

# SHIFT

the global change-makers' magazine

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*Dear reader,*

Examining the bigger picture and finding our place in it all is an important part of being an effective change-maker. But what about the big questions – the existential questions, the metaphysical questions? Where do these fit into the change-maker's grand plan? Or do they have a place at all?

Issue 9 of SHIFT gets to grips with the meaning of spirituality, our deep yearning for connection to one another and the natural world, and how this can be channeled to co-create a sustainable and just future.

In this issue of SHIFT, author and psychotherapist Carolyn Baker considers the spiritual challenges posed by the existential crisis of collapse; SHIFT editor Kari McGregor plumbs the depths of the environment movement's deepest shade of green – deep ecology; and Christiane Kliemann of Degrowth Germany tackles the hard question missing from the mainstream climate debate: how much are we prepared to change to ensure the next generation has a future?

We also catch up with Helena Norberg-Hodge – founder and director of the International Society for Ecology and Culture, and producer of award-winning documentary *The Economics of Happiness* – for a glimpse at the journey that led her to conclude that the future is necessarily local.

And to mark the 70 years since Europe's liberation from the horrors of Nazi occupation, Martin Winiecki of the Institute for Global Peace reflects on what we still need to change within ourselves to bring about a peaceful world.

SHIFT is the labour of love of a team of cultural creatives passionate about sustainability. Innovating around the constraints of a shoestring budget, our all-volunteer team seizes upon every available moment to investigate, interview, analyse, vision, scribble, edit, and design our way to a shift in the direction of public discourse. This ninth issue of ad-free insight, analysis, and inspiration to practical action is our latest contribution to the conversation.

Gossip-free and devoid of commercial clutter, SHIFT provides a platform for a movement that is uncompromised by revenues and remits, cutting straight to the chase on subjects of social significance. SHIFT is made possible by generous supporters who help us push the envelope on change and make space for the conversations that matter. Thank you for taking part in the much-needed shift.

Without further ado, make yourself comfortable, still your mind, and settle in to enjoy the fruits of our labour of love...

In solidarity,

The **SHIFT** Team

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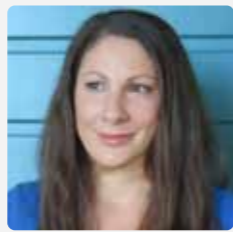
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## Theo Kitchener

Theo Kitchener has a background in activism and community building, and more recently has been working to raise awareness around collapse and transition possibilities through the Melbourne-based volunteer group, Doing It Ourselves. Self-described apocalypsimist, Theo is positive about the future, focusing on community, permaculture, appropriate technology, voluntary simplicity, participatory democracy, community economics and our potential transformation. Theo is based in Melbourne Australia.

[/DoingItOurselves](#)  
[www.doingitourselves.org](http://www.doingitourselves.org)



## Kari McGregor

A committed downshifter, Kari's career pathway through non-profit management and mainstream education recently culminated in a leap from the treadmill and a return to her activist roots. Harboring nomadic tendencies, she has lived in the UK, Spain and Thailand before settling in Australia and making the Sunshine Coast her home for now. Kari now divides her time between consulting for the non-profit world, and working for the grassroots non-profit, Sustainability Showcase. She blogs as The Overthinker, freelancing a critical spin on our planetary predicament.

[/TheOverthinker.org](#)  
[@ThinkstOver](#)  
[www.theoverthinker.org](http://www.theoverthinker.org)



## Sean Crawley

Sean Crawley has decided to hang around and get involved in earthy affairs for as long as possible because his curiosity to see how all this pans out is greater than the sometimes attractive option of hanging up one's boots. Sean has worked as an educator in schools, community settings and in youth mental health, and currently donates much of his time to the grassroots non-profit, Sustainability Showcase. He lives and works on the Sunshine Coast, Australia.

[www.fourtentywoam.blogspot.com.au](http://www.fourtentywoam.blogspot.com.au)



## Dave Pollard

Dave Pollard retired from paid work in 2010 after 35 years as an advisor to small enterprises. He is a long-time student of our culture and its systems, of history and of how the world really work. His books include Finding the Sweet Spot: The Natural Entrepreneur's Guide to Responsible, Sustainable, Joyful Work, and Group Works: A Pattern Language for Bringing Life to Meetings and Other Gatherings. He is currently working on a collection of short stories about the world two millennia from now. He lives on Bowen Island, Canada.

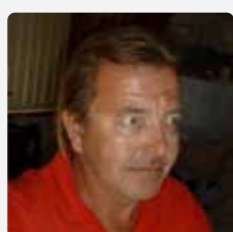
[@DavePollard](#)  
[www.howtosavetheworld.ca](http://www.howtosavetheworld.ca)



## Anneke Vo

Anneke Vo, aka Miss Metanoia, is a millennial-generation freelance writer, cultural creative, and professional homebody. A digital native, she critiques culture through the lens of a generation raised on selfies and status updates, whilst attempting to navigate an economic and political terrain unrecognizable to previous generations of thinkers. Anneke is based in Sydney, Australia.

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[www.miss-metanoia.blogspot.com.au](http://www.miss-metanoia.blogspot.com.au)



## John Oliver

Having spent much of his life in the corporate world, John was exposed to the inner workings of energy production, banking, and government departments. Realising that he was selling his soul to whichever devil was offering the highest price, John jumped ship and began actively working at making a positive difference, as opposed to just making a profit. Life on the other side of the fence, according to John, is not only much easier, but also more satisfying.



## Carolyn Baker

Carolyn Baker, Ph.D. is the author of Collapsing Consciously: Transformative Truths for Turbulent Times. Her previous books are Navigating the Coming Chaos: A Handbook for Inner Transition (2011) and Sacred Demise: Walking the Spiritual Path of Industrial Civilization's Collapse (2009). She lives and writes in Boulder, Colorado. A former psychotherapist and professor of psychology and history, Carolyn offers life coaching for people who want to live more resiliently in the present as they prepare for the future. Her upcoming 2015 book is Love in the Age of Ecological Apocalypse: The Relationships We Need to Thrive.

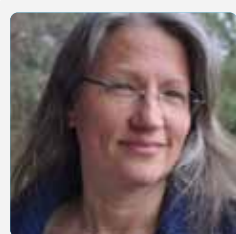
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## Martin Winiecki

Martin Winiecki was born in 1990. Since his early youth he has been politically engaged in his hometown of Dresden, Germany. From 2006 to 2009 he was a student in the peace education in Tamera, Portugal and has been a co-worker of the project ever since. Since 2009 he has been part of the Institute for Global Peace Work in Tamera, working for the implementation of a global network. Since May 2013 he has taken on the coordination of the Terra Nova School.

[/terranovalmovement](#)  
[@TerraNovaRising](#)  
[www.terra-nova-school.org](http://www.terra-nova-school.org)



## Christiane Kliemann

Christiane Kliemann is a German freelance journalist focusing on postgrowth, alternative economy and social change. A member of the organizing team of the Degrowth 2014 Conference, she has worked in communications at the UNFCCC secretariat and as an editor at German broadcaster Deutsche Welle. Currently she is running the blog for the German degrowth web-portal and preparing to move to the eco-village Sieben Linden.

[@Schnecken\\_Post](#)  
[www.degrowth.de](http://www.degrowth.de)



# World News Digest

April 2015 to June 2015

With the fast pace of today's news cycle it can be hard to know what to pay attention to, and information overload is often the inevitable result. Listed under the categories of Economy, Energy, Environment, Geopolitics and Culture, our selected news highlights bypass celebrity gossip and partisan politics, cutting through the crap to shine the spotlight on the world affairs that affect us most strongly.

The SHIFT team has trawled through hundreds of news sources and stories, turning up our bullshit filter to maximum volume, to bring you April and May's global affairs highlights...



## Economy



### Modelling global financial instability

The Bank of England has imposed a series of tests on large UK banks to establish whether they are able to withstand a dramatic slowdown in China, a contraction in the Eurozone, the worst deflation since the 1930s or a fall in UK interest rates to zero. Meanwhile the slump in global oil prices continues to fuel financial instability and standard approaches to fuel economic growth may fail to work in unstable debt markets.

#### FOLLOW THE STORY:

- Bank of England stress tests to include feared global crash
- Satyajit Das: The slump in oil prices is fuelling financial instability globally
- If the US economy is signalling an iceberg, bad news: we're out of lifeboats

[www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)  
[www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)  
[www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)



### The lucky country is running out of luck

The Australian economy seems to be coming to the end of its latest boom cycle, and heading into uncertain times. Unemployment is on the rise, the economic slowdown in China is taking its toll, and demand for Australian iron ore and coal is plummeting. There is no plan in place to mitigate the effects of the boom and bust cycle.

#### FOLLOW THE STORY:

- Australia's economy: is the lucky country running out of luck?
- Someone needs to go broke in the Australian iron ore industry, says analyst
- Foodbank throws open doors of hunger relief centre in Perth
- What will happen to Darwin after the last of Australia's natural gas giants has been built?

[www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)  
[www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)  
[www.abc.net.au](http://www.abc.net.au)  
[www.abc.net.au](http://www.abc.net.au)



### Radical plans afoot in Iceland to end the boom and bust cycle

The Icelandic government has suggested handing over the power of money creation from commercial banks to the state owned central bank in a bid to stabilise the boom and bust cycle.

#### FOLLOW THE STORY:

- Iceland looks at ending boom and bust with radical money plan

# Energy



## Price swings expected as oil enters an age of uncertainty

High prices and low demand signal the end of affordable oil, according to some analysts, while others point to sharp fluctuations in oil prices. The only thing that seems certain is that we are entering an age of uncertainty.

**FOLLOW THE STORY:**

- Not 'peak oil' but 'peak affordable oil'. The economy cannot grow normally again. [www.crudeoilpeak.info](http://www.crudeoilpeak.info)
- How oil is preparing for a new world order [www.cnbc.com](http://www.cnbc.com)



## Fossil fuel faux pas dents oil giants' credibility

BP's early investments in clean, low-carbon energy research in the 80s and 90s have been mothballed. Not only has the oil firm halted the flow of billions of dollars into fossil fuel alternatives, but they have also locked away the research. Adding further embarrassment to the industry, Shell has been caught promoting the view that the world still needs fossil fuels despite climate change. Shell's internal documents acknowledge an average global temperature rise twice that of the UN Copenhagen target.

**FOLLOW THE STORY:**

- BP dropped green energy projects worth billions to focus on fossil fuels [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)
- Shell accused of strategy risking catastrophic climate change [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)
- Don't mention the Arctic: Shell embarrassed by video competition row [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)
- The real story behind Shell's climate change rhetoric [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)



## US coal in decline

The US coal industry is reported to be in structural decline as the industry loses 76% of its value in five years, shutting down over 200 mines.

**FOLLOW THE STORY:**

- US coal sector in 'terminal decline', financial analysts say [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)
- Appalachian Miners Wiped Out by Coal Glut That They Can't Reverse [www.bloomberg.com](http://www.bloomberg.com)

# Environment



## Climate update

It's never good news on the climate front, and this month doesn't disappoint. Further evidence emerges of the expected impacts of climate change, while Antarctic ice thinning speeds up and ocean circulation slows down. Meanwhile, methane is giving carbon a run for its money with fears over thawing permafrost and unexplained methane hotspots. Scientists have called for coal projects threatening the Great Barrier Reef to be scrapped.

**FOLLOW THE STORY:**

- A new website shows how global warming could change your town [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)
- Global warming is now slowing down the circulation of the oceans — with potentially dire consequences [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)
- Antarctic ice shelf thinning speeds up [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com)
- The Arctic climate threat that nobody's even talking about yet [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com)
- Mysterious hotspot of methane over Four Corners [www.natmonitor.com](http://www.natmonitor.com)
- Great Barrier Reef campaign: scientists call for scrapping of coal projects [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)



## Sixty more years of crops, and then what?

Landowners worldwide are engaged in a level of soil destruction that the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation says leaves the world with an average of just 60 viable years of growing crops.

**FOLLOW THE STORY:**

- We're treating soil like dirt. It's a fatal mistake, as our lives depend on it [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)



## Natural wonders threatened by economic development

As the machine of economic progress rolls on, large regions of the world's wilderness are under threat. Massive infrastructure and road-building programmes financed by aggressive development banks are the latest scourge on the environment. Meanwhile our insatiable lust for technological gadgetry has been exposed as far more ecologically damaging than previously believed. A glimmer of hope may be seen in the establishment of Australia's biggest national park, as mining companies ditch plans to mine the Mitchell Plateau in the Kimberley, Western Australia.

**FOLLOW THE STORY:**

- Last great regions of pristine wilderness from Asia to Amazon under threat from massive road-building projects, scientist warns [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)
- The dystopian lake filled by the world's tech lust [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com)
- Australia's biggest national park to be created in WA's Kimberley as mining companies relinquish tenement [www.abc.net.au](http://www.abc.net.au)



## The Human Race

Sean Crawley plumbs the depths of the human race in search of answers to who we really are and what our purpose is.



## Wildlife in decline

Biodiversity loss reaches critical proportions with scientists predicting an 'empty landscape'. 60% of large herbivores are now at risk of extinction, and a third of Europe's birds may be set to follow suit, according to recent research. Australia's rate of mammal extinctions — the world's worst — has triggered a group of concerned scientists to devise a comprehensive plan.

### FOLLOW THE STORY:

- Wildlife decline may lead to 'empty landscape' [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com)
- Decade-long plan to halt native animal extinctions to be led by conservationists [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)
- A third of Europe's birds under threat, says most comprehensive study yet [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)
- Pet trade prices can give early warning of wild species in danger [www.thehound2.wordpress.com](http://www.thehound2.wordpress.com)



## Geopolitics



## Muddling through what's going on in the Middle East

If you're unclear on what's going down in the Middle East you're not alone — experts are struggling to make sense of it all as well. Amidst the chaos, a few things are becoming clearer: exactly who ISIS are, how they operate, and what their agenda is.

### FOLLOW THE STORY:

- Robert Fisk: Who is bombing whom in the Middle East [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)
- Who's fighting for whom in Yemen's proxy war? [www.blogs.reuters.com](http://www.blogs.reuters.com)
- The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State [www.spiegel.de](http://www.spiegel.de)



## Big Brother is most definitely watching you!

Few people are aware of an NSA surveillance program known as TREASUREMAP, which is being developed in order to continuously map every internet connection of every person on the planet. The surveillance covers mobile digital devices including cellphones, laptops and tablets.

### FOLLOW THE STORY:

- Why NSA surveillance is worse than you've ever imagined [www.blogs.reuters.com](http://www.blogs.reuters.com)

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## Spirituality for Atheists

- stepping off the not-so-merry-go-round of our time

Being an atheist I have a tendency to balk at any mention of the word spirituality. Gods, life after death, souls, angels, fairies, crystal healing, higher levels of consciousness — the whole cornucopia of faith-based stuff that gets lumped under the banner of spirituality seriously grates with my rational mind and inevitably triggers the old bullshit detector. But what other word is available to describe those moments of awe and wonder and the sense of oneness or connection with the universe that we all experience from time to time?

A *Spiritual Experience* may hit us when: we look up at a night sky full of stars; or when we feel a deep emotional response to a piece of music; or when we experience the joy of love and connection with another human being. These are all real and deeply personal. Even simply contemplating the mystery of consciousness can be a moving and profound human experience — no assistance from the drug industry required! No need either for the conjuring of complex supernatural entities or phenomena.

Nature has given us the ability to have a natural high, and I would argue it is for a good reason. Those fleeting moments of bliss, inner peace, calmness, focus, clarity, being in the zone — or however else you describe spiritual experiences — are so nourishing to our personal and collective wellbeing that throughout all of history, and spanning all cultures, humans have discovered and created a multitude of practices to increase the frequency, intensity and duration of them.

The problem is we lose some of the depth of the *inner* spiritual experience when we try to communicate it to the *outer* world of our fellow human.

What we do is invent a faith-based language to represent that experience — but in the process of communication we unavoidably lose some of its raw quality.

This is a small price we pay for engaging in *Spirituality* — the social practice of communing with others on matters of deep spiritual experience. How does

"A spiritual experience hits us in those all too rare moments when the endocrine system and nervous systems get neatly into sync - freeing us from that incessant monkey chatter that traps us within the confines of an artificial world of words and numbers."

religion relate to spirituality? Once we collectively go on a spiritual journey as a species, it is not a great leap to move from spirituality to formalised religion — with a whole heap of unwanted side effects.

