

Essay by Monika Robbins

Albert Einstein's statement that "we shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive" is correct. Einstein revolutionized our conception of who we are and how the universe works with his theory of relativity. Einstein's discovery reveals that the appearance and reality of the world are shaped by the frame of reference of the observer. I see the world quite differently than a teenager from Russia, because our lives and our surroundings are so different. Einstein's statement highlights his belief that his discoveries and other technological advancements would require changing our frames of reference.

Einstein understood the power of the atomic bomb, as almost no one else could, because his theories made its creation possible. The atomic bomb could destroy a city or country instantaneously, as Einstein understood and was demonstrated by America's attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The same cognitive shifts that permitted humans to destroy can be harnessed to permit us to create. The attitudes that helped us organize armies could instead help us organize towards common human goals, such as peace among ourselves, harmony with nature, and progress of the human spirit. All of these goals, however, can only be achieved with a new way of thinking.

Instinctive ways of thinking may have made sense for primitive humans, who looked at the world from the limited perspective of their family or tribe, but this is no longer the case. These primitive humans' main concern was the survival of themselves, and after that, their tribe. They had no concern for the other tribes and species who shared their world. When their raw survival was at stake and they had the use of stone tools, this perspective outweighed the costs, and it was successful for a long time.

Now, if the human race is to survive, we must adopt a new way of thinking. Our selfish perspective has been exposed as a failure. Our actions are magnified by technological and cultural factors to the point where our individual and collective actions can destroy the world or render it uninhabitable. Tribesmen and women with stone tools could not change the climate, pollute the air with radioactive fallout, or destroy the ability of the earth to support life. We need a new way of thinking to account for our new way of living.

Just as the tribesmen ensured their survival, we must ensure ours. As technology creates a globalized economy and culture, we must work together to guarantee that humans survive. No longer can we work only for ourselves and our tribal relations. We must work together to bring all world citizens out of poverty. We must work together to save the environment. We must work together to create peace, so atomic weapons never are used again. Einstein recognized this over fifty years ago, and we need a new manner of thinking now. Only then, can mankind survive and continue to thrive.