

Interview: “Wholeness & the Environmental Crisis”—Jeffrey Kiehl, Ph.D., with Bonnie Bright



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BB Hello, everyone, and welcome to Depth Insights where we take a depth psychological look at news and events that are going on in your world. My name is Bonnie Bright and I'm here today with my guest Jeff Kiehl, who is a longtime climate scientist—close to 40 years now—and also a Jungian analyst. And Jeff is going to presenting at the C.G. Jung Psychology and Spirituality Conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico, which takes places June 9th through the 16th of 2017. Welcome, Jeff, thanks so much for spending some time with me.

JK Thank you, Bonnie. It's great to be here.

BB I'm really happy to have you with me. Of course, we have a lot of very similar interests, but I just consistently am amazed at the combination of careers that you have put together being both a climate scientist for a long time, which is a very different kind of approach to being a Jungian analyst, which allows you to come at the problem and issues from a very different side of things. Yeah, it's kind of a remarkable and very impressive career that you have. I'd love to talk to you a little bit more as we get into it about how that particularly combination of careers affects all of what you do. Great.

So meanwhile I wanted to share a little bit about the conference because this is a really exciting opportunity. It's not something that has been done in the US necessarily in the past. It's happening this year, of course, in Santa Fe, and you're going to be presenting there as I mentioned and, of course, you'll be talking about this exact topic, which is climate science and in fact, the title...you can probably say it better than me...but the title of your talk is “Reclaiming a Sense of Fullness Amidst Our Current Environmental Crisis,” and you'll be presenting both a morning and an afternoon, so you have a pretty significant chunk of time.

JK Well, yeah, I'm really excited about it. The theme of this conference is really about reconnecting to our sense of wholeness and it's a topic that I'd been looking at and

working on for many years now, especially as how that relates to our connection to nature or the environment around us.

BB Absolutely, this is such powerful work. And I will say overall, the title of the conference is “Nature and Soul - Cultivating a Partnership with the Wholeness of All,” which is what you just alluded to. And then, the conference itself provides an opportunity to explore the integration of Jungian Psychology and spirituality, of course, by means of in-depth lectures by Jungian Analysts, also through creative expression, rituals, and though excursions.

And I know that some of the activities that will be going on there and I'm sure you're highly aware of this as well, is they'll do things like dream tending circles, talking circles, be sharing all of the meals together. Participants will be able to take nature walks and again, we'll have some rituals, some opportunities for socializing and networking, and then there will be excursions that actually take participants into both the history of the area with some of the ancestral that are around, and also some of the artistic communities in Santa Fe which are really quite exciting and very interesting to visit as well.

JK Yeah. I think one of the unique aspects of this workshop is, the whole week is going to be an arc across our sense of wholeness not just as a community but in relationship to the land and the history of the place of Santa Fe, anyone who's been to that area knows that's a very magical land that has an effect on one when you're present in the Santa Fe surroundings, so I'm really looking forward to not just presenting my material but all of the presenters are going to be there throughout the week interacting and creating the sense of community around the theme of wholeness and nature.

BB Yes. For me, it just sounds like it's going to be going beyond the regular conference; not just lectures where you show up and take notes, and then kind of disappear for the evening or whatever it is. Really it's like an amazing experience of being able to bring a community together and develop relationships and really not just relationships with the people that are attending, but also relationships with the land, with the history...

JK And there's a great line-up of speakers, lecturers for the week.

BB Absolutely. In fact, Jerome Bernstein, who many people who are watching this will be familiar with his work. He's just such an amazing, incredible thinker and writer, particularly on the topic of the nature-psyche connection. Also, Tom Elsner, Sandra Easter, Monika Wikman and John Todd and Puddi Kullberg—so that's very exciting. I know that there will be probably some other recognizable names and attendees who are there because they are able and wanting to attend and to be part of this particular topic which is so powerful.

