustainable. By aligning our economic models with natural forces we benefit from the natural abundance readily available.

Life essence economics should not be interpreted to mean putting a high monetary value on natural resources. Adopting life essence economics is a different value equation that incorporates monetary and non monetary, material and spiritual values. For example the hands-on nature of small scale rural economies and their proximity to the life essence will give them a higher intrinsic life essence value than the big industrialised economies. Developing countries will acquire a more valued status on the world stage which will initiate a rebalancing of power between developing and developed nations and provide the relational dynamic to build trust. Funding of these economies will not be tied into supporting old concepts and the unfair and destabilising effects of usury will be re-examined along with reform of the World Bank and its guiding principles. Mass production, technological development and entrepreneurship will continue to be vitally important and these activities should be valued as part of a larger relational framework.

At the end of the American civil war the 14th amendment to the United States Constitution was passed to give equal rights and protection to black people freed from slavery. This amendment was then used to argue that a company has similar rights and the modern corporation was born. The corporate body took on the identity of a person with all the rights and privileges and yet no personal responsibility except a legal mandate to make a profit for the shareholders. The insidiousness of this arrangement affects all our commercial transactions worldwide today. The mandate to make profit is non negotiable and takes precedence over any deleterious effects pursuing this mandate may incur. It is not the corporate entity that is at fault. It is this structure that determines how corporations must conduct themselves that needs to change. It will not be enough to make corporations more accountable and responsible without piercing the fallacy of the basic ethos. Anything less will retain a dead zone at the heart of the economy that will infect and hamper fresh new approaches to growth. People are the ultimate resource. Valuing what is good in people and dismantling structures that undermine this goodness, will change the playing field on which the game is played and release the kind of regenerative energy we need. The present system accords big corporations with far too much power and ultimately they are self serving. Life essence value gives us the framework to win the argument to restructure the Corporate entity, integrate its activity and recalibrate and develop sustainable methods of production and consumption. A first step could be to make the board of directors of a company, institution, or profession jointly liable for the actions they take. This would make the top decision makers directly accountable and result in more thoughtful behaviour. It is ironic that a constitutional amendment originally meant to ensure human freedom, has been used to ultimately enslave human beings and create huge disparity. As long as there has been wealth generation we have been willing to sell our freedom. Wealth is for everyone not just the corporate entity.

A life essence value scale should be created and applied to financial services in a way that measures the number of degrees a financial instrument is removed from an underlying tangible security which in turn is balanced by the effects of that security on life essence. Trading of virtual financial instruments with little underlying security should be isolated from the larger financial sector. We are already seeing such policies being proposed but without the relational framework. There could also be the establishment of a life essence value index that would be quoted on the stock and futures exchanges as a means of measuring the intrinsic value of



companies, commodities and financial products, not just the commercial value. Such measures would begin to redress imbalances in the system and would provide the foundation for the birth of a new life essence economic model that more accurately reflects the truth of the relationality of all things.

My second example illustrating the Life Essence principle and relationality concerns technology and its application. The last two centuries of industrialisation and advances in science have contributed significantly to our development and self identity, which reinforces our belief that we can fix any predicament facing us. Currently the computer is the bridge technology that is catapulting us into a technological age for which we are woefully ill prepared. Understanding and applying a broader concept of valuation can be the parallel human bridge we need for our humanity and life essence to participate in navigating and discerning our future intelligently. As machines begin to make moral judgments on our behalf, human beings need to redefine and establish an overt moral and ethical framework based on human and life essence principles. As we cross the threshold from the industrial age to a technological age we need a human bridge to guide us as to what parts of our legacy we take with us and what parts we best leave behind. Most importantly, people caught up in the detritus of the industrial legacy need support to make this transition, so as not to be excluded. There are no quick fixes for outdated factories, high unemployment and inner city and rural poverty; but as long as monetary value is the primary measure of value in society, we will not begin to redress the imbalances that created these conditions. There will always be inequity in terms of monetary wealth. This inequity needs to be placed in context of the greater wealth of life essence and valued accordingly. In this way life is honoured, nourished and respected in an equitable fashion and charity is not the purview of the powerful to the weak. Millions of people around the globe need this restructuring to give them hope in facing the difficult challenges ahead and to release their creative potential. It is said that all people are equal in the sight of God which is a way of saying it is our humanity that makes us equal. This is our meeting point and the point of change.

