

For George Leonard,

on the occasion of his retirement ceremony as President, Esalen Institute

What an extraordinary honor to live in a time and place that produced a George Leonard, and even better, to know a George Leonard directly—why, *this* George Leonard, for example!

I know as Boomers we are often charged with being a little bit full of ourselves, yet it is not ourselves but our times that we are full of, extraordinary times that have engorged us, blown our minds, shattered our paradigms, stretched our souls, opening even to infinity and beyond. During the last four decades, there were new openings created in the Kosmos, openings through which so much Truth and Goodness and Beauty have come pouring, openings for which I am so deeply grateful. And George Leonard, fearless warrior if ever there was one, has always been among the first pioneers in making those clearings, and heroically holding open those doors, for so many of us to follow.

And now, here he is, eight decades into a life lived with grace, courage, dignity, ferociousness, loving kindness, and uncompromising integrity—lotus heart, steel spine, fluid energy, fierce love.

It's hard for me to know what of his life and his being I admire most. Surely any of his dozen books would be a good start, all of them works of surpassing merit, several works of sheer genius, all of them still about a century ahead of their time, alas. I grew up on those books.

Maybe it's his 5th degree black belt in Aikido, a discipline he didn't even start until he was almost 50 years old—although five decades for George means just getting warmed up. Perhaps it's Leonard Energy Training. Maybe Tamalpais Aikido. Or giving name to the Human Potential Movement, the single most important movement of the twentieth century.

Well, all of those. But if forced to choose, I would narrow it down to cofounder of Integral Transformative Practice, and President of Esalen Institute. All of those gained a fierce spark that one evening, four decades or so ago, in George's house on California Street, where an up-all-night, raging, laser insane dialogue between Mike and George, two spirit-graced warriors of Eros, would literally rip the universe open just a little at its edge, create a catalytic crack in the Kosmic egg—it really happened that night!—an opening through which so much of the Human Potential Movement would start to realize its own potential, a shot from the heart heard round the world that left stupidity in smoking ruins and replaced it with a brilliant light that four decades later is still blazing brighter every day. For the record, it was February 2, 1965, in George's house on California Street, and, for the record, I was in the tenth grade that year, yet shortly thereafter would fly through that just-ripped-open Kosmic space and awaken to the call of my own deeper and higher potential, while the rest of the world was dragging its grey and boring and bloated belly across the wasted flatland of conventionality. Whatever happens in the future, please don't let us ever forget that evening, when a kairos, a sacred moment, was inserted into the secular stream of historical time, dull and dreary and eventless otherwise.

And as for Esalen, where would any of us be without it? I don't believe I would exist without Esalen. That is, I don't think somebody called Ken Wilber could exist without the clearing created by the vital forces at Esalen, where literally millions of souls from around the world gathered their collective life force and whatever higher consciousness they had and together pushed through the density of the existing world to create an opening in which higher, wider, deeper truths could emerge, and flourish, and grow and touch and bless and exalt us all. What Esalen was doing allowed a young kid washing dishes in Lincoln, Nebraska, to see the light at the end of the tunnel, and know that he was not alone, know that others were working hard in the same direction, a collective gathering of intimations of the supermind, dipping down to embrace us all, eventually to lift us up into an infinity of our own release, a Godhead of our making, a Spirit of the highest in all of us, come down to earth on this blessed spot of land said to be situated at Big Sur overlooking the Pacific, but actually located at the edge of evolution, overlooking infinity.

If you have ever sat in one of its natural hot tubs, hanging in nothingness, mixing your mind with the sky, allowing the self to uncoil in the vast expanse of all space, you will know exactly what I mean, and know exactly where Esalen resides: here in the great Unborn of your ever-present Heart as it rushes exuberantly into the stream of its own manifestation, right there on the horizon of its own evolutionary dawn, the supermind come knocking on this blessed spot of land, because it knew there were those who would listen. This is what Esalen was, and is, and always will be, I honestly believe.

The last forty years have been the rough-and-ready leading edge, the breakthrough insights, pioneering experiments in the laboratories of our own souls,

recipes for exaltation cut with collapses and disasters, a smorgasbord of the highest and lowest and greatest in all of us. Out of that extraordinary experiment in depth is now coming a second turning of the wheel, where in addition to the wonderfully wild and eclectic openness, more focused efforts are also finding room to make their contributions, foremost among which is surely Integral Transformative Practice, a spiritual cross-training that finds room for all the practices pioneered at Esalen, but simply adding an extra ingredient called time, as in, practice takes time. Typically, George took this up consciously when he was in his late sixties—in part because he didn't co-invent ITP until then, but also, of course, being George, sixty-five was a nice middle age to start something new.

Whatever comes from all of these glimmering glimpses and tantalizing tastes of the all-pervading supermind come knocking ever-increasingly on our door, I know at least one thing for sure: this dishwasher from Lincoln owes so much to the man from *Look*—that intrepid pioneer, unblinking warrior, gentleman scholar, loving friend, enlightened soul, graceful being. He's what all of us want to be when we grow up. And if any of us continue to grow at all, it will be because, and only because, of those extraordinary openings in the Kosmos that George Leonard had a hand in creating.

I love you, George. Please take care of yourself, there is still so much more work to do, and it just won't get done without you....

Ken Wilber

November 6, 2004