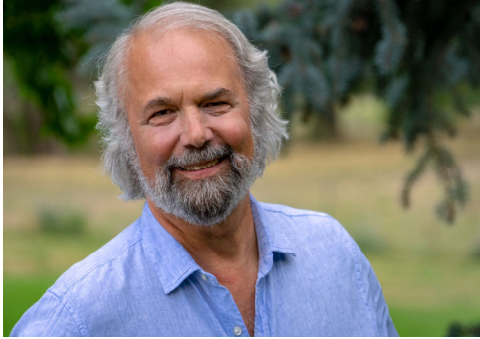


SPIRITUAL POLYPHONY

PULSE OF SPIRIT
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DAVID KARCHERE is a speaker and workshop leader who assists people to renew their Primal Spirituality—an experience that virtually all human beings know at birth, and that ideally grows as they mature.

So how about those Nuggets? In case you don't follow American basketball, the Nuggets are the team from Denver, Colorado, and they just won the American pro-basketball finals. Living in Colorado, it's a happy occasion for me and for friends.

At its best, basketball is an awesome game. The top two players on the Nuggets are remarkably in sync, setting up plays together and passing off to one another.

There is another team, the Golden State Warriors, who reach unparalleled levels of team play. Their star player, Steph Curry, is considered the best shooter who ever played the game. But more than anything, the Warriors are known for their passing, and their team play.

Sometimes, people call an extraordinary level of awareness in human activity a *flow state* or being *in the zone*. Bill Russell, one of the greatest basketball players of all time, described it this way:

Every so often a Celtics game would heat up so that it became more than a physical or even mental game, and would be magical. That feeling is difficult to describe, and I certainly never talked about it when I was playing. When it happened, I could feel my play rise to a new level. It came rarely, and would last anywhere from five minutes to a whole quarter, or more. Three or four plays were not enough to get it going. It would surround me and the other team, and even the referees. At that special level, all sorts of odd things happened: The game would be in the white heat of competition, and yet somehow I wouldn't feel competitive, which is a miracle in itself. I'd be putting out the maximum effort, straining, coughing up parts of my lungs as we ran, and yet I never felt the pain. The game would move so quickly that every fake, cut, and pass would be surprising, and yet nothing could surprise me. It was almost as if we were playing in slow motion. During those spells, I could almost sense how the next play would develop and where the next shot would be taken. Even before the other team brought the ball inbounds, I could feel it so

keenly that I'd want to shout to my teammates, "It's coming there!"—except that I knew everything would change if I did. My premonitions would be consistently correct, and I always felt then that I not only knew all the Celtics by heart but also all the opposing players, and that they all knew me. There have been many times in my career when I felt moved or joyful, but these were the moments when I had chills pulsing up and down my spine.

On the five or ten occasions when the game ended at that special level, I literally did not care who had won. If we lost, I'd still be as free and high as a sky hawk.

Flow states shared by a team bring synergy among people. But individuals can experience extraordinary levels of awareness. My friend, Keahi Ewa, has performed the traditional Hawaiian dance form, hula, since childhood. She reports times when she felt herself being danced by a reality that is higher than her usual state of consciousness. In having that experience, she offers the opportunity to people who watch her dance to share it.

I've led Healing Chant around the world. It has been a great pleasure to see how open people are to the experience. Their first approach is usually an attempt to chant as if they were performing. They are trying to make it sound good to themselves and others. They are *trying to chant*, usually with a lot of openness, and even gusto.

What I know is that there is a threshold for them to pass through to experience a flow state as they chant. So, I make the distinction that singing is a performance, but chant is an experience. And I encourage them to reach a point where they are not chanting the music; the music is chanting them.

I had this experience vividly myself. I was chanting in the Little Chapel at Sunrise Ranch, a small building made in the early 1950s from the stone found on our property. It is incredible how many people can fit into that small building.

On this occasion, there were only five of us. It so happened that we were individuals who had been chanting together for years, and each of us had a musical background.

The simplest way to chant is in unison. Someone begins the chant on a note, and everyone else joins them on that same note, breathing when they need to. It is simple. But if people allow it to be so, it is profound. The tone deepens and deepens.