### Spirituality and Sustainability

So what is non-religious *grassroots spirituality* — spirituality without complex systems of faith? We all know it is a core human practice, yet we rarely give thought as to what it actually is. I would argue that there are two aspects. The first is that spirituality is the sum total practice of what we humans collectively do to communicate and share with each other how to have and remember a personal inner spiritual experience that inspires the personal and gives hope to the social. Spirituality is actually a compassionate activity where we wish others to have the same beautiful moments of spiritual experience as we have had.

Secondly, spirituality ought to be a vital component that underpins our considerations of the world and our place within it. It is about our deep connectedness to the world. Without a deep and genuine spiritual awareness of the interconnectedness and beauty of all things, even our most well intentioned actions as individuals and as a species are liable to fail in the long term. It fails because we try to act upon the world as if we can compartmentalise it, when it is



By: Sean Crawley



actually totally interconnected and related and inseparable.

What has spirituality got to do with shifting the world towards a more sustainable and just future? Is such a wish even possible?

Spirituality has as much to do with change as does politics, technology, science, art and ethics. It could be argued that spirituality is perhaps at the very core of change. You may cringe at sayings such as "to change the world you have to change yourself first". I know I do, and there is a good reason: we don't change ourselves in isolation. Getting out into the real world and doing some good is just as important as working on yourself, so change happens simultaneously — within and without. In our individualistic society there is often too much focus on changing just the individual and leaving the system untouched.

Change is needed in the way we currently deal with energy, the economy, the environment, and justice to name a few. Our collective footprint on the planet is of utmost consideration. But the reductions in the footprint of the citizens of the overdeveloped world will never occur sustainably until those individuals become deeply aware that they are connected to the larger collective of humanity and nature as a whole. So, for example, simply switching energy sources from coal to solar is pointless unless we realise that the quantity of energy we consume is also of great concern — then we can have a legitimate discussion about what source of energy we should adopt.

In the human race to get ahead, spiritual practices have become commodified, corrupted or simply relegated to the sidelines. This is inevitable in a world dominated by material gain driven by competition. A true spiritual life, by virtue of its nature, flourishes in an environment of co-operation, moderation, generosity, peace, justice and equality. In stark contrast the modern paradigm of capitalism and "free"

markets is built upon competition, resource depletion, greed, war, injustice and inequality. Capitalism has turned us into passive material consumers - it is high time we stood up to it and started producing some good in this world. As the Beatles poetically put it: "The love you take is equal to the love you make".

Unfortunately, various 'save the world' groups and individuals have so far been unsuccessful at slowing down the trajectory toward collapse. The apparent and abhorrent ease with which many well intentioned intelligent people and global organisations have become corrupted by power, money and status is a sign of how spiritually bankrupt our civilisation has become. The human race to get ahead economically is all-pervasive, and the wellbeing and salvation that a spiritual existence has to offer us has been lost. The ideology of material wealth for all — driven by never-ending growth and technological breakthroughs — is the bullshit story that has brought us to the nightmarish upside down world that we find ourselves in today. It permeates everything.

The resulting mad and panicked race to get ahead is damaging the health of our minds while it degrades the planet upon which we depend. In fear we mindlessly push forward and wonder why we burn out, why children suicide, and why every second person you meet is on antidepressants. Meanwhile, the so-called 'success' stories of human achievement stand proud upon their pedestals and proclaim that if only we dream bigger and work harder we will climb to the very top of the ladder.

Sadly, by and large, we believe them, and while we set our noses to the grindstone with increased vigour we punish ourselves for not being successful enough.

Spirituality is not about getting ahead; it is about sharing with each other the simple joy and gratitude centred upon



**The Tree of Contemplative Practices**  
www.contemplativemind.org

the wonderful reality of being a small but legitimate part of something huge, complex and beautiful — the universe. It is not about some unattainable enlightenment or pinnacle of human achievement. A spiritual experience hits us in those all-too-rare moments when the endocrine system and nervous systems get neatly into sync, freeing us from that incessant monkey chatter that traps us within the confines of an artificial world of words and numbers. When we become totally absorbed in simply being, we experience unforgettable joy and timelessness.

**Spirituality is engagement with the world**

The time for spirituality to re-emerge as a central dimension of human existence is well overdue. One of the biggest misconceptions about a spiritual life and practice is that it is all about detaching oneself from the real world. Some gurus may emphasise accepting the world nonjudgmentally in a way that suggests everything is perfect as it is. This is a misunderstanding or corruption of the real meaning of detachment, and not at all what I am talking about here.

Denial or ignorance of worldly affairs as though they don't exist or don't matter is insanity — a major contributor to where we find ourselves today: on the brink of collapse.

True spirituality is exactly the opposite: it is about engagement. Contemplative practices remind us of our connection and interdependence to everything and that we all have a responsibility to act mindfully in all that we do. Sure, meditation or prayer may require switching off for a while, but the whole point of switching off is to enable us to find within ourselves the wisdom and strength to deal with reality.

The tree of contemplative practices diagram above outlines the scope of contemplative practices that exist — a useful resource for the non-religious among us. In celebration of diversity, some of these practices will appeal more to your unique self than others.

I encourage you to step off the not-so-merry-go-round of modern life and honour your own wellbeing; take the time to find the peace and clarity that spiritual practice can offer us. You will be better for it — and so will the world at large.

# Attenborough's Pitcher Plant

Each edition of SHIFT presents one species of life that is classified as critically endangered, Homo sapiens excluded. By definition, whether it be by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), or your nation state's environmental governance structure such as the Department of the Environment in Australia, critically endangered means that the species is facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in the immediate future.

**CURRENT POPULATION**  
**< 300**

**COMMON NAME:**  
Attenborough's Pitcher Plant

**SPECIES:**  
*Nepenthes attenboroughii*

**RANGE:**  
Victoria Massif, Palawan, Phillipines

**THREATS:**

- Mining
- Poaching
- Difficulty in propagation



Photo courtesy of Dr Alastair Robinson

Atop Mt Victoria in the province of Palawan, Phillipines, grows one of the rarest and youngest pitcher plants catalogued.

First discovered in 2007, it was named *Nepenthes attenboroughii* for naturalist Sir David Attenborough who has always had a keen enthusiasm for the genus. The species was not officially described until 2009 and is critically endangered.

Pitcher plants are carnivorous plants that capture insect prey in fluid filled tube-like leaf structures called pitchers. Growing to a height of up to 1.5 metres and with pitchers up to 30cm tall and 16cm across, the Attenborough's Pitcher Plant is considered one of the largest pitcher plants yet discovered; one study found the pitcher on one plant contained more than 1.5 litres of liquid. They are also known to be capable of digesting small rodents following the discovery of the remains of a shrew inside the pitcher of one plant in late 2012.

Each plant is capable of producing multiple pitchers, described as upper or lower, and the pitchers themselves can vary dramatically in size and colour.

The flowers of the plant generally grow on a single stem that can contain up to 100 densely packed flowers. These stems are up to 6.5cm long depending on the sex of the plant, and although female plants always produce a single stem, male plants have been found to produce 2 stems on occasion.

With only a few hundred plants still in the wild colony, survival is severely impacted by organised poaching for the Japanese or Taiwanese markets. The rarity of the plant, as well as its size, mean locals see it as an item to be harvested for profit with little to no consideration given to its conservation value.

Regrettably, Mt Victoria, where the majority of the colony is located, is not a conservation zone. There is already a mine at the base of the mountain and companies hold exploration rights for the rest of the mountain. Attempts are being made to propagate the plant to increase its population, but harvesting the seeds is a difficult procedure and there is very limited success in germination.

*Nepenthes attenboroughii*: a rare and beautiful plant that is on the verge of extinction, primarily at the hand of man.

**FURTHER READING:**

- [www.iucnredlist.org/details/159126/0](http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/159126/0)
- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepenthes\\_attenboroughii](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepenthes_attenboroughii)



Photo courtesy of Dr Alastair Robinson



Photo courtesy of Stewart McPherson



By: John Oliver



# Are we prepared to change to prevent climate change?

**What is needed to get us out of our comfort zone and fight for our children's future?**

If you ask, let's say, a seven year old, it's all pretty clear. If it's the way we live, consume and produce that causes climate change, why don't we simply stop it and start doing things differently? And if there are millions of people too poor even to meet their basic needs, why don't we tell the rich to share a bit of their overflow so that there is enough for all?

We may consider this cute and naïve, we may laugh and say, "Look, it's not all that easy, there are too many complexities and interdependencies and lock-ins and path-dependencies. It's OK, when you're older you'll understand. Our economy needs to grow for us to keep up the good life. It needs to grow to get more people out of poverty, to secure return on investments, and to create jobs in place of those that fell away due to rationalization. We cannot simply stop the machine for something abstract like climate change: this would lead to recession, social unrest and chaos. We have to keep up our economic system to secure social stability, pension schemes and state budgets"—as if social instability, unemployment and wars on resources<sup>1</sup> were not already well on their way.



By: Christiane Kliemann

## Questioning the underlying system logic

These are all robust arguments hardly ever questioned—following the logic of homo economicus<sup>2</sup> that individual profit and competition are the best means to achieve the higher common good. But what if this system logic itself was the root cause of our environmental and social crises—climate change above all—and needed to be replaced by something new to secure our survival on this planet? What if we have constructed a whole system of theories, models, technologies and defence mechanisms just to deny the simple truth? What if the seven year old was right and we do need to change

What if the seven year old was right and we do need to change our lives in an unprecedented way, and concentrate all our efforts on the required systemic transformation in the face of climate change and the underlying crisis of civilization?



We have to bring across that we are really serious about changing the economy and changing our lives, and that we won't accept any excuse.

In the current system, this fear of losing one's job often forces people to choose between a secure livelihood and ethical principles.

our lives in an unprecedented way, and concentrate all our efforts on the required systemic transformation in the face of climate change and the underlying crisis of civilization<sup>3</sup>?

Mark Lynas and others made the case that questioning the paradigm of economic growth is kind of politically extreme<sup>4</sup>, but what if it turned out that climate stability and growth are indeed incompatible<sup>5</sup> and that such "extremity" is in fact required? That keeping up economic growth, "green" or otherwise, is not in line with the physical reality of the planet, regardless of what we might wish?

In the end, it all boils down to the question of decoupling economic growth from greenhouse-gas emissions (and the use of other natural resources in the case of other no less important planetary boundaries). However, despite the tremendous efforts that are being invested to convince us that energy efficiency, renewables<sup>6</sup> and new technologies<sup>7</sup> will do the trick, decoupling in absolute terms<sup>8</sup> remains highly unlikely if not impossible<sup>9</sup> in a growing economy.

## The limits to growth are real

According to economist Tim Jackson<sup>10</sup>, from 1990 to 2007 the global carbon intensity of technology decreased annually by an average of 0.7 %. At the same time, global population increased by 1.3 % while the average income increased by 1.4 %. These numbers reveal that the efficiency gains (relative decoupling) didn't even make up for population growth and income increase, so the overall emissions actually went up.

In order to avoid dangerous climate change in the future, we would need to achieve an annual carbon intensity decrease of at least 7 %, a figure ten times greater than that achieved from 1990 to 2007. The relating scenario only accounts for a moderate population and income increase, and maintains the gap between developing and developed countries. If the developing countries were to catch up with industrialized living standards, which is the more likely trajectory, this would even require a 55 times lower carbon intensity by 2050. Is this realistic?

While a recent high-level report<sup>11</sup> claims that climate action and economic growth can go hand in hand<sup>12</sup>, it doesn't even attempt to prove<sup>13</sup> the probability of absolute decoupling—leaving its core message a mere assertion<sup>14</sup>. The reason behind it: among the multitude of studies dealing with decoupling and the related rebound-effects<sup>15</sup>, there is not one that could prove absolute decoupling as a realistic scenario considering the relevant facts and figures.

## Standing up to vested interests

This leads us to the question of whose interests are actually at stake in case the growth fetish gets criticized by a larger public—which can also explain the tireless attempts to prevent this from happening by the military-industrial complex,

It's our Western consumer lifestyle that inherently depends on the exploitation of nature and other people.

the fossil fuel industry, the agroindustry, the aviation and automotive industry, to mention only a few (no, electric<sup>16</sup> or driverless cars are not sustainable, despite what the industry tries to make us believe). Given the vast financial and political power of the global players in these and other sectors, it is no wonder that governments are usually putty in the hands of their interest groups. These play with our fears and assure us that their profitability is essential for keeping our jobs—knowing that politicians fear nothing more than rising unemployment rates.

And indeed, in the current system, this fear of losing one's job often forces people to choose between a secure livelihood and ethical principles — and to continue to work in jobs<sup>17</sup> that are obviously damaging for the environment. So if a global bottom-up climate movement is to succeed against these vested corporate interests, it has to push just as hard for alternative solidarity structures and job opportunities. In the end, it's not the corporations that we need, but secure livelihoods<sup>18</sup>—which can be provided in many different ways<sup>19</sup>.

## Facing our defence mechanisms

At the same time it is not enough to point fingers at others and blame “the system” or “the industry” or “the politicians” when our own interests are deeply intertwined with that of the economy we are living in. Aren't most of us quite happy in our comfort zones enjoying all the superficial pleasures the globalized consumer culture can provide? It's definitely not those who are less fortunate and have to struggle to make ends meet who are to blame. It's the average and above average consumers in the Global North and the rich

in the Global South who are gobbling up resources that the earth cannot sustain. It's our Western consumer lifestyle that inherently depends on the exploitation of nature and other people, particularly women<sup>20</sup>—be it in the form of cheap labour, environmental racism<sup>21</sup> or direct deprivation — e.g. by destroying people's livelihoods for our hunger for resources.

So if we want politicians and governments to act and take on the “Great Transition<sup>22</sup>” towards a secure and liveable future as their utmost priority, we first have to give up our defence mechanisms and stop justifying our own role. We have to bring across that we are really serious about changing the economy and changing our lives, and that we won't accept any excuse. Otherwise they can rely on us being too deeply attached to our cars, fancy holidays and long-haul flights, globalized supply chains and ever more electronic gadgets—even at the expense of the millions of deaths, increasing violence, wars on resources and ever stronger environmental disasters.

## Shaping a global movement for change

If the movement<sup>23</sup> gets its priorities right, the largest parts of the global population have much to gain. Even the rich and privileged might prefer the prospect of a materially simpler life in a social and economic environment that fosters wellbeing in a healthier sense than the current one. Luckily, there are already many ideas<sup>24</sup>, proposals<sup>25</sup> and concepts<sup>26</sup> available to secure the good life for all while maintaining a healthy planet—in democratic and participative ways.

The widespread belief that the white male hypocrites from Silicon Valley<sup>27</sup> and their likes will save us through technological innovations is yet another symptom of our collective denial<sup>28</sup>. These will neither be ecologically sustainable, nor democratic; they will just tighten our dependence on increasingly complex technologies from large monopolist corporations. We tend to forget that the real driver behind such innovations is not change, but the attempt to keep up our business-as-usual capitalist economy and prevent it from collapse—thereby securing cash flow into the pockets of the usual suspects.

Now back to the seven year old, for whom the solutions are so simple, so apparent. Don't you think it's high time we listen to our children<sup>29</sup>, get out of our comfort zone and do all we can to safeguard the Earth for them? Consume less, share more and stand up against fossil fuels, urban sprawl, destructive infrastructures and resource extractivism. And, above all, fight for an economy<sup>30</sup> that can fulfil everyone's basic needs within the natural boundaries of a healthy planet.



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# Changemaker profile:

## Helena Norberg-Hodge

### Resist, Renew, Reconnect



Kari McGregor caught up with Helena Norberg-Hodge – new economy activist, founder and director of Local Futures, and producer of award-winning documentary *The Economics of Happiness* – for a glimpse at the journey that led her to conclude that the future is necessarily local.

Ladakh circa 1975: A young blond woman from Sweden sticks out like a sore thumb against the backdrop of forbidding mountains and forgiving smiles. But she is fully immersed.

An independent modern woman, she has lived in Europe and the United States, and she has travelled the world; now she finds her spiritual home in a culture as alien as it is ancient.

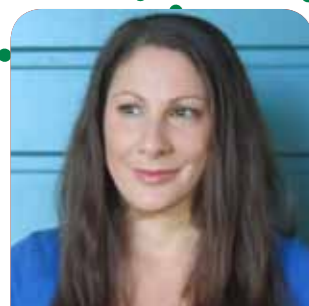
In the 1970s Helena Norberg-Hodge is one of few westerners to have visited the craggy terrain of the Tibetan Plateau that is home to ancient wisdom and youthful joy. Little Tibet, geographically remote, politically Indian, culturally uniquely Ladakhi.