So, let's get into that a little bit. It'd be really great to hear a bit about what you're going to be presenting. Maybe you can give us an outline and some highlights to tease us a little bit. Before we do that, Jeff, actually I'd love to read your bio so that we have that here for those who aren't as familiar with your work. So, I'll do that now:

Jeffrey Kiehl is a diplomat and Jungian analyst in Santa Cruz, California. He's also an adjunct professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz and a senior climate scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research. He holds a master's degree in psychology and is a senior training analyst at the CG Jung Institute of Colorado and

the Inter-Regional Society of Jungian Analysts. He is the author of the recently published book, *Facing Climate Change: An Integrated Path to the Future*, which provides a Jungian phenomenological perspective on climate change. Originally trained as a PhD climate scientist, Jeffrey returned to school to get an MA in psychology from Regis University. He completed his analyst training with the Interregional Society of Jungian Analyst and is a senior diplomat analyst at the C. G. Jung Institute of Colorado, the Interregional Society of Jungian Analysts, and the International Association of Analytical Psychology. And Jeffery has given workshops and lectures on Jungian topics around the United States including teaching a workshop at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, of course.

So, Jeff, I know you probably have to sit through the reading of this on the pretty regular basis. I know you've been doing a lot of interviews and you've always been so accessible and willing to talk about your work, which again I just believe is so absolutely important. And for me, of course, having that deep psychological approach or Jungian perspective on things is really such a critical piece of it. I just don't see how we can possibly talk about the climate crisis without looking at it from that perspective and you do that so beautifully. Maybe, you can start off by just sharing a little bit about how your work both as a climate scientist and as a Jungian analyst converge when you begin to address this material.

JK

Yeah, well, I think it goes back to sort of how it converged with me personally with my life. Working as a climate scientist one becomes extremely and acutely aware of what we are doing to the planet and the implications of what's happening not just now, but especially what's going to unfold in the future if we continue on this path of burning fossil fuels. And as you said the depths psychological lands provides a really unique perspective on that issue.

Traditionally, this problem has been approached through looking at it as an economic problem, as an energy resource problem, as a technological problem. All of those are important but when it really comes down to the most fundamental causes of why we're mistreating this planet, it has to do with psyche. This goes back to Jung's statement around the world hangs by a thin thread and that thin thread is the psyche of Man, so unless we understand psyche we really are not going to understand the cause of our disconnection from the natural world, and our mistreatment of the natural world.

So for me, the combination of being a scientist that looks at the facts and the physics of what's happening in the world, the science of that issue merging that or marrying that with an exploration of psyche and the depths of psyche, provide me with a way of seeing this problem in a very different way than the traditional, technological, purely scientific, purely rational approach to the problem. So what's interested me is how do I bring that understanding out into the world. How can we bring depth psychology into the conversation, that's constantly going on around the degradation of the environment.

And ultimately, from not just my perspective but many people's perspective, this does go back to this central theme of wholeness. Jung felt very strongly that, when we lose that sense of wholeness, we lose our direct connection to the numinosity of the world around us, the sacredness of the world around us. So what I'll be working on in this conference...In the morning, we're going to explore how we started out with that deep sense of numinous and the sacred in western society and how we lost that sense of connection and sacredness. And how, through Jungian perspective, we can reconnect to

that sense of numinosity.

Jung made the statement that, an exploration of the unconscious provides us with the *via regia* to the *unus mundus*, the royal road to the *unus mundus* or “one world.” And the two areas that I really want us to explore during the day I'll be teaching are the two concepts: *unus mundus* and *anima mundi*, the one world and the soul of the world or the world's soul. I think it's essential that we rediscover our personal connection to those two concepts. Not just experience, and not just cognitively think about them. And so the second part of the day that I'll be teaching will be around experiential work that will drop us down into that experience of the *unus mundus*.

BB That's powerful stuff! And again, that brings me back to why I'm thinking about this conference is not just a conference because it will, I think, provide a container in which we can sort of immerse ourselves as participants to be able to actually drop into that deep mystery you're talking about. And you know what's interesting is we all have access to that all the time. Of course, we do. It exists, right? The numinous is there. But the problem is that we are not accessing it on a regular basis, most of us.