Another step to take in chant is to create harmony, born out of the fundamental tone initiated. The people chanting create a musical chord, with new tones within the chord emphasized as individuals renew their breath and re-enter the chant. New colors of sound burst forth, painting an ecstatic picture that reaches the heavens. Musically, this is called *homophony*.

On that day, the five of us entered another experience. It began with unison that blossomed into a rich chord. But then there was something else. One person began singing a melody. There was an answering melody by another. And then, another and another, until we wove an intricate fabric of melodies, each unique yet dynamically related to the original tone, to the harmonic structure we had created, and to each other.

There were melodies and counter melodies. Musically, it is called *polyphony*—originally from Greek, meaning “many sounds.” It was thrilling to answer each other musically.

We were in the zone, entering a flow state. Afterward, we compared notes. For each of us, the music was chanting us. We were, at the same time, vitally involved in each note sung and distinctly aware that a higher intelligence was orchestrating the experience. And we were knowing that intelligence as our own. *Ecstasy!*

People experience flow states irrespective of age, gender, or race. These experiences involve a loss of self-consciousness when the person is completely absorbed in an activity, whether primarily physical or mental. A person may be open to the experience of flow when there is full engagement in an activity they see as voluntary.

Psychologists call the experience of flow the *secret to happiness*, an experience of *immense joy that makes a life worth living*.

These monumental experiences tell us something about what all life is about. Exceptional experiences may become vivid and intense, particularly if we share them with others. Yet those experiences show us what is possible. They give a vision of something we can integrate into all our life.

Often a group of people doesn't even get in the space to begin that work. Personality concerns can dominate, and people can become so reactive to each other that they are not harmonizing. They don't hear the fundamental tone that is sounding among them. They have lost sight of the reason they are together. They have forgotten who they are as a group of people. And they are not listening to the tone of their togetherness. They haven't found their *one voice*—their unison tone. So, they are not finding a harmonious way of creating together and are certainly not ready for polyphony. They are unprepared to learn how their powerful, unique expressions contrast and ultimately complement each other.

One person gets on their soapbox about their pet issue. Others are in a standoff over something they disagree about. The lack of understanding between people can make it impossible for them even to begin to enter a flow state together.

Many years ago, when I became the spiritual director for the Emissaries globally, I was criticized for not being inspirational enough. It was at a time of discord in our community, and I remember wondering, *Can we just get into a space where we are tuning in to the spiritual urge that brought us together in the first place? Can we tone down the egoic individuality that keeps us separate so we can begin to sense each other in the space?* Without that, how would I, or anyone else, inspire an ecstatic flow state?

If we are open to it, we can find our one voice—our unison. Then we can begin to harmonize. In that context, we begin to notice how different we all are. Embracing our own uniqueness and appreciating the uniqueness of others, we begin to explore how we complement each other. We become interested in how vigorous independent action can add a vital element that weaves the fabric of community. *Polyphony!*

Everyday existence might not seem as extraordinarily ecstatic as Bill Russell's experiences or as the flow state any of us might have experienced at some point in our life. But what if those high points that we have witnessed, heard about, or experienced ourselves, were meant to inspire us to know a state or flow with other people from day to day? For that to happen, we have to be willing to begin at the beginning, gradually building the pattern that can lead to that ecstasy.

It can't happen if people are playing sour notes that don't harmonize with the fundamental reason we are together or with other players in the community. I learned about this as a boy of ten

years old. I played cello in a summer school orchestra, and it bothered me that I couldn't hear my instrument or how it contributed to the piece we were playing. And so, I did something nutty. I decided to saw away with my bow on the strings of the cello without following the music. I wanted to see what would happen.

The conductor noticed; he scolded me appropriately. But in the process, I realized that my playing mattered to the orchestra.

A community of people can be like that. People can attempt to establish their own significance and independence by the sour notes they play. And while they might learn something from it, sour notes don't bring harmony, and they don't create a flow state.

Physicist David Bohm described a deeper and more fundamental order of reality, naming it the *implicate order*. This is what we touch in a flow state. We experience ourselves as part of the implicate order, and our consciousness is nothing other than the consciousness of this deeper intelligence expressing itself as a human being. This experience is the deeper knowing of polyphony, to which we are called.

Shall we know ourselves as part of the implicate order? Shall we experience the one voice we share in common? And having done so, move to the wonders of harmonious expression? And from there to a glorious polyphony?

Let's enter a flow state together.

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