Adding a seventh language to the string she already spoke placed Helena on the inside of a culture that most westerners can only ever view from the outside, and the perspective provided a flashpoint for opportunity.

Helena offers up her husband's perspective as to why Ladakh ignited the spark that catapulted her to activism:

*"...he feels that if I had not been so culturally flexible and able to learn the language – but not only learn the language, but embed myself in Ladakhi culture in a way that allowed me to experience it from the inside – he thinks I probably wouldn't have been so aware of particularly the inner issues of contentment and happiness."*

Having studied psychology and linguistics, and digging to the core of what is it that makes some people – some cultures – more peaceful,



By: Kari McGregor

more happy, Helena had already been struck by the difference between Europe and the US. She was ready to learn from Ladakh.

*"I experienced people who were telling me that they were incredibly well off, that there was no such thing as hunger, who were so clearly the most at ease with themselves and the most vital and joyous people I had ever encountered."*

But Ladakh was not to remain frozen in time; it, too, capitulated to the demands of the bloated global economy. With economic integration came imported luxuries, manufactured wants, and the maladies of lopsided western affluence: depression, addiction, and conflict.

*"In the beginning I thought it was the west, but I realized it was actually the global economy – the corporate and banking structures that were behind something that not only destroyed their self-respect and happiness, but that almost overnight there was unemployment and friction between people."*

## Exporting an economic model

Helena is critical of what the west has exported to the east, and is keen to accurately identify the culprit. Globalisation: a vector for profit-motivated trade, cultural evangelism, and something much more sinister. The psychological and spiritual impacts of globalisation are less tangible than the material widening of the gap between the haves and have-nots, but no less alarming.

As the gap between the rich and poor grows to a gaping chasm and people notice their real incomes decline, working ever longer hours to cover their basic needs, we are coming to terms with the need for change.

*"People are beginning to understand that something is fundamentally wrong, and that minor tinkering with the current system is not the answer. A critical mass is ready for fundamental change."*

In the meantime, however, global trade treaties have handed over so much power to multinational corporations that they have become what Helena calls a de facto global government, ruling from behind the façade of democratically elected governments.

*"...far too big, far too mobile, capital and corporations have been lobbying governments to give them more freedom, to access resources, labour, to move in and out of local and national economies more and more freely. And that free trade agenda is a disastrous systemic direction away from democracy... Governments – many of them too poor to meet their obligations – now respond to the wishes of international lenders rather than their own citizens."*

To be able to address the social and ecological costs of our economic system we need to provide clear explanations of the root causes, Helena says. It's not a simplistic matter of individual greed, or a deliberate choice to pursue endless economic growth at huge social and ecological cost.

*"Our destructive economic system continues to expand primarily because of ignorance. The economic pundits that promote this growth model have been trained to look at flows of money and numerical representations of the world, and are shielded from many of the real-life social and ecological consequences of their abstract models."*

While corporate and banking CEOs are driven by mandate to meet short-term profit and growth targets they are often oblivious to the overall impact of their actions; likewise concerned citizens often fail to notice the ways in which their consumer choices support what Helena sees as an energy-intensive job and soul-destroying economy.

## Changing the system

The belief that the economic system will collapse of its own accord due to inherent design flaws leads many to view attempts at system change as futile. Helena is not convinced.

*"Despite its deep flaws and contradictions, the economic system may outlive much of the natural and social world. Many years ago, the Swiss economist H.C. Binswanger convinced me that deregulated capital – money de-linked from any standard or limit – could keep multiplying endlessly, even as ecosystems and societies crash. In other words, the economy could keep growing until the last tree falls. A depressing scenario, and one that we must do everything we can to prevent."*

Unable to escape the burden of responsibility for change Helena suggests that we need to better understand the roots of market fundamentalism and its impact on the global economy, a position from which we will be better equipped for the long, hard, and often thankless task of bringing about an economic system that caters for all of human need.

*"Until recently, the broad perspective needed to deconstruct the global economic system has been marginalized, with the field left to narrowly focused market fundamentalists. As a result, it appeared that the only viable option was to head towards ever larger and more inhuman economic scale, with wealth and power concentrated in ever fewer hands. Big picture activism informs us that another way is possible."*

Helena is positive for the future, yet her expectations are expertly managed so as not to be bitterly disappointed by the baby steps achieved by change-making Davids against the Goliath of globalisation.

*"I do see countless projects, organisations, individuals who so clearly want something else, and ultimately squashing these movements really means squashing life itself, because life moves towards healing, towards self-balancing, and for me I see that an almost unconscious movement in the west, towards doing things in a way that's more natural and more health-affirming for both people and ecosystems."*

Helena herself is now based in Byron Bay, the effervescent hippy haven of the New South Wales coast that attracts alternative minds and new age travellers, cultural misfits and lifestyle retreaters. There is much that is positive happening in the region, a hub for local activism, but as with most places there is a level of frustration that change isn't moving faster, reaching further, really getting under society's skin.

## Fragmentation and loss of connection

Part of what stands in the way of meaningful change is, quite possibly, the deleterious effect of fragmentation and the loss of connection that comes with the territory of an individualistic system that caters to consumerist impulse. We have lost a great deal to globalization.

*"What people around the world are missing is both self-reliance and self-esteem.... people are sort of becoming aware of the western epidemics of depression and all kinds of addiction, that there are very evident signs that we are not so happy."*

While it is easy to talk with progressives of the Left about the tangible impacts of globalisation – they are plain to see – it is much harder to broach the subject of spiritual bereavement. Ephemeral and subjective, it's a topic that's hard to kick-start, and even on the Left there is a reluctance to stray from subjects that are easy to quantify.

A large proportion of the change-making projects and initiatives that gain traction in the west are based on the leadership of white, middle class males, and Helena laments the lack of sincerity with which we greet the work of women, the value of diverse cultures, and the contributions of the materially poor. We are missing out on a great deal of learning if we fail to broaden our scope.

The scope of our activism also needs to take into account the worldviews of cultures where spiritual traditions provide the foundation.

*"With spirituality, what I've experienced is that in cultures where spiritual traditions were actually the fundament of the worldview – like in Ladakh, Bhutan, but also I've experienced it in Laos, I've experienced it in other parts of India, where it's Hindu, I've experienced it among Muslims, and with the Masai – the worldview was*

*spiritual in the sense that constantly at the centre of it is the reminder of the interdependence of the oneness of all life. And another universal fundament of the spiritual belief was that love, compassion is the way. And this is of course true in Christianity as well. So essentially these spiritual worldviews were extremely positive and life-enhancing."*

This is not a view that is taken seriously by many academics on the Left in western cultures, much as the economics of happiness is treated as so much fluff compared with cold, hard statistics. There remains the underlying assumption that more collectivist cultures whose cultural roots are in ecological spirituality are somewhat inferior to the enlightened rational west. The individualistic, mature west, where we need not depend on others for our wellbeing.

*"...in the west, as we've gone away from this spiritual truth of the interdependence of life, we have actually created a type of hyper-individualism. The whole system that globalization is driving forward is a system that encourages separation, fragmentation. We are out of touch with the reality of being at one and totally interdependent with nature. At every level it's based on fragmentation. At the core these spiritual traditions remind us of the inextricable connection."*

In fairness to those who are turned off by the notion that spirituality can be an effective force for change, Helena cites the shortcomings of the new age movement, whose overly esoteric approach has alienated many activists.

*"Until recently, however, there was a tendency in the new age to focus almost exclusively on the inner dimension, on thinking positively, and personal change. And among those who focused on this inner world, many tended to look down on activists who seemed fixated on the outer world."*

## A false dichotomy

The dichotomy between the scientific and the spiritual has left a yawning chasm that few even attempt to bridge, and I comment that spirituality has become a post-Enlightenment taboo, simply because it's not scientific. Helena thinks there's more to it.

*"I would go further than that. I would say that what we really need – to look clearly at what's going on in the world today – is to be very, very cautious about science as this search for objective truth that many people believe it is. I think if we look back historically we'll see that it really never was."*

*But there was a time – certainly even going back 30 years, in many countries, I mean certainly in Scandinavia where I grew up – there was a certain amount of science in the public interest. And among other things that science began noticing that certain*

*things like pesticides were very detrimental to our health, and provided warnings against them, and so on."*

But in more recent years the profit motive has claimed victory over much of science. It's not part of some insidious plot, Helena adds, but a systemic inevitability of the structural relationship between enterprise and innovation.

*"...the structural relationship between money accumulation and the so-called search for objective knowledge is disastrous."*

Helena sees the position of the Left, vis-à-vis science, as one of raising awareness about the co-optation of the field by Big Money, and demanding science in the public interest. The field needs to be decoupled from narrow profit-making goals if it is to retain relevance and objectivity.

If the supposedly objective domain of science has been rendered subjective by suspicious ulterior motives, then subjectively focused spirituality is not off the hook either. Helena cites a lack of rigour and integrity among many who emphasise spirituality as a driver of change, and instead points toward the need for testing hypotheses and being honest in our claims and what lies behind our decisions.

## How big money co-opts and corrupts

Helena is not pointing to a lazily clichéd middle way either. She warns against the lobbying of corporate-funded think tanks that promote the idea that the world cannot be seen in black and white terms when it comes to issues such as genetic engineering. Although the grey areas on the fringes of issues are often the locus of truth, there are cases – practices and policies – in which an emphatic no must be articulated. Some paths must be rejected.

No task seems to have been co-opted quite so easily as that of feeding the world. Insidious though it may seem to profit from preventing hunger, the notion that a corporation might, on the one hand, claim the honourable intention of feeding the world's hungry yet on the other hand create terminator seeds that cannot reproduce after a single harvest, bears consideration for its inherent contradiction. You can't have it both ways.

*"So many of the scientists – and I've known many of them – that have been passionately committed, for instance, to developing genetic engineering, have been doing so because they've been told that this is the way to feed the world."*

Helena tells me the story of a professor from the University of Indiana whose name escapes us both, but whose story reveals a challenge to the scientific psyche that demands integrity to the method, not the motive.



*"She was convinced that what she was doing as a geneticist was helpful for feeding the world. Then she happened to be on holiday for long enough in India to actually get in touch with what was going on on the ground, and started hearing from groups and small farmers that this was actually disastrous, that it was destroying their ability to feed themselves and the world."*

*This opened her eyes to it, and then when she went back to the US and started trying to discuss this, she realized how closed the system was – both in academia and the media – to any discussion. And she became an active proponent of local food economies, and, if you like, a black and white "no" to genetic engineering, based on the fact that this idea that it's feeding the world was an utter and total fabrication."*

Equanimity emanates from this elegant lady of nearly 70 whose expressive features hint at stories to tell while she measures her words with practiced restraint. But she is serenely defiant, protective of what is just, protective of what has not yet been taken or destroyed. For Helena effective activism requires both resistance and renewal.

## Unity in diversity

Although certain pathways can be rejected with great clarity, Helena warns against promoting simple solutions. One size does not fit all; diversity of culture is not a luxury, but a necessity based on the specific ecological conditions of a landbase.

*"And on the other hand, when it comes to developing paths that are truly health-affirming of both humans and ecosystems, affirming something that is more democratic, something more egalitarian, we have to be extremely cautious about imposing simple formulas on the great diversity of cultures and ecosystems."*

*"I think we can have a very clear, united "no" to a monocultural top-down system while maintaining great humility over just how we should develop."*

The perils of this monocultural top-down system are represented nowhere more dramatically than in Ladakh. Not because Ladakh was entirely without problems prior to globalisation, but because this laid-back culture familiar only with sustainable, local, organic materials to meet their daily needs had begun to fall prey to the more sinister side of global trade.

*"...and then to see government officials on the radio, in the villages, promoting things like DDT that had been outlawed elsewhere, to see a hospital being built essentially of asbestos when asbestos was being – at great expense – being removed in the west, that's where these issues of greater clarity and so on were so stark. That became the theoretical foundation for me for localization as opposed to globalization."*

Helena describes her connection to Ladakh and its people as an ongoing relationship. For over forty years she has been invested in this spiritual flashpoint that sparked her *raison d'être*, and she frequently travels back. But she says her efforts are now needed more in the west than in the east, and are best applied where they can be most effective.

*"In the so-called third world the environmental movement and the ability to speak out are so much more curtailed than in the west. You know it's very frightening to see in India right now they're sort of witch-hunting non-profit organisations; we do have that in the west as well, but not in such an extreme form. We have a window of opportunity here, but we can also see that the system is definitely trying to do everything it can to squash these voices."*

## Connecting with our local roots

In order for an economics of happiness to really take root we are going to need to turn to the wisdom of those who remember a smaller world pre-globalisation.

Contrasting the deep spirituality of traditional cultures with the thin veneer of spirituality that sits atop a troubled western society, Helena explains why an ingrained spirituality is intrinsic to co-creating an economy that serves all our needs.

*"What I experienced in Ladakh was that this spiritual framework there was part of daily life, and it was not something where you have to look very serious and go into a building where a priest or someone tells you what to do. It was something that was part of everyday life – it was also part of cooking and eating and laughing and dancing."*

*This is a very long-winded way of saying that I think a lot of new age spirituality in the west often fragments the spiritual as a separate entity of something very holy, very serious, but very separate from everyday life, from the economy – what does a spiritually based economy look like? Well it's one that would actually be aware of and encouraging interdependence."*

And this comes back to localisation. By fragmenting we create a type of spiritual materialism that Helena considers counterproductive. Instead there is a need for holism – to consider the entirety of human experience and acknowledge our need for connection to one another and to the landbases that provide for us.

In Helena I sense a craving for connection – it is the same craving I think we all have, but that so few of us are able to express, or even identify. But for Helena it is not a connection that has never been found; it is one that is known well, and sorely missed, like an old friend whose warm embrace soothes all aches of the heart and soul.

When I ask her how she feels about making her new home in Byron Bay she sighs, smiles, and whispers:

*"It's not Ladakh."*



# Turning to the Dark Side: Grieve, Heal, and Commit to the Earth Community

*Resisting or postponing the collapse will only make it worse. Finding new ways to grow the economy will only consume what is left of our wealth. Let us stop resisting the revolution in human being-ness. If we want to outlast the multiple crises unfolding today, let us not seek to survive them. That is the mind-set of separation; that is resistance, a clinging to a dying past. Instead, let us shift our perspective toward reunion and think in terms of what we can give. What can we each contribute to a more beautiful world? That is our only responsibility and our only security.*

~Charles Eisenstein, *Sacred Economics*~

Many people in spiritual circles resist the use of the word "collapse." After all, it sounds so--well, "apocalyptic." And indeed, it is, and that reality becomes more significant when we consider that the word "apocalypse" simply means "the unveiling." While "collapse" implies the notion of things falling apart, in the manner that Buddhist teacher Pema Chodron writes in her wonderful little book *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice For Difficult Times*, "collapse" and "apocalypse" travel together.

In fact, when things fall apart, we are compelled to notice the extent to which the paradigms we formerly embraced are revealed for their dysfunction and devastation. Likewise, when we are able to look honestly at what is unveiled, we notice that facets of the dominant paradigm are already collapsing and have been for some time.



By: Carolyn Baker

## Impermanence

Buddha taught us that all created things perish. Everything and everyone is impermanent — as in collapsing, falling apart, and eventually, becoming extinct. Paul Kingsnorth, environmental activist and author writes in his marvelous article, *The Witness*:

*It is hard for us to take in the reality that Earth is an extinction machine, and it has been here before. It doesn't need us, and we cannot control it. The 'ecological crisis' we hear so much about, and which I have written so much about and worked to stave off — well, who says it is a 'crisis'? Humans do — and educated, socially-concerned humans at that. For the Earth itself, the Holocene Extinction is not a 'crisis' — it is just another shift. Who determined that the planet should remain in the state in which humans find it conducive? Is this not a form of clinging to mutable things, and one that is destined to make us unhappy? When we campaign to 'save the Earth' what are we really trying to save? And which Earth?<sup>11</sup>*

Not only is the Earth an extinction machine, but humanity's way of operating on this planet is a heat engine. The way civilized humans choose to live on Earth inexorably leads to the extinction of the Earth community.

And Charles Eisenstein, in the above passage from his incisive book, *Sacred Economics*, asks us not to resist any of this. Or as a friend of mine says, "When you're in the middle of a meltdown, your job is to melt."

Someone else famously said that a crisis is a terrible thing to waste. But how do we, in fact, discover the opportunity in that well-known Chinese character that means both crisis and opportunity?