My third example is how acknowledging relationality could affect healthcare. The lack of integration of life essence value is most apparent in how we view health. A report in the United States stated that the second career choice of medical school students is investment banking. Not so surprising when money is driving healthcare. The incestuous relationship of the insurance sector, pharmaceutical companies and medical profession is working against the greater good. Advances in medical science have transformed diagnostics, pharmacology and surgery. Yet the cost of introducing these developments into healthcare systems around the world is so prohibitive that most of the world's population will not benefit from these advances. Entrenched medical attitudes and commercial interests work against the use of cost effective public health measures, and preventative, complementary and alternative therapies, even though some of these have been shown to be successful in preventing and treating pandemic infectious diseases and treating life-threatening and debilitating conditions like asthma, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes. It is ironic that in spite of United States sanctions and lack of Russian support, Cuba has a life expectancy figure close to that of the United States. This has largely been achieved through education, preventive healthcare, good organisation and other low cost initiatives. For healthier people in the world, rich or poor, there is a need to radically review the viability of current medical practice. An ethos should be fostered based on a truly patient centred approach that is self empowering, placing greater emphasis on prevention and redefining what is meant by health, cure and treatment. The arrogance of a finance driven, mono medical centred system, objectifies patients and their ailments and ultimately lacks human understanding and care. We are all human and we are all dying and we need to allow the reality of this fact to participate in the process of living fully and in how we view health. Years ago my family doctor said that she comforted herself when going



to bed at night in the knowledge that 85% of her patients would get well on their own accord whether she treated them or not. Her observation illustrates the power of the body to restore balance and right itself, and the role of medicine to help maintain health and assist in the healing process rather than claim the cure.

Acknowledging relationality is also the way to restore health to the world political arena. Yet this will not happen unless a different value based relational dynamic is put in place. So my fourth example focuses on United Nations reform and its link to nuclear disarmament. Radical reform of the United Nations is long overdue. We cannot have a world body held to ransom by the veto power of any one of the five permanent members of the Security Council who also happen to be the five main nuclear powers. Reform of the United Nations and nuclear disarmament are intrinsically linked. The power politics of the twentieth century are outmoded and inadequate. There is no place for any country to have nuclear weapons and their continued underlying presence at the heart of the world body stifles meaningful debate and decision making. Permanent members of the Security Council should take the lead in putting their power and influence on the table in service of far reaching reform. We urgently need an empowered world body that is truly democratic and structured on life essence value and relational principles. Otherwise we will not stop nuclear proliferation; restrain despotic national leaders and governments from flagrantly abusing the human rights of their citizens; cease poisoning our environment; or effectively counter the threat of terrorism. The root cause of terrorism is not religious difference. Terrorism is largely the product of social and economic injustice compounded by a world order that has lost a sense of life essence and relational value. Negative and destructive elements will lessen when this condition is alleviated. The creation of the United States constitution over two hundred years ago was a remarkable achievement, born out of a passion and dedication to create the best that was possible for the people of that time and circumstance. We require a similar endeavour today to create a world body that is truly for the people of the world and where the nation state is in service of the people. Correct valuation and creating the right relational dynamic will bring about this change and have far reaching consequences for how we govern ourselves and manage our resources. New possibilities will begin to emerge in addressing intractable problems and minimising their destabilising effects.

And so this brings me to the role of the religions and their failure to acknowledge relationality. All the religions of the world recognise the sanctity of life and offer a language and means of honouring this in differing ways. Unfortunately the religious organisations have been deeply committed to their own self perpetuation and the need to exercise control, and are as entrenched and invested in the trappings of power and domination as other areas of society. This has severely tainted their ability to be true advocates of the spirit and of life essence. The vast majority of the world's people ascribe to some form of religious belief and practice and the religions have a role to play in helping individuals find their place as part of the spiritual and human bridge to the future. This will not happen if they insist on proselytising and clinging to their own particular brand of spirituality above all others. Religious doctrine and belief could and should be an enabler of understanding life essence principles more deeply, not a hindrance.