And it's really easy not to be in that space, because we get busy, and we have things going on, and we have that whole rational part of our brains that you mentioned that is kind of sidetracking us from that experience of wonder and awe that is just going on all the time.

And it's really, actually kind of frightening when you start to think about some of the symptoms that we're seeing in the world that have emerged because of our lack of focus, or lack of awareness, or a lack of relationship with that numinous, or that sense of wonder that you're alluding to. Can you talk a little bit about how you feel that we can begin to address that? And I know that you have an exercise prepared for the participants as you just described that whole experiential piece of things. But on a daily basis, as we go about our lives, what kinds of things might we be looking for that could actually change and provide transformation for us?

JK Well, I think that it's very much doable, that we can in any moment reconnect to that deeper sense of numinosity and sacredness that surrounds us. I personally believe that it's always there. It's always present. We just need to remember to connect to it. And so how do we remember that connection? The first step is to slow down. We are so caught up with speed and multitasking and doing so many things so quickly. But it's in that state of-- if we're in that state of mind, it's very hard to connect to that sense of the numinous that slips around us. So this is where the body comes into play because we are embodied beings, we are grounded and surrounded by this felt-sense world. And so, taking the time to slow down and to just experience our breath is, I think, one of the first things that we can do.

You can do it anywhere at any time...Standing in a line at a grocery store. You don't have to be out in some beautiful scene of nature to drop into this state of a sacredness. And so, the very first step is remembering that you can take time to slow down and to feel your breath, focusing on your breath. And then, in that state of slowing down, it's really focusing your gaze on a particular object so that you're not-- if you actually take time to

think about, reflect on how often your vision is moving from one object to another object. It's just like the internal clock —speedy clock—the eyes are following them, as well.

And so to take just a single object or person and to place your gaze upon that object or person while you're slowing down in your breath, that's the second step of engaging with the numinosity that surrounds us.

And then the third step is dropping one's concepts, the labeling. We're constantly labeling what we look at. We're putting all sorts of conceptual material around whatever we're looking at. So to the extent that we can just open ourselves up—open our awareness up to whatever is presenting itself to us—that's the third step in beginning to see the sacredness that's before us.

And a lot of this has also to do with our heart—opening our heart up. We tend to be closed off often because we're protecting ourselves from the world around us. I think this has become more so in the last year or so because of all of the things that are going on in the world. And so how do you put yourself in a more vulnerable state where you're actually willing to open up your heart in the moment to whatever is presenting itself to you? That's the fourth and perhaps more difficult state, which is to really place yourself in a state of vulnerability. And it's in that state of vulnerability that you really open up. Your body opens up, your senses open up, your mind is dropping a conceptual thought. And in that moment, you're experiencing the numinous, the sacred.

BB

Absolutely. It makes so much sense and I think that you're right. That last step, the opening of the heart and then allowing oneself to be vulnerable is often where the process sort of stops short. And so, it's so important to do those other steps that you mentioned first. I think that those-- it is a pathway as you just mentioned. It's a way of, if you put one foot in front of the other and do each of those things, I think that that last piece does tend to happen kind of more naturally.

And it also happens, by the way, in my experience, in community. So it's really nice to be surrounded with other people who are also desiring and intending the same kind of outcome and experience, and that's very helpful. So, again, that just kind of takes me back to the idea of the conference and I'm just-- I can see that it has been specifically designed actually to kind of play to each one of those things that you just mentioned. And I don't think that you were involved in the design of it.

JK No I was not...(laughter)

BB And yet, I see that, because it intentionally allows people to come together, to spend time together, to slow down, to be in that container, to spend time in nature, to be exposed to the arts, and to history, and to get to the ancestors, and all of those pieces that are so critically important. And it is critical.

I'm wondering what you—how you would rate—and this kind of comes back to the judging, which you just said not to do. But it just seems really critical to me that some of us start taking action now around these things because I'm thinking about something that Thomas Berry said, who was a tremendous theologian and geologist. He did say that his biggest concern, particularly in his later years right before he passed away a few years ago, was that he was witnessing, and thinks that maybe we are witnessing the death of birth.