## Initiation

I woke up to the collapse of industrial civilization in 2007. Although I was inundated with articles, books, and documentaries on the topic which unarguably revealed that collapse was a done deal, my training as a psychotherapist incessantly screamed: "And how are people going to navigate this demise emotionally and spiritually?" Thus my current calling was born as I penned *Sacred Demise: Walking The Spiritual Path of Industrial Civilization's Collapse* (2009), *Navigating The Coming Chaos: A Handbook For Inner Transition* (2011), and *Collapsing Consciously: Transformative Truths For Turbulent Times* (2013).

What I have increasingly understood with every new record of CO2 parts per million being broken, every report on ocean acidification, and every new extreme weather event is that the human species is in the throes of a planetary initiation. Most indigenous cultures had, and some still have, elaborate initiation procedures for their young people during the age of puberty; however, in the modern world, one does not have to be a member of an indigenous community to experience initiation. In fact, Carl Jung asserted that initiation is an archetype or fundamental motif inherent in the human psyche. That is to say that something in us wants and expects engagement in the initiatory process, not only at the age of puberty, but throughout our human experience. The process is so fundamental, Jung believed, that even if we do not participate in a formal rite of passage ceremony as we transition from youth to adulthood, our human journey will provide us with initiatory events for the purpose of deepening our humanity and our connection with the cosmos and something greater than the human ego.

Examples of initiatory events which humans frequently encounter are loss of meaningful work, loss of livelihood, loss of home, loss of health, loss of relationship, loss of future security, loss of life, or loss of place. I have intentionally reiterated the word "loss" because loss is the hallmark of modernity. The irony is that civilization has promised us inestimable gain but fundamentally delivered infinite loss at every turn of our path toward embracing its demands.

In tribal cultures where formal rites of passage are practiced, it is understood that life on earth is fraught with loss — that,

**What can we each contribute to a more beautiful world? That is our only responsibility and our only security.**

in fact, loss is the hallmark of human experience but that the bone-marrow ordeal of the initiatory process grounds the young person moving toward adulthood, by way of loss, into his or her permanent place in the community. Thus, regardless of what losses one may endure, for the initiated man or woman, one's connection with community and with the sacred are constant. As a result, one is equipped to face and navigate loss with remarkable fortitude and grace, not alone, but supported by elders and peers in the process.

I do not wish to idealize tribal cultures or imply that they are without challenges or devoid of dysfunction. Indeed, the more they are encroached upon by civilization, the more dysfunctional they become. My intention is not to focus on indigenous peoples per se, but on the archetype of initiation that I believe inhabits the human psyche. If my premise is correct, then much of how we as a species have arrived at the current predicament of committing planetary suicide makes perfect sense.

Moreover, if the reality of initiation is deeply embedded in our humanity, it is likely that survival and navigation of the collapse of civilization will be enhanced by our perception and response to collapse as an initiatory process.

Furthermore, in our fundamental human origins, we are all indigenous people. Whether or not we claim our indigenous roots, "white roots" do not exist. We are either actively acknowledging our indigenous roots, or we are ignoring them; in reality, all of humanity has been colonized by civilization, the collapse of which offers us the opportunity to reclaim our heritage and liberate ourselves from conquest.

## Turning to the dark side

This then leads to the question: How does an uninitiated species respond to the predicament it has created, and conversely, what is the initiated response to the collapse of civilization?

First, we must recognize that "bright-sided" spirituality will not serve us in an initiatory experience. In her wonderful 2014 *Time Magazine* article, *In Praise of Darkness*, Episcopal priest and author, Barbara Brown Taylor speaks of our culture's addiction to "full-on solar spirituality":

**I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light.**

*"Darkness" is shorthand for anything that scares me — that I want no part of — either because I am sure that I do not have the resources to survive it or because I do not want to find out. The absence of God is in there, along with the fear of dementia and the loss of those nearest and dearest to me. So is the melting of polar ice caps, the suffering of children, and the nagging question of what it will feel like to die. If I had my way, I would eliminate everything from chronic back pain to the fear of the devil from my life and the lives of those I love — if I could just find the right night-lights to leave on.*

*At least I think I would. The problem is this: when, despite all my best efforts, the lights have gone off in my life (literally or figuratively, take your pick), plunging me into the kind of darkness that turns my knees to water, nonetheless I have not died. The monsters have not dragged me out of bed and taken me back to their lair. The witches have not turned me into a bat. Instead, I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light.<sup>2</sup>*

The global crisis compels us to step decisively into spiritual elderhood which has little to do with age and everything to do with the cultivation of wisdom. The first advance toward spiritual elderhood is the mature decision to open to the depth and severity of the darkness and become a willing student of its revelations, personally within one's own psyche and collectively in the macrocosm. The spirituality of initiation is not about rising, soaring, and moving up and out, but rather bowing, kneeling, and allowing ourselves to be drawn downward and inward.

Secondly, moving downward and inward, we naturally fall back in love with the Earth or perhaps fall in love with it for the first time. Why should we do this if it's too late to save

the Earth? Because we must do this especially if it's too late to save the Earth. We are not "part" of the Earth or "stewards" of the Earth: We are the Earth. Her demise is our demise, and when confronted with any demise, spiritual integrity demands that we allow ourselves to become intimate with it. Cultivating Earth intimacy is a spiritual practice to which we must commit in order to experience the radical transformation that planetary initiation offers. Surrender to Earth's demise and our own in this planetary initiation evokes both grief and joy as we let go of our civilized "developmental delay" and become mature, initiated adults.

Additionally, the sanest emotional response to our predicament is deep, deep grief. Grief elder, Francis Weller, in his wonderful book *Entering The Healing Ground: Grief, Ritual and The Soul of The World*, notes that in some indigenous cultures, regular grief rituals are practiced as a form of "soul hygiene" for the community. In those cultures, it is believed that people who do not grieve become toxic to the village.<sup>3</sup>

### **Grieve, heal, commit**

In my work with individuals grieving a variety of losses, including the loss of ecosystems, rivers, mountains, forests, and wildlife, I notice that when they allow themselves to grieve in the safety of a supportive community such as a grief workshop or group ritual, they become profoundly more alive, more joyful, and feel more deeply connected with all living beings. This is the healing power of heartbreak consciously embraced. Conscious grieving is essential for navigating a planetary initiation, and for this reason, I have begun devoting much of my work to offering grief workshops and rituals.

The power of heartbreak quite naturally compels us to serve the Earth community perhaps in ways we had never imagined, with compassion for all beings cascading from

**The first advance toward spiritual elderhood is the mature decision to open to the depth and severity of the darkness and become a willing student of its revelations, personally within one's own psyche and collectively in the macrocosm.**

**Whether or not that mission "succeeds" is not up to us. Our responsibility is to commit wholeheartedly regardless of the outcome.**

every pore. How we will serve is not a decision the mind can make but a labor of love to which the heart must be driven because it cannot do otherwise. We must cease all cerebral speculations about whether the Earth can be saved or when and how its final demise may unfold. The end result of our service may be none of our business. Rather, we serve because we desire nothing more than to be love in action when love may be all that remains.

As my friend Andrew Harvey incessantly emphasizes, in a time of potential extinction, we must commit to engaging in some manner with indigenous wisdom. We can begin this adventure by:

- 1) Developing an entirely different relationship with animals. We must engage not only with our pets, but open to the presence of animals in the rawness of nature.
- 2) Spending quality time in nature, not camping or hiking, or doing anything except being present — sitting quietly, contemplating, allowing all of our senses to engage with leaves, grass, trees, soil, insects, birds, streams, and the wildness that reminds us that we are nothing if not animal beings. Above all, in doing all of this, we must continually say, "Thank you."
- 3) Making a commitment to become a sacred activist in some capacity who allows radical heartbreak to guide us to whatever our mission is to be at this pivotal moment in the history of our planet. Whether or not that mission "succeeds" is not up to us. Our responsibility is to commit wholeheartedly regardless of the outcome.

Radical transformation cannot happen without a spiritual initiation, and what makes the transformation radical is the downsizing of the human ego and rational mind and the limitless expansion of the Sacred Self. This is initiation's glorious endgame, as the poet Juan Ramon Jimenez so exquisitely articulated:

*I am not I.  
I am this one  
walking beside me whom I do not see,  
whom at times I manage to visit,  
and whom at other times I forget;  
the one who remains silent while I talk,  
the one who forgives, sweet, when I hate,  
the one who takes a walk when I am indoors,  
the one who will remain standing when I die.*



## References

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## Collapsewatch

Dave Pollard considers the future of a civilization that's past its peak.

# Beyond Belief

People often ask me if, in my self-proclaimed state of joyful pessimism and contemplative gratitude, I've finally discovered spirituality.

I insist that I have not.

Just about everyone I know who self-identifies as "spiritual" also believes our civilization will somehow be 'saved' from collapse (by science or technology, or the market, or wise leadership, or human ingenuity, or by a god or gods, or by a massive human consciousness-raising). What good is a 'spirit', after all, if he/she/it can't save you from perceived disaster?

No thank you, no salvation needed here.

I'd like to think that most non-spiritual people have moved on, as Derrick Jensen puts it, "Beyond Hope" for saving our culture and our species.<sup>1</sup> Tom Robbins says we now have no choice but to "insist on joy in spite of everything".

We who are resigned to the inevitability of civilization's collapse strive instead to be unattached and equanimous, but not nihilistic or depressed about it. We humans can only be who we are, and who we are is ignorant of complex systems and preoccupied with the needs of the moment. So it is. Life is wonderful and worth living every minute anyway. No soul or striving or sacredness required.

But a little voice inside me says: "That sounds kinda spiritual to me. Borderline *Buddhist* even. Are you sure you're not spiritual? You throw around the word *Gaia* as a shorthand for all-life-on-Earth, but it sounds pretty Goddess-like. You have a picture of her in your mind, some kind of wise, wild, beautiful meta-creature?"

“Being “Beyond Belief” means challenging everything you are told, everything you believe and everything you want to believe.”

And I must confess that my belief that complex systems are unfathomable, and cannot be known or understood or 'managed' or predicted or changed or controlled by humans, no matter how rich or powerful or organized or skilled or motivated, sounds not dissimilar to the faith that some ancient peoples had in some higher, invisible, awesome power.

I am on a journey these days to try to really see what I know intellectually — that my self, my mind, my sense of being all-of-a-piece, my sense of separateness, my sense of self-control and my sense of time are all illusions, conceptions, ideas that are extremely useful in surviving day to day, but ultimately false. If that truth-seeking isn't a spiritual journey, what is?

## Solace in spirituality?

Although it's defined a thousand ways, spirituality is ultimately about belief, and faith. For most who call themselves spiritual, it is about belief in something larger and more important than ourselves and our species, and faith that there is a purpose to our struggle and a meaning to our lives.

I don't understand the need of spiritual people for purpose or meaning or something larger than everything-that-just-is, the need for something to strive for and to progress towards.

My great-great grandfather, who lived through the Long Depression (which lasted from 1873 more or less until 1896) wrote in his diary about his duty to do whatever was necessary to leave things better for his children than they had been for him. This was the era of robber barons, urbanization caused by bankruptcy of family farms, and child labour, an era which followed a period of relative agrarian prosperity and equality. He was spiritual. He had faith that his struggle and belief would be rewarded in the afterlife and through increased opportunity for his children. He never lost his faith. His children and grandchildren would contend with WW I and the Great Depression. Whether he was rewarded in the afterlife is anyone's guess.

“We humans can only be who we are, and who we are is ignorant of complex systems and preoccupied with the needs of the moment.”

We boomers were really the first Western generation in recent history to challenge that faith en masse. Many of us became secular humanists in youth, and believers in the gods of money, markets and technology in middle age. Or were "born again". Most of us have now become salvationists of one kind or another, seeing the world through very different evolved worldviews, and defining life's meaning and their purpose accordingly.

These days we also have the advocates of scientism whose faith is, paradoxically, in scientific certainty and the knowability of everything.<sup>2</sup> Science, its advocates contend, can ultimately solve any problem, reduce everything that can be known to simple equations and perfect models, and allow us to transcend our bodies and live anywhere, forever. It's the new salvationist religion of science that, preposterously, self-identifies as atheistic. The myth of progress expresses itself in many different ways, each with its fervent and unshakable believers.

But every generation has its skeptics, and I think the boomers, the first generation whose rebelliousness was largely celebrated rather than suppressed, has retained more than its share. And just as we have politically moved Beyond Hope, we have culturally and philosophically moved Beyond Belief.

## Beyond Belief

Stephen J Gould argued in *Full House* that the emergence of vertebrates (let alone humanoids), even in a physical environment ideally evolving for life as we know it, was a one-in-millions long shot. If we manage to render life on this planet extinct, he said, there is very little chance of it re-emerging in any fathomable time span, and even if it did re-emerge, it would almost certainly be unrecognizably different from the web of life that emerged from the primordial soup a few billion years ago. Our search for extraterrestrial life (at least in the sense we define the term) is foolish, he would assert, and the search for extraterrestrial "intelligence" (some form of life we could communicate with), is absurd, and based on nothing but faith, a will to believe in something in spite of its staggering improbability.

This does not sit well with people who argue that life tends to emerge and grow in complexity and resist "death" tenaciously whenever and wherever it can. Life, these believers assert, is predestined, the will of all existence. No matter that such belief is tautological.

So what does it mean to be "Beyond Belief"? It means appreciating and embracing complexity, and accepting that we cannot ever hope to fully know, predict or control complex systems (including our bodies and the microcosms within them, and social and ecological systems, and our planet, and all the macrocosms beyond it). It means accepting that in our study of science and technology (including the so-called "social sciences") we may devise interesting and useful, within limits, models of reality, but that these are only absurdly simplistic and limited representations of reality -- stick men on cave walls.

It means challenging everything you are told, everything you believe and everything you want to believe. It means appreciating and accepting what is without pretending or hoping to fathom it. It means becoming humble. It means learning to live without the need for meaning or purpose or progress or something larger and more important than the miracle of what just is, what has evolved from the universe's infinite random walks through possibility.

OK, I used the word 'miracle'. That's pretty spiritual, isn't it?

Nope, afraid not. 'Miracle' comes from the proto-Indo-European word meaning *to wonder* and *to laugh*. That is what awaits those who can let go of their beliefs and faith. To wonder, and to laugh. To notice. To really see. To really be.

Beyond belief, that is all that you need.



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By: Dave Pollard



Anneke Vo takes aim at the sociocultural trends of the millennial era.

# The Spiritual Imprints of Collapse

The role of spirituality in activism, in my experience, seems to be thriving on the fringes of our earth community, yet is often ignored and under-appreciated on the frontlines of the environmental movement.

Since our work relies primarily on factual and pragmatic evidence-based discourse it can be easy to assume there is no room for broader spiritual and philosophical concerns. Who has time to ponder the meaning of life when we've reached 'peak everything' and ecological collapse demands serious preparation? Why should we preoccupy ourselves with the afterlife or supernatural when there are concrete problems to be solved and innocent lives to be saved in the here and now? It's an understandable position, especially when existential humanism is viewed as a 'given' framework in which we are able to mandate human rights and extrapolate personal meaning.