And so my last example of inherent relationality is to recognise - nature is our life support. Nature is the ultimate resource upon which we all depend. The earth's capacity to absorb unbalanced and depleting human activity is truly remarkable. We could not have developed without this gift. With our development has come greater awareness and consciousness of our place in the natural order. With this consciousness comes greater responsibility. We are at a threshold in our development cycle and we now have the conscious capacity to make informed choices. What makes this point in history different from previous development cycles is our consciousness and the earth's incapacity to absorb more unconscious, irresponsible, depleting



behaviour. We need to allow the earth to regenerate and do what she does best by supporting us. It is not adequate to keep using compromised outmoded forms of behaviour that lead to compromised responses to the earth's welfare and ultimately our own welfare. By articulating the value of life essence in relation to our constructs and processes we have the conceptual framework and tools to engage the challenges that face us with innovative short time frame responses to make a real impact in restoring balance. An example is the debate on setting targets to cut carbon emissions. It is a known fact that a high proportion of carbon emissions come from equatorial rainforest destruction. Why is it so difficult for us to just stop cutting down the trees? It would seem like a no brainer. Yet we do not seem to have the relational framework and tools to enter into such a negotiation. The failure to take substantial action at the United Nations conference on climate change held in Copenhagen in 2009 is a disturbing example of just how inadequate is our negotiating framework.

In 2006 a proposal was put to British Prime Minister Tony Blair that Brazil could be encouraged to lease its rain forest to the world for a sum of money that would make it economically counter productive for Brazil not to keep the rain forest in pristine condition, thus dramatically cutting carbon emissions and securing 20% of the world's oxygen supply. The President of Guiana has put a similar proposal to the British Government to enable him to reject ever increasing pressure to cut down Guiana's forests. Implementing such ideas and proposals may not be simple, but they can quickly become a reality if the relational ground from which governments operate is changed.

So to conclude - relationality reveals the presence of life essence in all things. Ignoring this relationality is ultimately destructive. Embracing the truth of relationality changes us. This is the vital change agent that will allow us to value and relate differently, and let relational life essence value be the guiding principle in our thinking and decision making in creating a new world order. I seek to neither glorify small scale rural economies nor negate the value of industrial, technological development and production. I merely propose that all activity needs to be valued and informed by life essence principles and suitable frameworks put in place that supports the interdependent relational nature of our activities. Doing so will give us the conceptual framework to dismantle outmoded systems and structures and replace them with the life enhancing architecture we need to move forward and the environment will flourish and support us.

Establishing life essence economics with life essence as the gold standard will release our human potential and create an unparalleled vibrant economy. The joy of health and learning will be our human right and our world leaders will be able to sit together and work for the deeper good. Is all this an impossible dream? Are we so heavily invested in being unintelligent that we cannot respond to the imperative facing us? Making relational value a priority is a doorway to a new dimension that can make this dream a reality. These ideas may seem extreme, impractical or unrealistic. They need to be researched and examined as to their viability and how they can be implemented in ways that do not create excessive disruption. Yet these ideas are emerging precisely because our circumstance is extreme and our systems and processes increasingly impractical and unrealistic. We can wait until our current structures self destruct or we can engage and take responsibility for change. For those who wish to seriously engage, is there a practical alternative? The inclination will be to continue to try to balance and calibrate existing dynamics in the hope that in time this will address key issues. The evidence does not support this view and seems more motivated by postponement and avoidance rather than a real vision that embraces a positive future. We have a deep fear of uncertainty and a continuing need to believe we control our circumstance, coupled with a gut instinct that knows we are not in control. This leads to distorted behaviour and outcomes and drives much of what we do. Embracing life



essence as a core value humanises us and addresses this fear without neutralising our creative potential. To reiterate: this is the change agent out of which balanced behaviour and outcomes will emerge. The offer is to profoundly claim our humanity and live more fully.

When Barack Obama was running for President his campaign slogan was a quote by Mahatma Gandhi whose birthday just happens to be this very day October 2nd – he said – ‘Be the change that you want to see in the world’.

I hope that what I have shared today gives us a doorway into understanding how we may embrace such change.

Thank you

(Text of Bleddfa Annual Lecture given by Simon Davison in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Bleddfa on October 2nd 2010)