In other words, he was saying that there are these cycles of death and rebirth that are

very archetypal and natural and may go on all the time in nature and in the world and it's a part of life and the cosmos. But because of the human factor, how we have inserted *ourselves* into the cycle of things, we are actually creating such a huge difference that it may break the cycle itself, so that rebirth no longer— I mean, that's kind of a dire way to look at it, and we may look at it symbolically, and not too literally, I guess. But it just seems like if we don't make some kind of a change at this point that we really are risking a pretty profound transformation of our world and our species, and all the other species are out there as well.

JK Yes, that's I think that's true, that we are distracting ourselves from transformation. For my perspective that's really what we're doing with much of the things that we create now is we're trying to stay away from....I think he [Berry] called it the Great Turning...that we have to go through this transformation of consciousness to step into the new world which is recognition of the soul of the world, and unfortunately we're creating so many things to distract us from that work that it's putting us in peril.

One symptom of that is climate change. Now, but there are many symptoms of awaiting the work to enter the transformation. So this workshop, I mean the purpose of this workshop, I view it as it's to create a container, a *temenos*, a sacred space where those that come can continue to do the work.

You know one of the fundamentally important aspects of Jung's view of psyche is there's a collective unconscious that connects all beings together. So to the extent that individuals, alone or in small groups, are doing the work through the collective unconscious, that work is connected. It propagates through the cosmos. And however fantastical that seems, I believe that that's how we are connected. That is the— Jung had this idea of cosmic affinities—and that's a manifestation of cosmic affinity, that the group down in Santa Fe in June is going to be doing work for the group, but they're going to be doing work for the cosmos.

BB I absolutely agree 2000%. Wonderful. Yeah. Well, thank you so much, Jeff, for spending some time with me today. I've been speaking with Jeff Kiehl, who is the author of *Facing Climate Change*, who is a climate scientist and also a Jungian analyst. And of course, we've been discussing his upcoming presentation at the C. G. Jung Psychology and Spirituality Conference, which takes place June 9th through the 16th, 2017, in Santa Fe.

And you can find out more about that conference at jungconference.org. You can probably also google that and just **google the “Jung Psychology and Spirituality Conference Santa Fe.”** And of course, you can find out more about Jeff on his website which is jtkiehl.com. Thanks for spending some time with me today, Jeff.

JK Thank you, Bonnie. It's always great to have a conversation with you.

Get Details or Register for the Conference at www.jungconference.org

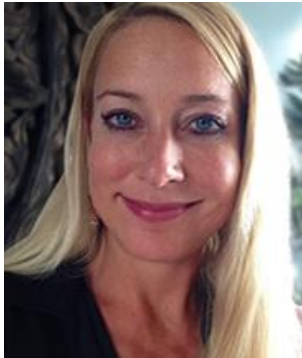
Learn more about Dr. Jeffrey Kiehl at www.JTKiehl.com

Find more interviews from Bonnie Bright at <http://www.depthinsights.com/pages/radio.htm>



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Colorado, the Inter-Regional Society of Jungian Analysts and the International Association of Analytical Psychology. Jeffrey has given workshops and lectures on Jungian topics around the United States, including teaching a workshop at Esalen Institute.



Bonnie Bright, Ph.D., earned her doctorate in Depth Psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute. She is the founder of [Depth Psychology Alliance](#), an online community for everyone interested in Jungian and depth psychologies, and of [DepthPsychologyList.com](#), a free-to-search database of Jungian and depth psychology-oriented practitioners. She is also the creator and executive editor of [Depth Insights](#), a semi-annual scholarly journal, and regularly produces audio and video interviews on depth psychological topics. Bonnie has completed 2-year certifications in Archetypal Pattern Analysis via the Assisi Institute; in Indigenous African Spiritual Technologies with West African elder Malidoma Somé; and she has trained extensively in Holotropic Breathwork™ and the Enneagram.