Spiritual perspectives have not been easily reconciled, culturally and historically, with the scientific naturalism, determinism and materialism of the Cartesian-Newton paradigm, which has dominated western thought since the Enlightenment era. Statistically, atheism and agnosticism have risen in educated societies, due to our need for existential security being met by a higher



By: Anne Nguyen

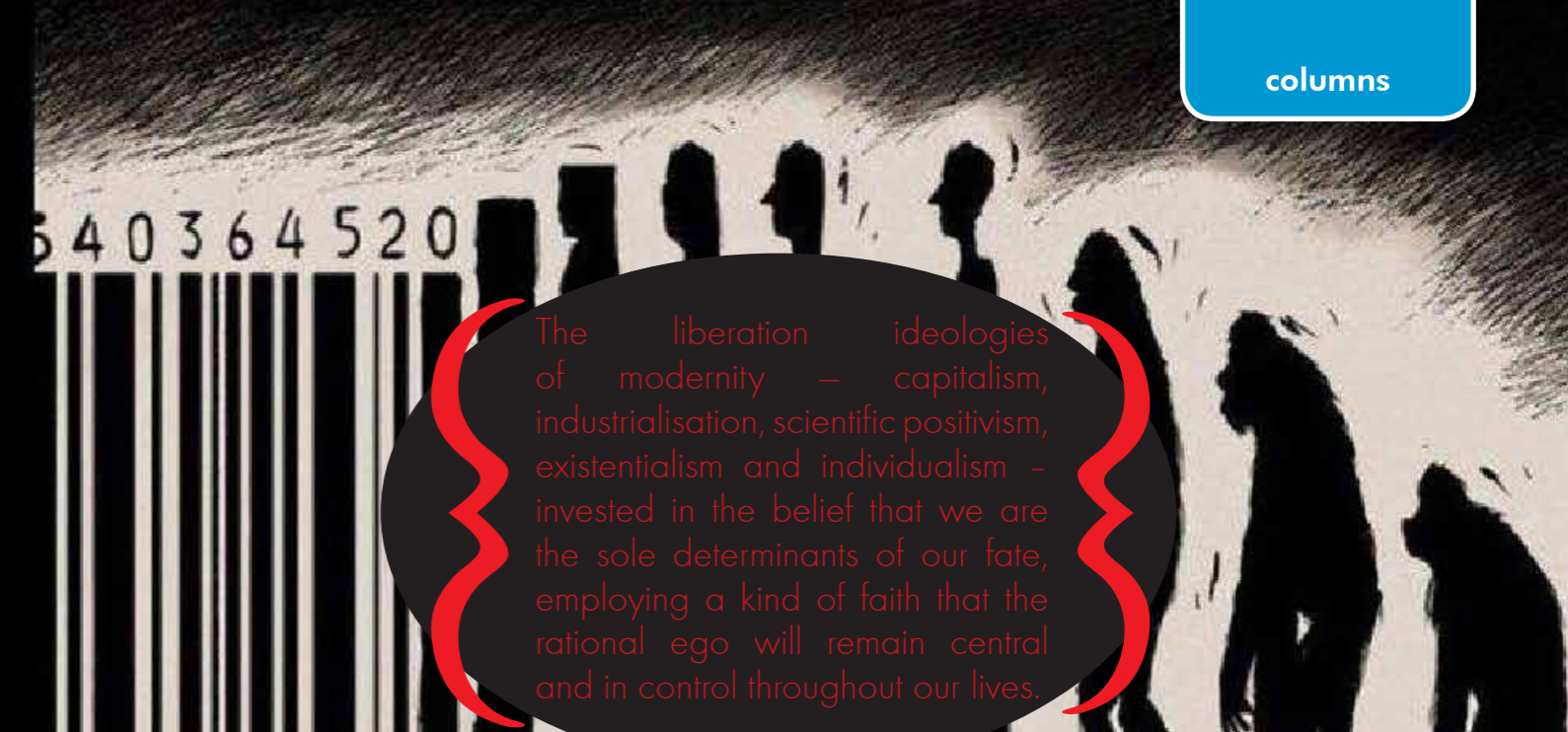
Who has time to ponder the meaning of life when we've reached 'peak everything' and ecological collapse demands serious preparation? Why should we preoccupy ourselves with the afterlife or supernatural when there are concrete problems to be solved and innocent lives to be saved in the here and now?

standard of living. There is a diminished need to depend on a higher power, or think too hard about concepts like 'the soul', since we can afford the resources to strengthen and develop the ego-self or personality.

There's an unspoken assumption that we will be fulfilled if only we jump through all the hoops of training our brains according to the latest neuroscience research, invest in the only self we will ever be, and approach our lives with a sense of urgency because it's the only life we will ever have.

## Evolution of Spirit through the Epochs

In *Cosmos and Psyche*, pioneering cosmology theorist Richard Tarnas refers to a historical schism within the western mind between Romantic and Enlightenment worldviews. Romanticism embodied the soul of western intellectual history; the Enlightenment ruled our schema of objective reality, where a reasoned life of the spirit was valid only within the interior, subjective confines of the modern psyche.



The liberation ideologies of modernity — capitalism, industrialisation, scientific positivism, existentialism and individualism — invested in the belief that we are the sole determinants of our fate, employing a kind of faith that the rational ego will remain central and in control throughout our lives.

Our greatest aspirations for consciousness, manifested through mythic and sensory enchantment within the arts, literature, philosophy and mysticism, seemed to be constructed within an "atomistic void" — a fundamentally impersonal, purposeless and indifferent universe. The liberation ideologies of modernity — capitalism, industrialisation, scientific positivism, existentialism and individualism — invested in the belief that we are the sole determinants of our fate, employing a kind of faith that the rational ego will remain central and in control throughout our lives.

We have built high defenses against the possibility of being accountable to guiding, interdependent principles larger than ourselves — whether that is implicated in our unwillingness to surrender to Gaia's ecological laws, or peer beneath subconscious, archetypal complexes on the soul level. Our times are governed by lack of a unified cosmology and the paradox of our shared humanity.

The irony of spiritual plurality, represented as objective nihilism or moral relativism, remains a liminal construct of the postmodern era. When quantum physics became infatuated with multiverses and supernatural dimensions, evolutionary biology buried god in the carbon-dated soil. Observer bias permeates our most advanced scientific times, yet contemporary philosophy still hungers for an integrated worldview to bridge the existential divide between holism and reductionism, romantic spirit and objective science.

Since the emergence of humanistic and transpersonal psychology in the 1960s and 70s, unconventional faiths and spiritual movements began to gain wider momentum and acceptance in our collective consciousness. The decline of organised religion paved the way for more personally intuitive, eclectic 'salad buffet' approaches to spirituality, while those who retained their faith were permitted to become more open-minded to its mystical, allegorical interpretations. Universal lessons began to be sought out and explored in pursuit of psychospiritual growth from a range of different cultures and wisdom traditions. More commonly among environmentalists and cultural creatives, contemporary spirituality became

integrated within holistic healing modalities, which nurture the "mind-body-spirit" connection, such as meditation, yoga, shamanism, depth psychology and naturopathy.

In later revisions of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the pinnacle of human motivation extended beyond self-actualisation and the fulfillment of personal potential. Mystical or transpersonal dimensions of the self were unravelled through self-transcendence, defined as "seeking to further a cause and experience communion beyond the boundaries of the self through peak experiences." Peak experiences can be understood as enabling the mind to calibrate and awaken to a deeper sense of purpose, inner stillness or psychological "flow." Insights gained from self-transcendent states, such as losing our inhibitions in conscious intimacy, reconnecting with nature, surrendering our ego in altered states, meditation or meaningful service, anchors us within the bigger picture, enabling us to grow through existential lessons from a space of greater presence and compassion.





Faced with modernity's collapse, we are increasingly restless for spiritual meaning and catharsis as a result of excessive bio-psycho-social stress, intergenerational trauma and systemic conditioning, much of which we are exposed to during our early, critical developmental years.

Founder of analytical psychology, Carl Jung, believed that following the formation and eventual disintegration of the ego, the psyche is predisposed to seek transcendence and wholeness. Traditionally, indigenous cultures held communal and shamanic rituals, such as soul retrievals and vision quests to guide them through their journey of individuation. Their concept of 'self' meant being in service to a unified, transpersonal reality or ancestral spirit, which extended beyond individualistic confines of egoic identity and self-interest. In such a worldview, meaning was intrinsically imbued in the fabric of existence, with sacred regard for the earth's anima mundi and its archetypal cycles of separation and reunion, destruction and regeneration, across the vast animated cosmos. Unlike the isolated subjectivity of the modern psyche, an ensouled, luminous, deeply purposeful universe, as envisaged by indigenous cultures, could be synchronistically symbolised and psychologically integrated in the 'objective' world.

Faced with modernity's collapse, we are increasingly restless for spiritual meaning and catharsis as a result of excessive bio-psycho-social stress, intergenerational trauma and systemic conditioning, much of which we are exposed to during our early, critical developmental years.

When introspective spiritual discourse is deliberately excluded in secular institutions, such as healthcare, psychotherapy, social work or education, we neglect an entire dimension of self-awareness, and risk contributing to a culture of spiritual repression and alienation. Spiritual repression denies our compulsively rational minds an inviting space for our intuition to flourish and explore meaningful possibilities, unconsciously delegating them to the shadow. It leads vulnerable people to buy into false gurus, new age delusions or religious fundamentalism in their search for broader spiritual perspectives, which are philosophically relevant, practically transformative and therapeutic in a secular context.

Our relationship with the sacred, ultimately, cannot be prescribed by any external authority, whether it be cultural, religious, scientific or political. The 'eco' spirituality, which

Our relationship with the sacred, ultimately, cannot be prescribed by any external authority, whether it be cultural, religious, scientific or political.

many restless change makers yearn for, bears little semblance to the fixed caricatures and ideological battlegrounds of dogmatic religion, new atheism or metaphysical solipsism. It is concerned with both 'doing' and 'being' more intimately present, worldly and engaged in this life, rather than controlling or escaping above it. In a similar way that the personal is understood to be political, ecospirituality integrates care of the earth with care of the soul. Regardless of how literally or metaphorically we choose to take the notion of spirit, individual self-actualisation and transcendence involves deepening our relationship with the greater whole; reconnecting with our inner truth, shared values for meaningful change and capacity to serve our highest calling.

### What does spirituality mean to you? I'd love to hear your thoughts!

I'm about to launch a community blog, which explores themes of healing and personal growth in the lives of changemakers. If you would like to share your story, feel free to get in touch with me at [missmetanoia@gmail.com](mailto:missmetanoia@gmail.com)

– I look forward to hearing from and being inspired by some of you soon.

### FURTHER READING:

- David Tacey: *Gods and Diseases, The Spirituality Revolution*
- Richard Tarnas: *Cosmos and Psyche*
- <http://academic.udayton.edu/jackbauer/Readings%20595/Koltko-Rivera%2006%20trans%20self-act%20copy.pdf>
- <http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/eco-spirituality-values-based-economic-structure>
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## Mt. Popocatepetl and Mt. Iztaccihuatl, Mexico

Popocatepetl, the 'Smoking Mountain' and Iztaccihuatl, the 'Sleeping Lady' are the two sacred mountains lying to the south-east of Mexico city and the ancient Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan. Popocatepetl, as its name suggests, is a now-extinct volcano whose 5,286 metre-high flanks are home to the ruins of numerous shrines, hinting at its importance as a sacred site for Aztecs and perhaps earlier cultures.

Ancient legend holds that Popocatepetl was a great warrior whose marriage to the fair maiden Iztaccihuatl, the daughter of a tribal king, depended upon his victory in battle with a rival tribe. Although Popocatepetl was victorious, his mission took longer than expected, and rumour spread that he had perished in battle. When Iztaccihuatl heard this she died of grief, and upon his return Popocatepetl laid her body atop a mountain range. Overcome with grief himself, Popocatepetl climbed the adjacent peak, keeping eternal watch over his lost love with a smoking torch.

Photo courtesy of Anwar Vazquez from Flickr

3

## Purnululu, Kimberley, Western Australia

Not even 'discovered' by white man until the 1980's this sacred site, home to the Kitja people, is still relatively inaccessible. Purnululu is the name given to the range of orange and grey-striped beehive-shaped karst sandstone domes that reach as high as 578 metres above sea level.

The Kitja have been based in this remote region of Australia's wild north west for at least 20,000 years, and their rock art and ancient burial sites are dotted about the region. Kitja dreaming stories explain the creation of Purnululu's sandstone structures, gorges and waterfalls through narratives that describe the formation of the landscape by the creatures that have long inhabited the land.

Scientific explanations for the spectacular striped appearance of the rock formations include the biological processes of cyanobacteria. The differences in clay content and porosity of the sandstone is key: the grey bands are composed of cyanobacteria growing on the surface of layers of sandstone where moisture accumulates, while the orange bands consist of oxidized iron ore compounds, drying out too quickly for cyanobacteria to multiply.

Photo courtesy of David from Flickr

# Top 10: Sacred Sites

Excited though we are to feast our eyes and minds on some of the world's most stunning sacred sites, it's probably best we digress early with a disclaimer: there's no way in the world we could aim to provide an objective run-down of the world's top ten most sacred sites. Sacredness is in the eye, heart and mind of the beholder, and all we can do is share our inspiration.

So with a subjective eye for sacred treasure and a rummage around some of the less-obvious corners of the globe, what we present here is a selection of ten sacred sites we think are especially stunning – hopefully stunning enough to ignite a flame of passion for Mother Earth. The stirring stories that accompany these sacred sites speak of ancient spiritual connections to the land that still inspire awe today.

Selected for their natural beauty, importance to local cultures, and the stories told about them, here are ten of the world's most spectacular sacred sites, and their stories...

1

## Mt. Olympus, Olympus Range, Greece

Home of the twelve Olympian gods of ancient Greece, Mount Olympus began its life in legend, only later becoming associated with a particular peak in Greece's highest mountain range.

Among the deities dwelling upon the mythic mount were Zeus, king of the gods, his wife Hera, his brothers Poseidon and Hades, his sisters Demeter and Hestia, and his children Apollo, Artemis, Ares, Aphrodite, Athena, Hermes, and Hephaestus.

These Olympian gods and goddesses were understood as archetypes representing various aspects of the multi-faceted human psyche, and worshipped by invoking and amplifying those aspects in the behaviour of the worshipper.

Zeus was the god of mind and the intellect, a protector of strangers and the sanctity of oaths; Hera was a goddess of fertility; Apollo represented law and order, and the principles of moderation in moral, social and intellectual matters; Ares represented the dark, bloodthirsty aspect of human nature; Aphrodite was a goddess of love and overwhelming passions; Athena was spiritual wisdom incarnate; Hermes was the god of travellers, and of sleep, dreams and prophecy; and Hephaestus was the god of the arts and fire.

Photo courtesy of stefg74 from Flickr

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## Wat Tham Suea (Tiger Cave Temple), Krabi, Thailand

Wat Tham Suea (the Tiger Cave Temple) is a Buddhist cave temple in the soaring karst of Krabi in the south of Thailand.

One of the most sacred Buddhist sites in the province, its name comes from the discoveries of tiger paw prints on the cave walls, and legend has it that a huge tiger used to roam the cave.

The temple itself is a Thai Buddhist meditation centre, and holds archaeological and historical significance thanks to stone tools, pottery remains, and so-called Buddha footprints found there.

The journey to the top of the karst involves climbing a steep jungle staircase of 1,256 steps (many of them very steep), dotted with hidden shrines. Accompanied on the ascent by the resident monkeys who make it look easy, the stretch to the summit is a 25-minute climb for the fit. The view from the 278m high summit is breathtaking thanks to both the effort and the reward. It is easy to see why many of the other caves in the region's dramatic karst landscape are not accessible to visitors.



Photo courtesy of Jeremy Foster from Flickr

## Devil's Tower, Wyoming, USA

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Jutting abruptly from the flat surrounding terrain, Devil's Tower has been a sacred place for Indigenous tribes since prehistoric times, known to the First Nations as Mateo Tepee, or Grizzly Bear Lodge. The tower is the remnant of a volcanic extrusion that occurred 60-70 million years ago.

A greatly honoured 'vision quest' site for Indians, both past and present, Devil's Tower has reportedly treated many modern-day visitors to strange light phenomena above the summit, and even UFO sightings, for the true believers.

One of the many ancient legends – common to the Kiowa, Arapaho, Crow, Cheyenne and Sioux tribes – has it that seven young girls were one day playing in the forest when a great bear came upon them and gave chase. As the girls ran the bear gained on them, and, realizing the hopelessness of their situation, they jumped upon a low rock and prayed to the Great Spirit to save them. The rock then grew upward toward the sky, lifting the girls to safety; the bear jumped up against the sides of the growing tower, leaving deep claw marks as he tried to reach the girls. The tower continued to soar toward the sky until the girls were pushed up into the heavens where they became the seven stars of the Pleiades constellation.

Photo courtesy of Bradley Davis from Flickr

## Externsteine, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany



Photo courtesy of Andreas DI from Flickr

The mysterious Externsteine rocks, a chain of towering sandstone spires dating from the Cretaceous period, are one of the most debated archaeological sites of central Europe. Externsteine is the geomantic centre of the ancient sacred region of Teutoburg district, the historically claimed sacred heartland of Germany, home to heroic myths and pilgrimage.

Believed to be a sanctuary for nomadic reindeer hunters, Externsteine is also the site of ancient pagan rituals performed there until the 8th century AD. The remains of a prehistoric temple are preserved atop the tallest rock spire, and archaeological excavations have recovered stone tools dating to before 10,000 BC.

The temple itself, constructed according to astronomical orientations, aligns with a view of the moon at its northern extreme and the sun at sunrise on the summer solstice.

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## Gunung Agung, Gunung Batur & Lake Batur Bali, Indonesia

Bali's highest volcanic mountain at 3,142 metres, Gunung Agung is part of a range of towering volcanic peaks that includes three other sacred mountains, including Gunung Batur.

Gunung Agung, considered most sacred by the island's Hindu population, is believed to be the home of Batara Gunung Agung, the supreme manifestation of Shiva. Agung dominates the surrounding area, influencing the climate by taking the water from the western clouds, leaving the west of the island lush and verdant and the east dry and barren.

