

RIFS-Blogpost

Datum:

Autor*innen:

Projekt:

AMA Convergence 2024 - Societal Transformation as a Spiritual Practice



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Zitation: [Voggenreiter, Valerine;...] (2024): AMA Convergence 2024 - Societal Transformation as a Spiritual Practice – RIFS-Blogpost, 30.10.2024.

<https://www.rifs-potsdam.de/en/blog/2024/10/ama-convergence-2024-societal-transformation-spiritual-practice>





The motto of the AMA Convergence 2024 in Potsdam was “Social change as spiritual practice”.

1.1 By Moana Pfleiderer and Valerie Voggenreiter

For over a decade, the project A Mindset for the Anthropocene (AMA) has been a space for collaborative research, personal growth, and community engagement, blending the transformative potential of inner work with the need for societal change. This mission was further deepened at the 2024 AMA Convergence in Potsdam, Germany, titled Societal Transformation as Spiritual Practice.

This four-day Gathering in late summer 2024, aimed to create a shared journey of discovery, reflection, and action, with an emphasis on cultivating a mindset that can help navigate the complex sustainability-related challenges of our times. AMA strives to cross-fertilize the fields of knowing, doing, and being—integrating science, practice, and reflection. At the heart of the AMA community’s vision is the wish to enable trustful and resonant relationships between individuals, communities, and disciplines as a foundation for more connected and integrated approaches to societal transformation.

Set on the peaceful campus of the Research Institute for Sustainability (RIFS), the 2024 AMA Convergence brought together around 50 participants from diverse fields—science, civil society, the public sector, business, spirituality and the arts. Attendees from the USA, China, India, Brazil, Bolivia, Uganda, and across Europe came together to reflect on the intersection of spiritual practice and societal transformation, and how this convergence can inform their daily lives, both personally and professionally.

The gathering was more than just a series of discussions; it was an immersive experience where participants engaged in practices that encouraged them to live out transformation in real-time. As Thomas Bruhn, one of the facilitators, remarked, “We will be creating a playing field together.” This open invitation to co-create the event laid the foundation for a gathering where participants could show up fully, both intellectually and emotionally.

Day 1 was dedicated to reconnecting with the space and with each other, allowing participants to settle into the rhythm of the gathering. The atmosphere was informal yet deeply meaningful, offering opportunities for personal sharing and collective reflection. From a Chinese tea ceremony led by Man Fang to dancing and playing games, the Open Playground created space for unstructured and spontaneous connections, fostering a sense of trust and community.

1.2 Tension and integration: navigating complexity

The second day, titled “Stories of Tension and Integration,” invited participants to explore the balance between personal transformation and collective societal challenges. A series of workshops offered diverse experiences, from improvisational theatre focused on constructive collaboration to a heart-opening cacao ceremony and a Bohm Dialogue. These sessions highlighted the tension between individual growth and the complexities of the larger world.

As the group reconvened, a palpable tension filled the room. Some participants returned energized and inspired, while others expressed feelings of frustration. This divergence of experience reflected the complexity of societal transformation—where different perspectives can coexist, even when they cause discomfort. The shared realization was that transformation does not follow a straightforward path. Instead, it involves holding space for



contradictions and challenges, creating a field where complexity can be embraced rather than resolved.

Social change as a spiritual practice requires us to adapt to the unpredictability of life with openness and presence.

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Keynote speakers such as Ioan Fazey, Violeta Bulc, and Mark Lawrence contributed to this dialogue, discussing the friction between personal meaning-making and the global quest for sustainability. These discussions underscored the importance of both individual courage and collective action in navigating turbulent times. Although many questions remained unanswered, the ongoing conversations throughout the day reinforced that transformation is an unfolding process, often raising more questions than providing clear solutions.

Embracing crisis and resilience

On the third day, the theme of crisis entered the space in an unexpected way. During the morning session, participants were startled by the sudden blaring of an emergency alarm from 45 phones—a test of the national warning system that symbolized the unpredictability of life. The abrupt shift in energy sparked intense emotions of all kinds and prompted new discussions and reflections on power, crisis, and resilience.

Rather than retreating from this moment of shock, the participants leaned into the discomfort. Two new sessions emerged organically, one focusing on the theme of death and dying, and the other one creating a quiet space for participants to hold and process the intensity of the moment. This spontaneous response mirrored the essence of the AMA Convergence: societal transformation as spiritual practice requires us to meet life's unpredictability with openness and presence.

Later that day, participants took a walk to the nearby Heiligensee lake, where they engaged with nature as part of their personal and collective reflection. Some participants chose to swim in the lake's cool waters, while others lay on the grass or climbed trees. This moment of connection with the natural world offered participants a

chance to let go of what no longer served them, symbolizing the personal and collective work of release and renewal.

1.3 Resourcing through community

The sense of community deepened on the third day, as Valerie Voggenreiter led a journaling session focused on resourcing. Participants were invited to reflect on the inner and outer resources that had sustained them throughout the gathering. In the large circle that followed, many expressed gratitude not only for the personal insights they had gained but also for the collective experience of support and connection.

One participant shared a profound realization: “In every human being, if addressed with sincerity, there is the seed of love.” This insight captured an important essence of the Convergence—the belief that deep connection, sincerity, and care are essential resources in navigating the uncertainties of current dynamics. As participants shared their reflections, it became clear that the gathering had created a powerful sense of belonging and mutual support, reinforcing the idea that we cannot face the challenges of multiple crisis alone.

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1.4 Mutual support and looking Forward

The final day of the Convergence was marked by a sense of completion and integration. After a playful and creative check-in, participants gathered in wisdom councils to share their closing reflections. These councils provided space for those who needed support or wished to explore unresolved questions. The atmosphere was one of familiarity and deep connection, as participants reflected on the journey they had undertaken together.

One of the final sessions, a fishbowl conversation, allowed participants to voice their thoughts on the experiences of the past four days. Tears, laughter, and moments of vulnerability were shared, and the conversation acknowledged the ambiguity and complexity of transformation. One participant's reflection, "Without the struggle, it might not become a resource," resonated with many others, capturing the idea that it is often through challenge and discomfort that we find our greatest growth.

As the gathering came to a close, a question emerged: "Is it naive or visionary to believe in a world without borders?" This sparked a lively and controversial discussion, with one participant responding, "Isn't it powerful? Wouldn't it be naive to think that business as usual has a future?" This dialogue encapsulated the forward-looking spirit of the Convergence—an acknowledgment of the challenges we face, but also a deep belief in the possibility of transformation.

The 2024 AMA Convergence was not a conventional conference with a fixed agenda and predetermined outcomes. Instead, it was a fluid, evolving process that embodied the messiness of transformation. The gathering reminded participants that societal change, like personal growth, is rarely straightforward. It is a journey filled with ambiguities, tensions, and uncertainties. Yet, it is also a journey rich with possibility, creativity, and connection. What practices may support fostering the best in us?

As we navigate these turbulent times, we are called to cultivate a mindset that can hold space for complexity—one that recognizes the interconnection between science, action, and reflection. The Convergence showed that this mindset is already emerging in communities around the world, as people come together to share stories, support one another, and co-create new ways of being in the world.

In the words of one participant, the Convergence was “a journey of the heart. It can expand so much; it can hold so much.” This sentiment captures the essence of the AMA project—a belief that through community, connection, and openness, we can face challenges and co-create a more sustainable, compassionate and regenerative futures.

Meeting the great challenges of our time through community, connection and openness to create more sustainable, compassionate and regenerative futures.

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