In contrast, Gunung Batur is considered most holy by the indigenous population of the remote jungles surrounding Lake Batur, a 4,240-acre freshwater lake. Gunung Batur and Lake Batur are both sacred to Dewi Danu, the Goddess of the Lake, who is regarded as the provider of irrigation water in the form of bubbling natural springs that flow from the lower slopes of Gunung Batur and irrigate the whole of central Bali.

Photo courtesy of Sean Hamlin from Flickr

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## Kata-Tjuta, Northern Territory, Australia

Not as well-known as its neighbour, the towering monolith of Uluru, but at least as spectacular, Kata-Tjuta is a collection of 36 domes of varying types of rock, including granite, sandstone, and basalt. The tallest point – Mt Olga – reaches 1,066m above sea level, making it 198m higher than Uluru.

Archaeological evidence suggests the area has been inhabited by humans for at least 20,000 years, and just as Uluru is sacred to the Anangu people of the Pitjantjatjara land, so is Kata-Tjuta, whose name means 'many heads' in Pitjantjatjara.

Legend has it that the rocks were built during the creation period, and are still inhabited by ancestor spirits. Rituals and ceremonies are still conducted in various locations of Kata-Tjuta, although much of the mythology is not disclosed to uninitiated outsiders. As with Uluru, it is requested that people do not climb on the rocks out of respect for their spiritual significance, and that photos not be taken of certain sacred sites.

Photo courtesy of Maarten Danial from Flickr

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## Salar de Uyuni, Potosi, Bolivia

Perched high in the Altiplano at 3,720 metres Salar de Uyuni, the great salt lake of southern Bolivia, only holds water for a few weeks or months each year. A massive expanse of 10,582 square kilometres, it is the world's largest salt flat.

Silent and shimmering white, the crush of salt crystals beneath your feet supply the only sound, and shimmering mirages on the horizon in every direction lend Salar de Uyuni its otherworldly feel. In the centre of the lake lies the small island of Isla Inkawasi, a sharp crag of black volcanic rock contrasted against the misty purple mountains in the distance. Few environments provide such a profound sense of calm and inner peace.

Aymara legend holds that the surrounding mountains – Tunupa, Kusku and Kusina – were once giant people. Tunupa married Kusku who ran away from her to be with Kusina. In her grief, Tunupa began to cry while breast-feeding their son, and as her tears mixed with the milk they formed the great Salar.

Photo courtesy of Luca Galuzzi from Flickr

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## Mount Kailash, Tibet Autonomous Region

This soaring peak in the Gangdise mountain range of western Tibet is sacred to Buddhists, Hindus and Jains. Buddhists believe Kailas to be the home of Buddha Demchog, who represents supreme bliss; Hindus believe it is the residence of Lord Shiva and the land of eternal bliss; and Jains believe it is the site where the first Jain attained nirvana.

Although some hardy believers make the pilgrimage to Kailas, the four-day journey over the inhospitable plateau to the remote site means it is not a trip for the faint-hearted. Most pilgrims attempt the journey either on foot or with the help of a pony or yak, and complete their pilgrimage with a 52km circuit of the base of the mountain. While Hindus and Buddhists approach the circuit in a clockwise manner, Jains do so in a counter-clockwise direction. There is no record of anyone attempting to climb Mount Kailas, and rumours abound as to why not.

Some pilgrims believe that the circuit should be completed in a single day, which amounts to 15 hours trekking time for a person in good shape walking fast. Other pilgrims place even harsher demands on themselves, performing full-body prostrations over the entire length of the circuit, a process that takes at least four weeks of physical endurance.

Photo courtesy of Yasunori Koide from Flickr

# DISSOLVING FASCISM



# WITH HUMANITY

A reflection on a new way of living seventy years after the fall of Nazi Germany.



The fascist madman cannot be made innocuous if [...] he is not tracked down in oneself; if we are not conversant with the social institutions that hatch him daily.”<sup>(1)</sup>

– Wilhelm Reich

Seventy years ago on May 8th 1945, with the conquest of Berlin, the Third Reich and the Second World War ended in Europe. The massacres that happened under Hitler break all the categories of conventional thinking – the horror of it has been almost too difficult to grasp, and so the trauma of National Socialism remains unresolved to this day in the suppressed psychological underground of German society.

For the sake of rebuilding civil society after the devastation of war, many German citizens have had to suppress the horror. But a significant number of activists have been so deeply shaken they have kept the knowledge of the horror alive – sacredly vowing to ensure that there would be ‘never again fascism; never again war’. With the establishment of the United Nations and the Declaration of Human Rights, it was hoped that a renewal of humility and peaceful civility throughout Europe would be sustained once and for all.

How much of this hope remains to this day? Seventy years after Hitler’s death there still is gross inhumanity throughout the world. A global slave trade, mass starvation, and millions of refugees displaced by war and poverty are just some of the extreme injustices of our time.

More than one million civilians have died in the Middle East in the wars following September 11th 2001. Entire countries were bombed to ash, accompanied by torture, rape, and sadistic excess. Obama continues this insanity with his drone crusades, a mechanized assassination campaign on a colossal scale. Europe currently lives under imminent threat



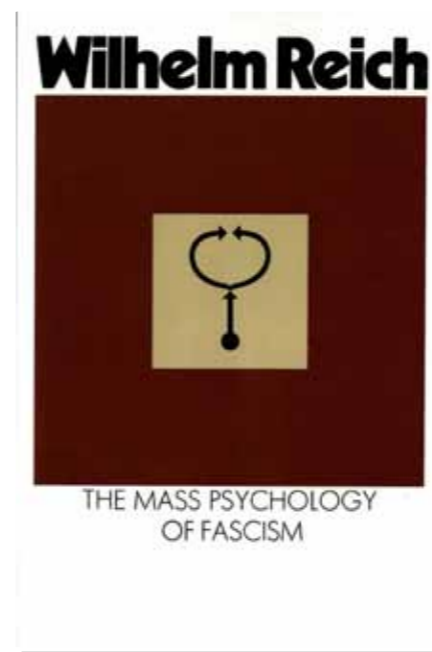
of once again becoming the scene of war. In the confrontation between the West and Russia there is a return to an even more potent cold war, with the danger of nuclear war in Europe emerging once more.

The impoverishment of ever larger sectors of the population is unravelling social cohesion in both Europe and North America – all while a powerful cohort of capitalist elites accumulate wealth on an unprecedented scale. Many people no longer have any prospect for meeting even their most basic needs. There is now a latent seething anger toward a ‘corrupt ruling class’ in a social climate which can be compared to the situation at the end of the Weimar Republic.

Extreme economic injustice paves the way for a return to fascism. We are now seeing the rise of right-wing neo-fascist parties in Greece, France, Hungary. How can we be so certain that there won’t be another fascist eruption to mirror 1933? Already some years back, Noam Chomsky warned:

*“The mood of the country is frightening. The level of anger, frustration and hatred of institutions is not organized in a constructive way. (...) If somebody comes along who is charismatic and honest this country is in real trouble (...). What are people supposed to think if someone says ‘I have got an answer, we have an enemy’? There it was the Jews. Here it will be the illegal immigrants and the blacks. We will be told that white males are a persecuted minority. We will be told we have to defend ourselves and the honor of the nation. Military force will be exalted. People will be beaten up. This could become an overwhelming force.”<sup>(2)</sup>*

During the global economic crisis of the 1920’s-30’s, communists held a firm conviction that the obvious failure of capitalism and the worsening social misery of the working class would logically need to result in a Socialist revolution. Instead, history proved otherwise – the German masses were swept up in the extreme fascist counter-revolution of Hitler’s Nazism.



## The latent structure of violence: the basis of fascism in the human character

The novel ‘The Wave’ by Todd Strasser is based on a true story from a California high school in 1967. Ron Jones, a young history teacher, conducted a mocked-up experiment with his students on the dynamics of the Third Reich. He imposed a strict system of rules, harsh punishment, and even a pretend secret police. His class was transformed into a movement following the motto “Strength through discipline! strength through community! strength through action! strength through pride!”<sup>(3)</sup> Incredible enthusiasm spread and more and more students from other classes joined in. The introverted students, the ones who had never before had a say – the nobodies – suddenly become somebody and so ‘the wave’ rose up and gave new meaning to their lives. Violence continued to spread and it did not take long for the situation to spin out of control. Participants of the group began to beat up fellow students who did not want to join in. Overnight average kids were transformed into a raging crowd.

During the days of the Third Reich, normally polite family fathers were transformed into concentration camp killers. Where does the fascination for such a collective destructive force originate? Who of us that honestly searches inwardly and asks, ‘what would I have done in such a situation,’ could be certain we would not do the same?

I joined the anti-fascist movement in Dresden after a neo-Nazi party (the NPD) was elected into state parliament with nearly ten percent of the vote. I wanted to rise up against the spreading fascist scene. In demonstrations against Nazism we too experienced the potential for violence hidden within ourselves – the exhilaration to fight against the opponent, whether they were fascists or policemen, to surround them, to attack them and to finish them off.

I began to understand that while fighting fascists I became fascist. I realised I needed to leave this scene fast or lose my ethical integrity. Others in our group felt the same. So what is it within the human being that allows us to break all barriers of wisdom and reason? What is it that transforms us into violent monsters in such extraordinary situations?

In my search for an explanation, amongst the important contributions like those of peace researcher Dieter Duhm<sup>(4)</sup>, I came across a book published in 1933 – “The Mass Psychology of Fascism” by Wilhelm Reich, an Austrian psychoanalyst and communist who was influenced by Sigmund Freud. In it Reich writes:

*“With respect to man’s character, ‘fascism’ is the basic emotional attitude of a suppressed man in an authoritarian machine civilization.”<sup>(5)</sup>*

Your violence is only  
a silent cry for love.  
Your military boots  
long for tenderness.  
Because you are  
afraid of cuddling –  
you are a fascist.

When human beings are denied expression of our elementary emotional needs from early childhood; when we are harshly rejected in the places we seek protection or trust; when we are punished with violence for expressing our natural drives; when our societal institutions including our education system and the military do not honour us as human beings; when we are reduced to a role of unquestioned obedience – an indescribable pain and anger grows in the psyche.

We find this dark shadow in countless biographies such as the work Alice Miller, a Swiss psychologist and expert in childhood abuse. The dark shadow exists in sexual perpetrators and dictators – it may even exist within the supposed normalcy of domestic family life. When this latent violence is collectively experienced by an entire nation a murderous potential of hatred and blocked aggression arises in a society. Like an erupting volcano, mass rage is vented against a perceived enemy.

### Political channelling of blocked life energies

The elites in an imperialistic fascist system know that this psychological 'underground' exists in the populace, and they use it to build power. National Socialism used similar mechanisms that the United States now does in the so called 'war on terror' propaganda. The apparatus of violence could not be maintained without this subconscious resonance in humanity.

What would Hitler have been without the projections of millions of enraged Germans? What transformed the impoverished postcard painter from Austria into the 'Führer' of the 'Aryan race'? Did the demonic power of blocked life energy in the entire population become manifest in the expression of Nazi ideology? Hitler and his elite did not care about democratic debate in the least – they took advantage of this emotionally charged agitation in the populace, exposing human vulnerability for their own interest.

What happened between 1933 and 1945 in Germany was the cruel culmination of an epochal madness embodied in a 6,000 year-long history of patriarchal war in the region. After millennia where the experiences of escape, genocide, rape and war have time and time again been impregnated into the human soul, present day society still lives under a genetic program of fear, defensiveness, mistrust, and violence.

This historical legacy – the morphogenetic field of war – dominates humanity to this very day, passed on from generation to generation. The perpetrators today are the victims of yesterday; the victims of today are the perpetrators of tomorrow – until we recognize this insanity and break the cycle.

### The authoritarian character

In all patriarchal societies Wilhelm Reich discovered more or less the same structures of authoritarian character. On the surface such an authoritarian human being is 'reserved, polite, compassionate, responsible and conscientious in manner' <sup>(6)</sup>. There would be no societal problem if this superficial layer were connected with the authentic centre of the human being, a 'biological core,' from which our true drives and impulses originate. If this were the case, the human species would be ever faithful to truth, sexually free, loving, and creative without double standards and a hidden potential of violence. Authenticity and a natural moral concern would emerge without the need for a moral codex; ethical behaviour would emerge from life itself. However, between this biological centre and the facade of social norms of behaviour, there is a suppressed, subconscious layer in between which is "cruel, sadistic, lascivious, rapacious and envious" <sup>(7)</sup>.

The nuclear family was in Wilhelm Reich's time the key societal institution perpetuating this double-edged sword of a clean outward appearance concealing a darker sexual inhibition within. Children in particular are strongly influenced by environments that force conformity and inhibit their elementary life energy, so they develop 'body armour' to protect themselves. Their life energy comes from a biological core – the impulse of movement, learning, sexuality and creativity. In an inhibited environment this energy becomes distorted and misaligned with an authentic human expression.

One has to imagine how this affects the soul of a child. They are punished by parental authority to which they have surrendered. The child innately loves this same authority figure in the parent with the expression of a pure joy of life, and so they are incredibly vulnerable. The child cannot understand this dynamic yet, and so there is inner confusion which cannot be easily resolved. The sexual life force that had been joyful and fascinating becomes associated with rejection. Parental

With respect to  
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machine civilization.

authority has transformed it into something threatening, frightening, disgusting – to the point where it triggers a fear of death. In order to survive this fear, the child lives in an inner contradiction between internal drives, inner longing and life energy on the one side, and a judgemental voice of internalized parental authority on the other.

And so the structural lie begins. Continuing into adulthood, we suppress and feel ashamed that which triggers joy and authenticity within us. This rigid inner social order needs to end. It is the core from which violence arises.

Though the twentieth century legacy of authoritarian German rule is over, an underlying repressive force is still present – it is just much more subtle and pervasive. While many no longer grow up in a traditional nuclear family, instead living in more diversified arrangements like single-parent homes, even then repression emerges. The well-meaning parent can become stressed and overworked by the continual pressure of an enforced work ethic, unable to create a loving environment for the child. Simultaneously, children are bombarded by a mass-marketing machine flooded with stimuli designed to indoctrinate the child into a life of obedient consumerism. Today in the twenty first century, the ideology of economic progressivism above all has become the dominant exploiter of the vulnerable.

## Psychological archetypes of fascism

National Socialism operated within a set of psychological archetypes that radiated an almost irresistible attraction for people with an authoritarian inclination. These archetypes originated from the neurotic internal realm in which they had grown up. In an almost mystical ecstasy people submitted themselves to the 'Führer' and found in him the strong father that would love them in a way that their own parents had not. They found a home in the 'Aryan national family.' In the Nazis' mystical symbolism the nation was synonymous with the nurturing mother they never truly had.

Once the 'Nazi community' was embodied in the nation, a race to purify it was under way. In a classic underlying potential for sadistic violence, the 'blood poisoning' of the Aryan people was the direct reflection of a subconscious panic to be absolved of sexual impurity and perversion. Paradoxically, attempts to purify society of these vices led not to an introspective re-evaluation of social norms, but instead it looked to find blame outside of the community — and so minority racial groups were targeted. The polite, moralistic surface of bourgeois society was merely the pseudo-moralistic undercurrent of a perverted substratum of German society.

So long as society is full of broken souls, of people who cannot not find an authentic self-expression within their society, totalitarian ideologies find fertile ground. Does the development of the Islamic State in the Middle East display the hallmark of a similar urgency? What does it tell us about the inner constitution of our own society that thousands of young men from Europe voluntarily join the Islamic State, a military force that is transforming large parts of the Middle East into a terror regime through brutality, crucifixion, and mass rape? We find the same structures in a much more subtle manner in our own society of 'freedom' and 'democracy' where the true concepts are vapourised and the words become a facade for global capitalist expansion.

So long as people live in social systems that co-opt their authenticity there is potential for fascist eruption. So long as the cohesion of a society, community, or movement requires the exclusion of minorities as chosen scapegoats it is still structurally fascist. The same applies wherever an authority exercises violence against unprotected people — when the masses are passive spectators.

We experience this lack of engagement in our direct surrounding, yet we also witness it on a much larger scale as a general lack of compassion for the destiny of humankind, other living creatures, and even our planet. How many people drown monthly in the Mediterranean Sea at the contrived borders of the European Union while our security forces do nothing? Hans de Boer, who served in the resistance against Hitler in his youth later reported on the cruel structures of dominance inherent in globalized capitalism, stating that "indifference is the fascism of our time."<sup>(8)</sup>

A more subtle totalitarian system can operate to this day when the citizens become indifferent to active participation in genuine political, democratic and social life. Embedded indifference makes it easier for the elites who hold power to destabilize and exploit nations in resource-rich regions of the world. So a fictitious societal norm is presented as being 'open and tolerant' with the use of euphemisms like 'sustainable development'. It is based on an unspoken agreement as to what is acceptable and what is not.

If one dares to go even an inch beyond this convention and ask questions that threaten the ideological foundation of society, challenging its official narratives, one's public reputation can be instantly ruined.

## What can be done about the rise of neo-Fascism?

Neither political appeals nor moral indignation can structurally overcome fascism. We do not need preaching words. We need a new direction for the high voltage powers of the human soul, a perspective for transforming the latent violence within ourselves. Die Ärzte, a German punk band struck at the core when they sang "Your violence is only a silent cry for love. Your military boots long for tenderness. Because you are afraid of cuddling — you are a fascist."<sup>(9)</sup>

Would these young men really join the Islamic State? And in the Germany of seventy years ago, would millions have become Nazis had they a true perspective for love? If we want to live without cruelty, we need to make a space where people don't have to justify a boundless longing for love, sexuality, acceptance, adventure, and community — with violence.

It is not our human nature that is brutal, but the suppression of our human nature. When a concrete flood channel breaks its banks causing devastation, the question is: what is violent? Is it the water, or is it the narrow channel which the water was forced to move through? Both the water in a channel and human energy in a mechanised system are similar in that eventually they must be liberated. When water is allowed to flow freely across the land it restores the fertility of the soil. Once the flood is over, a river brings new life. At times it may expand and at others contract, but the river does not destroy the surrounding land — it nurtures and fertilizes it. The same is true for a young child. Given freedom of expression in an environment of trust and authenticity the child can orient his or her true nature with clarity and let the power within flow outwards to express humanity and compassion. Such a child will grow into adulthood and be intolerant of a totalitarian regime.

By and large, a person will not intentionally hurt another when from an early age they have known what true trust and acceptance is.

More and more people around the world recognize the absence of a solution within the existing systems and are searching for a new way. As Wilhelm Reich would have said, by reconnecting to our true nature we can finally overcome our historic trauma.

*"The misery is enormous, but nevertheless, I often walk late in the evening when the day behind me has sunken away into profundity. I walk with whipping steps along the barbed wire and then it wells up out of my heart again and again — I cannot help it, it is the way it is, it is of an elementary power: life is something wonderful and big, later we have to build up a whole new world — and each further crime and each further cruelty we have to contrast with a further piece of love and goodness which we have to conquer within ourselves."*

Overcoming the structure of fear in our society is an existential issue for our collective survival. The very political and economic mechanisms we live under are destroying the basis for life and even the planet itself. We need a planetary movement that is able to unite human energy in the unity of social justice — one that sets the foundation for non-violence and sustainable living on our planet.

We need a convincing methodology that can be practically realised in order to change the way we relate to each other in a more trusting and cooperative way to once and for all free ourselves from our mechanised prison. Ultimately, however, the shift from a pattern of structural violence to a pattern of compassion and trust means redesigning our society from the ground up.

In Dieter Duhm's latest book "Terra Nova: Globale Revolution und Heilung der Liebe" (translated as "Terra Nova: Global Revolution and the Healing of Love"), he outlines a global peace strategy: 'the Healing Biotores Plan'. Duhm writes (translated), "Society will shift to cooperation and solidarity through processes of trust and community building that are innate within our evolutionary core."<sup>(10)</sup> So an inner transformation simultaneously takes place alongside an outer transformation.

We need new economic, ecological, technological systems that have a nonviolent relationship toward the biosphere that can sustainably supply our basic needs and the needs of other living things on our planet. It will involve a space where fear vanishes — and with it hostility and violence. Instead of the adversarial, competitive, mechanised system we live under today, our new system expresses our elemental cooperative core. And so a new chapter of our evolution begins — the era of the engaged, spiritual human being.

I would like to conclude with a translated passage by Etty Hillesum, a young Jewish Dutch woman, which was written in her diary shortly before her execution in Auschwitz 1943. Her words are a legacy and an assignment for us all. Never again fascism; never again war!

**Etty Hillesum**  
(15 Jan 1914 - 30 Nov 1943)

*"The misery is enormous, but nevertheless, I often walk late in the evening when the day behind me has sunken away into profundity. I walk with whipping steps along the barbed wire and then it wells up out of my heart again and again — I cannot help it, it is the way it is, it is of an elementary power: life is something wonderful and big, later we have to build up a whole new world — and each further crime and each further cruelty we have to contrast with a further piece of love and goodness which we have to conquer within ourselves."<sup>(11)</sup>*



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## The Overthinker

Kari McGregor urges a rethink of the cultural stories and practices we take for granted.

**"Ecology and spirituality are fundamentally connected, because deep ecological awareness, ultimately, is spiritual awareness."**

**- Fritjof Capra**

# A Deeper Shade of Green

Environmentalism — once radical and ecocentric — has mainstreamed itself into a movement of eco-pragmatists. Discourse is diluted to a paler shade of green that fits safely within the parameters of a consumption-oriented growth economy, and we chip away at the symptoms of our ecological crisis while the root remains intact.

As the movement pulls resources toward its centre of gravity the fringes are frozen out and alternative perspectives get lost. More radical perspectives are treated with disdain, and the worldviews underpinning them are not taken seriously — instead often denigrated as extremist.

But to be radical means to address an issue at its root, and it is only when we take stock of root causes that we are adequately positioned to respond to our crisis.

Biased by an anthropocentric worldview, the mainstream environment movement — albeit unconsciously — holds humans to be rightfully 'in charge', responsible for curating and apportioning the natural world according to human need and desire. Nature is viewed primarily as a collection of resources whose value depends on their utility to humans. This worldview poses no challenge to a materialistic, consumption-oriented growth economy, and thus is impotent in resolving our predicament. Mainstream environmentalism has become business as usual with a light green veneer.

A deeper kind of inquiry is needed, and it involves tuning in to the natural world, reconnecting with our place in the web of life, and realising that separateness is just an illusion.

then we would come to appreciate the intrinsic value of biological diversity. This, he hoped, would provide a more solid framework for conservation of the biosphere than the utilitarian, pragmatic thinking of the mainstream.

For decades western environmentalists have effectively raised awareness of the various environmental issues of their time, but they have failed to address the underlying cultural and philosophical roots of the problem. Naess argued that a failure to acknowledge and unpack the presumptions and attitudes underpinning the developed western world — the same presumptions and attitudes that had led to our environmental crisis — was holding the environment movement back.

Although today's Deep Green activists have earned themselves a reputation for being the new radicals of the environment movement — thanks to their commitment to deep ecological sustainability and pulling our destructive system up at the roots — it is their ecocentric worldview that defines their shade of green as deep. For Deep Greens, it is the notion that humans are superior to or separate from the web of life that seems extreme. The reality that we are equal and interdependent underlies Deep Greens' fierce protectiveness of the sanctity of nature, and their willingness to take direct action to preserve it.

Deep Greens don't aim to tweak at the system; they aim to undermine it, disrupt it, and facilitate its eventual transformation.

Giving shape to the concept of deep ecological sustainability are three simple ethical propositions:

1. Preservation of wilderness
2. Human population stabilisation
3. One-planet living

## Preservation of wilderness

Humans dominate the Earth to an extent few are really aware of. Biodiversity is diminishing, and our extinction crisis is in no small part down to our clearing of ever more wilderness to further develop the human enterprise. If survival of any part of the web of life is dependent upon the whole, then we are playing a dangerous game.

Deep ecology holds that the all life — human and nonhuman — holds intrinsic value, independent of any utility for human purposes. As the richness and diversity of life are integral to the flourishing of the biosphere as a whole, it is only acceptable to disturb nature to the extent necessary to satisfy vital needs.

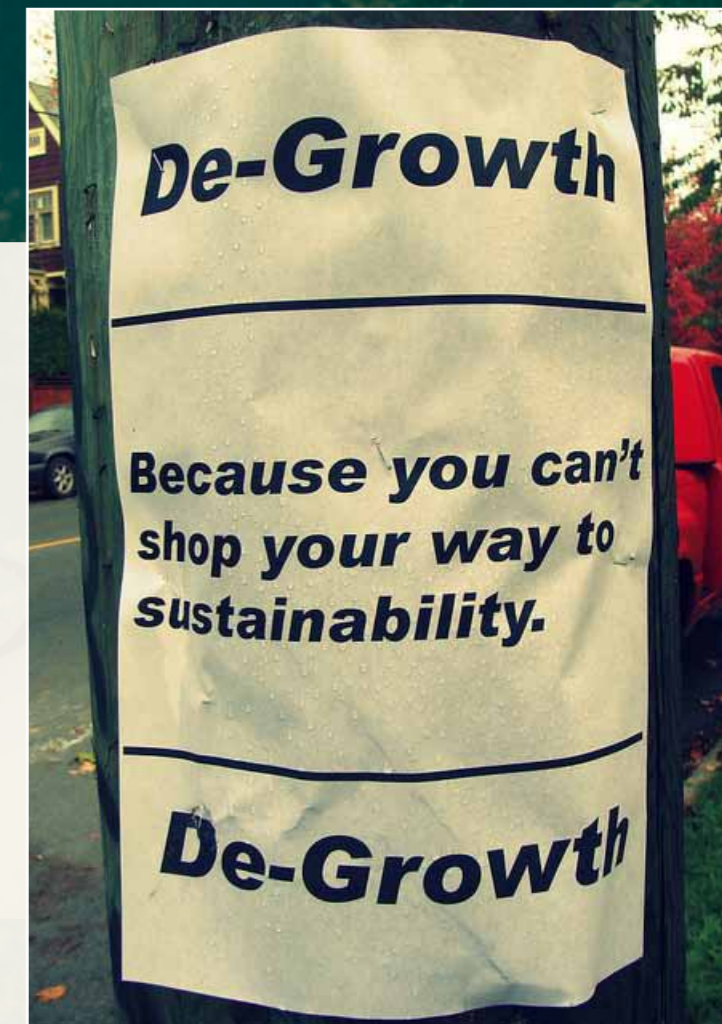
Allowing the natural world to slip from the perceived grasp of human control and re-wild itself requires surrender to the reality that we do not have ultimate control. Author and activist Derrick Jensen advocates for this ecocentric approach, arguing that we will need to relinquish our perceived position as superior to nature, and recognize ourselves as simply a part of it.

Jensen invites us to tune in to nature's frequency — to observe and listen to what the natural world is telling us. Most westerners interpret the idea of listening to nature as just a metaphor, but Jensen insists that it is literal, making reference to indigenous cultures whose way of life is in tune with their landbase, who understand the world as a network of living beings with whom we can enter into a relationship. It is therefore within reach for us to genuinely commune with nature, and not just take from it.

## Human population stabilization

At present, human interference with the nonhuman world is placing such strain on the environment that many bioregions are stretched to breaking point, and four of nine planetary boundaries have been breached. For nonhuman life to have the space to flourish, a substantial decrease in human population is needed so that we are not out-competing other species in the struggle for survival.

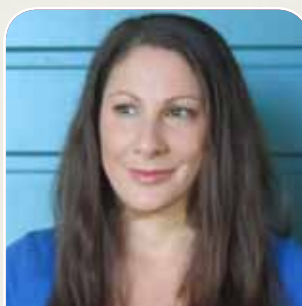
Deep ecological thinker and author Daniel Quinn — best known for his novel *Ishmael* — warns of population overshoot thanks to agricultural productivity. This agricultural productivity then stimulates further population growth, in turn stimulating the need for further agricultural production, hence



domination of more of the Earth's surface to sustain the human population. He refers to this as totalitarian agriculture, and suggests that we are destined for a human population crash as a result of overshooting the Earth's carrying capacity.

Whether or not Quinn is right is less important than whether we choose to mitigate for a potential crash, or come to regret our complacency when we discover how far we have overshot — the hard way. It makes no sense to just wait and see if the consequences are as dire as predicted.

Arguably population politics should be less a matter of squeezing as many humans as possible onto an inarguably finite planet, and more a matter of pinpointing the factors that encourage humans to reproduce at replacement rate only — such as equitable wealth distribution and women's sovereign reproductive rights and economic emancipation.



By: Kari McGregor

## Deep ecology

Deep ecology, a school of thought whose name was coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, distinguishes between deep and shallow ecological thinking. Naess believed that if people were to understand the complexity of nature

## One-planet living

Derrick Jensen calls out some of the values most championed by the dominant global culture, including technological development, economic growth, and the inevitability of progress. If we are to rein in the human enterprise to the scale of a single planet we will have to make some sacrifices. One-planet living requires changes at both the personal and policy level that will affect economic, technological and ideological structures.

The ideological change required is primarily concerned with appreciating quality of life, rather than adhering to a pathway of linear development with the expectation of increasingly higher standards of living. The embrace of a simpler life — along with its benefits of more time for family, community, creativity and leisure — renders technological downshifting and economic degrowth a politically simpler task.

Because environmental degradation is gradual, the point at which we ought to respond to the crisis is indiscernible; so we accept the creeping normality of escalating degradation like boiling frogs, never quite convinced that now is the time to respond. One planet living is a purposeful way of life that is not directly tied to a crisis or a particular trigger point, and whose enactment is gradual, scalable, and immediately tangible.

## Deeper, towards the root

Daniel Quinn argues that the term 'environmentalism' itself presents a false dichotomy — as though we are somehow separate from the environment. He labels the notion that humans are separate from and superior to nature as "the most dangerous idea in existence" — dangerous because it renders us ignorant to the effects of increased human population, consumption and domination on the rest of the web of life.

The notion that we are separate from the rest of the natural world is only one of the many stories of the dominant global culture that keep us on our current pathway. Some of the most powerful stories that underpin our way of life include the myth of human dominion over nature, the notion that there is one 'right way' to live, and the belief that humans are innately flawed.

Deepening our shade of green means coming to terms with the history of humankind: how we came to be a dominant force ushering in a new era — the anthropocene — from our humble origins among the countless other species that make up the web of life. Our desire for security and comfort has led us to pad our nests to the extent that we are oblivious to our connection to nature, and in denial of our own fragility when left to the mercy of the elements.

But we are not exempt from the forces that shape nature, and we are not in control. Surrendering to our own uniquely human niche in the web of life is at once humbling and liberating, and is the beginning of our return journey toward harmony.



## Further reading

- *Endgame*, by Derrick Jensen
- *The Culture of Make Believe*, by Derrick Jensen
- *Ishmæel*, by Daniel Quinn
- *Silent Spring*, by Rachel Carson
- *The Tao of Physics*, by Fritjof Capra



## Doing it Ourselves

Theo Kitchener turns theory into practice with straightforward solutions to society's problems.

# A GROUNDED SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality, to me, means practices and ways of thinking that get you in touch with your spirited self.

What I mean by your spirited self is the person you want to be, the joyful one, that takes life as it comes, makes good choices to have a balanced and whole life, and chooses to do something about the world because you're not in denial and you care. Your spirited self also doesn't let you feel guilty or depressed about the world because it knows that this craziness is not your fault, that you're doing the best you can, and you choose to feel sad about it all when that's present, and enjoy your life the rest of the time.

Having a grounded spirituality is crucial to our ability to change the world and live well on this planet. I'm not talking about losing one's sense of spirituality; I'm talking about being spiritual in ways that are grounded in reality. In my opinion, that's generally what's been missing from atheist discourse in the past, and I'd like to talk more about how to do that, a little bit in this article and more in upcoming articles.

The couple of times I've gone to Synagogue with my family as an adult, I've had a yearning for something like it that really fits my worldview. Because it's lovely, it really is, but I wish we were singing about something I really care about instead of singing about god.

I sit there and imagine: a large group of us, sitting in concentric circles under a beautiful big old tree, singing songs about utopia, love, nature, freedom, peace and self-care. I imagine us meditating together, sharing our grief in truth mandalas,<sup>1</sup> people talking to each other during the singing in low voices, children playing and much hugging and talking and eating afterwards. We could do it every Sunday. I just feel like it would help us centre ourselves, it would be a great reminder of our values and goals, it would be fun, and it would build community. It would help us connect with our spirited selves.

Over the last couple of months, I've been having some pretty intense conversations with a lot of my friends and housemates about new age



By: Theo Kitchener

"When we find healthy ways to look at the world without blinkers we feel a lot more emotionally and spiritually fulfilled."

spirituality. Previously I'd never chosen to have these honest and confronting conversations because it felt like it wouldn't be a good idea to say what I really think. That old taboo about not talking about politics and religion, well I didn't realise it, but it still applies. I'm still not sure that it's a good idea, but it feels important.

People started wondering why I care so much. Which was great, because I'd always thought that it was as simple as that I was right and they were wrong, and it just bothered me that they might believe "stupid things". Which isn't what it's about at all. I've learnt a lot from these conversations, and it's forced me to examine the reasons why I do care. Turns out my reasons are political and ethical.

To be clear, I don't have anything against anybody with different views. I don't judge them to be crazy, or stupid, or absolutely incorrect—in fact, I'm largely agnostic on actual possibilities now, as I believe there are some things that scientific endeavour simply cannot answer at this stage of human development. My respect for them does not hinge on their belief system. I accept that everyone has come to their own beliefs or ways of thinking for their own reasons, which undoubtedly makes complete sense to them. Should I have found myself in their shoes, I would, in all likelihood, have adopted similar beliefs.

Still, in response to my own research and pondering, I do find myself typically on the side of the skeptics with regard to such worldviews. But while it can seem scary to be open and truthful with others about my own way of understanding the world, it is also important that critiques and grounded alternatives are not muted out of fear. For it is my belief that supernatural worldviews, despite their purported benefits, actually run counter to our attempts to change the world.

## So why do I care so much anyway?

At first, the only thing I could enunciate was that irrational thoughts form the root of what's wrong with this crazy world. Greta Christina, an atheist writer, argues that since skepticism and rational thinking are skills, if you let yourself believe one thing that isn't grounded in reality, you're much more likely to let yourself believe other things of that nature. She says 'after I started applying skepticism to religion, and eventually let go of my spiritual beliefs, I became much better at critical thinking. In all areas of my life. Politics, relationships, money, health — everything... This is often not easy. I'm human, with a human tendency to believe what I already believe or what I want to believe; and better critical thinking often means letting go of ideas I'm very attached to.'<sup>2</sup>

There are things people choose to believe, which don't stem from rational thinking, but which have very real consequences for others. Climate change denial is one obvious example. Perhaps the most classic example though, in regards to new agers, is anti-vaccination. A recent major study concluded that there is absolutely no statistical link between vaccination and autism,<sup>3</sup> yet there are still plenty of pseudoscientific studies out there (supposedly scientific studies that don't meet widely accepted standards for methodology), as well as anecdotal evidence where children fall sick in various ways after being vaccinated, which continue to scare people off.<sup>4</sup> For a while there the pseudoscience on the internet had me convinced, but I quickly saw the light, and the absurdity of the anti-vaxxer movement. We may not automatically associate new age spirituality with harming others, but these beliefs can become dangerous when put ahead of ethics, other people and the planet.

Then there are those beliefs that cause harm to the believers themselves. Without a rational thinking practice, people are more easily manipulated. There are those, for example, who believe that their chosen alternative medicine will save them, despite their declining health, which can lead to what may have been an avoidable early death.<sup>5</sup> In India there are countless examples of gurus swindling poor Indians and rich tourists for all that they can, in order to sell nothing more than snake oil cures for their ailments.<sup>6</sup> And perhaps most insidious is the belief that one's financial hardships are not a

"Science is ever-evolving and open to new information; nothing is gospel and anything could be disproven."

result of the system, but rather of their own shortcomings or past lives.<sup>7</sup>

The clincher for me is that religious and spiritual beliefs can shield people from seeing their lives and the world as they are. Which can lead to a lack of interest in changing things, both in your own life and in society at large. You know that 'religion is the opiate of the masses' quote from Karl Marx? Well what follows it is even better:

*'The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions... Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers on the chain not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower. The criticism of religion disillusiones man, so that he will think, act, and fashion his reality like a man who has discarded his illusions and regained his senses...'*<sup>8</sup>

The main critique of so-called 'hippies' by political activists is their inclination towards passivity. While hippies and activists often share many of the same values, the former tend towards a faith that 'everything will be ok', while the latter recognise the value and necessity of political action. The reverse critique is that activists are too serious and stressed out. This is, of course, not entirely unfounded. In my opinion, both 'sides' need to learn from each other—yes, we need serious action, but let's not allow the weight of the world to permeate every aspect of our life. A balance between 'getting serious' and 'having fun' is key.



“Having a grounded spirituality is crucial to our ability to change the world and live well on this planet.”

### Debunking new age ideas

Perhaps most oddly in all of this are those beliefs for which there is not only no proof, but which can be explained in ways that do not invoke the supernatural. The classic example is manifesting, where you simply think of something that you want and the universe will find a way of bringing it to you. Some people believe that this is an amazing supernatural process, when often it can be explained through some combination of concrete action, an openness to opportunities, a trust in intuition, coincidence, and simply patience. Of course, getting what we want can be amazing, but it's just that the world is amazing. I once wanted a swag, and one day found one on the street, and then the very next day found a swag mattress on the street. Instead of saying 'the universe provides', I say 'the community provides' or 'nature provides'.

Lately, every time somebody invokes the supernatural to describe a phenomenon I've decide to take the time to actually do some research. And there is almost always either substantial proof that it can be explained by science, or substantial reasoning that suggests that it probably isn't true at all. Considering the prevalence of these unchallenged beliefs, including within my own social circles, I think it's important to share what I have learned. I'll talk specifically about a couple of widely popularised (supposedly) scientific stories, which has been described to me as cornerstones of the new age.

The story of the hundredth monkey. According to the tale scientists studying monkey learning behaviours discovered that once a hundred monkeys had learned from each other how to wash sweet potatoes in the sea, a tipping point was reached and almost instantaneously the entire monkey population (even those on other islands) began washing sweet potatoes. This story, presented as fact by Lyall Watson, is used by new age proponents to prove the existence of a 'collective consciousness' and to support the hope for a rapid shift in consciousness at some point in the future. I'd argue that such a shift is possible without a collective consciousness: we're highly interconnected via the internet and face-to-face interactions. Attitudes and beliefs are contagious. We don't need supernatural ways of learning to change the world.

To further extinguish the spiritual flames, the truth is that Watson fabricated the entire story. Ron Amundson, another researcher, contacted the original scientists to corroborate the facts, which they could not, and subsequently published his exposé in the *Skeptical Inquirer* in 1987. Watson responded: "I accept Amundson's analysis of the origin and evolution of the Hundredth Monkey without reservation. It is a metaphor of my own making, based—as he rightly suggests—on very slim

evidence and a great deal of hearsay."<sup>9</sup> Bizarrely, though, Watson's admission remains largely unknown.

Another prominent story is the pseudoscientific experiment performed by Masaru Emoto. Emoto assigned labels with phrases such as 'thank you' and 'you fool' to jars of water, and talked to (or screamed at) and focused feelings on the appropriate water jars each day. Apparently, under microscopic examination, the water that received positive words produced beautiful water crystals, while those receiving negative words produced chaotic crystals. The study promotes the idea that, since our bodies are mostly composed of water, how others feel has a big impact on us. I would argue, however, that this phenomenon can be explained by our insecurities and interdependence.

Again, raining on the new age parade, the problems with Emoto's study are many. He chose to publish only the photo evidence that supported his claims, he failed to control for temperature and humidity between samples (even the photographer breathing on the sample could have influenced the pictures), and he chose not to use double-blind testing—the photographer knew which ones were which.<sup>10</sup> Emoto has been offered a \$1 million dollar reward if he were to replicate his findings under double-blind conditions, an offer he has reportedly ignored. More recently, he encouraged people to do the test themselves with jars of rice in water receiving emotions and words for a month. The results, as shared online so far, have not been promising — predominantly and indiscriminately mouldy.<sup>11</sup>

I've found similar stories, a lack of properly scientific research, normal explanations and sometimes proof that the stories are incorrect in regards to people who have been said to not eat or drink for months or years (one of whom runs \$100,000 workshops about how),<sup>12</sup> dogs who know when their owners are coming home,<sup>13</sup> and people who are able to tell if someone is staring at them from behind.<sup>14</sup> The research suggests similarly that crystals don't heal,<sup>15</sup> homeopathy doesn't work,<sup>16</sup> and neither does astrology.<sup>17</sup> That \$1 million dollar reward, by the way, is one amongst many that have been around for a long time, being offered to anyone who can prove anything supernatural. None of them have ever been claimed.<sup>18</sup>

### Rational thinking and science

If there's no proof for something supernatural, and there is a non-supernatural explanation, then it's probably the latter. This is Occam's Razor. Author Greta Christina invokes the example of believing that throwing a rock at your TV will turn it on.<sup>19</sup> You can't be 100% sure that this isn't true (even though there's no evidence that it is, and rational explanations that it probably isn't), but you probably wouldn't actually do it since you might hurt your TV. And while most people tend to apply rational thinking to their day-to-day activities, many people continue to metaphorically throw rocks at TVs in their spiritual and religious beliefs. The reason people do it, I suspect, is that they feel like they're getting something out of those beliefs. There are all kinds of warm and fuzzy payoffs

that religious and spiritual beliefs bring, which I'll address shortly and talk about how they could be replaced with much more meaningful and useful ways of thinking.

Interestingly, according to Keith Stanovich, rational thinking is a skill, and it only has a very low correlation with intelligence. It requires extra effort, knowledge and practice. There are several types of questions that people normally get the answers to wrong. Try answering this question before you read the answer:

Jack is looking at Anne, but Anne is looking at George. Jack is married, but George is not. Is a married person looking at an unmarried person?

- A) Yes
- B) No
- C) Cannot be determined

More than 80 per cent of people choose C. But the correct answer is A (See Stanovich's article for the solution and more interesting practice questions).<sup>20</sup> This one is a lack of fully thinking something through, and settling on the first answer that comes to mind. Other kinds of errors occur due to our biases and our lack of training in rational thinking (in things like probability, scientific methodology and logic). I know that there have been a number of times when scientifically-trained friends have been able to point out flaws in my own thinking—this is something I wish to learn to do better myself and to be able to help other people with.

There doesn't need to be such a wide dichotomy between spirituality and science. They can co-exist, but it requires applying critical thinking to your own beliefs. The first error people tend to make in accepting new age beliefs is failing to research the scientific reliability of the 'proof' they're being offered—"has this already been debunked?" And the second is our natural tendency to accept anecdotal experience as proof. Taking extremely rare coincidences as proof of something supernatural is an example of non-probabilistic thinking — of course, bizarre coincidences do occur, albeit infrequently.

Another trap we can fall into is the circular condition of allowing our own beliefs to shape our experiences and then invoking these beliefs to explain these very experiences. For example, while people often believe that repeating positive affirmations such as "I am lovable" to themselves will convince them that they are, the research shows that actually if you don't already believe that you are lovable, you're likely to either feel nothing or to feel worse.<sup>21</sup> But because of the overriding belief that these affirmations work, people continue using them. This is the reason for double-blind testing in scientific studies — the preferences or expectations of the researcher or the participant have a tendency to influence the results in the absence of such controls.

Friends of mine have challenged me with the idea that science itself is a faith or belief system, that science is my religion. However, I don't believe that science can be considered

a belief system for it doesn't offer concrete answers. It is inherently agnostic. Science is built upon doubt: scientists bend over backwards to make sure that their own claims make sense, and to try to disprove the claims of others. Science is ever-evolving and open to new information; nothing is gospel and anything could be disproven (there are many things for which there is such an overwhelming amount of evidence that it's unlikely they will ever be disproven, but that doesn't mean they won't be).<sup>22</sup>

Scientific revolutions can be slow and, yes, peer pressure and funding pressure can have an influence on the process.<sup>23</sup> But it's impossible to keep the truth from revealing itself, no matter how much vested interests may try. Scientists did, after all, eventually accept the theory of evolution and discredit the flat earth theory. We might suspect that, should the evidence be there, science could be used to affirm supernatural beliefs too. So far, it hasn't. While we might just be in the early stage of that process, I have not come across any evidence of supernatural phenomena that meets scientific standards.

Rupert Sheldrake, a popular pseudoscientist, now argues that we're in the beginning phase of a scientific revolution, where evidence is being wilfully ignored. However, his arguments seem to be based either on pseudoscience or false dichotomies, including his claim that scientists see the universe essentially as a big machine, when actually it's a lot more complex than that.<sup>24</sup> For example, despite Sheldrake's protestations, ecologists do see ecological systems as much more than just the sum of their parts, they are living systems with emergent properties.<sup>25</sup> It appears that many new age writers are basing their critiques of science on these kinds of false dichotomies and false representations.

For many people, perhaps another reason to prioritise new age beliefs over scientific proof is that science is a bit scary. Science has given us the potential to make the world unliveable for humans (e.g. nuclear bombs), unhealthy for humans (e.g. fat- and sugar-heavy processed foods) and incomprehensible for humans (e.g. putting man on the moon). But this is not the fault of science, per se. Indeed, these changes have come about largely as a result of the co-optation of science by industrialism and militarism.

<b>Spiritual/Religious Belief Gets You</b>	<b>A Grounded Spirituality Gets You</b>
The belief that you're on the right track.	The knowledge that there is no right track. Only choices, all of which will have both positive and negative outcomes.
Less fear of death.	Living with the fear of death means that you learn to live in the present, overcome fears and take control of your life choices to ensure that you enjoy your life more.
Belief that a deceased person has been reincarnated or gone to heaven, or the ability to 'talk' to dead people.	Not shielding yourself from the fact that life is unfair, which can have very positive side effects on your day-to-day life.
Belief that everything is connected and that you're part of a much bigger whole.	Knowledge that everything is connected and you're part of a much bigger whole. Think of fragile ecological systems, compassion for others, or the side effects of inequality. Being able to explain it logically rather than stating it as a belief, makes it much stronger in terms of convincing others, which is critical if we're going to change the world.
Belief in your ability to manifest what you want.	Trust in your own ability to take action, trust in your intuition, an appreciation of coincidences, and an accurate disbelief in getting everything you might want.
Belief in a grand narrative that we're moving towards a shift in consciousness, or a coming time of heaven on Earth.	Trust in yourself that while you live, you can deal with however bad the world gets, and an accurate belief that everything might not turn out ok, which leads to a stronger desire to take action.
An appreciation for the world that comes from seeing it as magical/not being able to understand it all.	An appreciation for the world that comes from it just being totally amazing, beautiful and extremely complex. Even sacred, in the sense that it is infinitely important.
Ethics based on what you're told and what your community thinks.	Ethics based on your own conceptions which are often much stronger. For example, I've always lived in communities where being judgemental was unacceptable, however (like most people, I suspect), I've been largely just pretending not to be judgemental. Only recently have I learned that it's not in my interests and been slowly learning to listen well enough to my own needs to not need to go there.
A sense of a god-given or spiritual purpose to life. Can help people feel ok about a meaningless or unenjoyable life.	A knowledge that there is no purpose to life, which leads to choosing ways to find meaning and enjoy life.
Regular community interaction and ritual that affirms your beliefs.	Something like the utopian, nature-based singing, meditating community gatherings and truth mandalas I described earlier.
Belief in magical healing powers.	Acceptance of life not always being fair, and a rational/critical approach to all kinds of medicines.
Belief in non-attachment as a way to avoid negative feelings.	Caring about what happens to you while having the trust that you can handle whatever comes up means you get to enjoy the high points of life more.

### What belief gives you and why you're better off without it

Here's my take on some of the reasons people find religion/spirituality attractive, and how I prefer to look at things. Additionally, emotionally fulfilling practices like noticing the beauty in the world, appreciating every small gift throughout your day, meditation, being in touch with your feelings and your intuition/deep rationality, acting in service to others and the world, looking after yourself, and developing your own values and ethics would all fit into my idea of a grounded spiritual life.

Essentially, what I'm suggesting is that we take the best parts of spirituality, without all those bits that shield you from the world and its often-negative realities. Shielding ourselves from the inconveniences and horrors of the world can mean we never really learn to deal with what we can't change, or take action to change what we can. While I recognise that what I'm suggesting can be harder than just believing, such a project is incredibly worthwhile and necessary, both personally and politically. When we find healthy ways to look at the world without blinkers we feel a lot more emotionally and spiritually fulfilled, and we're much more likely to change the world into one where we accept and act in line with our dependence on nature and each other.



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25. See for example Fritjof Capra's *The Web of Life* or [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergence#Living\\_2C\\_biological\\_systems](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergence#Living_2C_biological_systems)

# Movies that Matter



To learn about the world's problems and the creative solutions needed to overcome them often means searching for hidden gems between the folds of sub-cultures. For the time-poor majority in our society, film is an unrivalled medium for informing and inspiring. The movies that matter are the ones that have the potential to change minds and inspire action. One new movie that matters has made it onto our must-watch list in this issue of SHIFT...



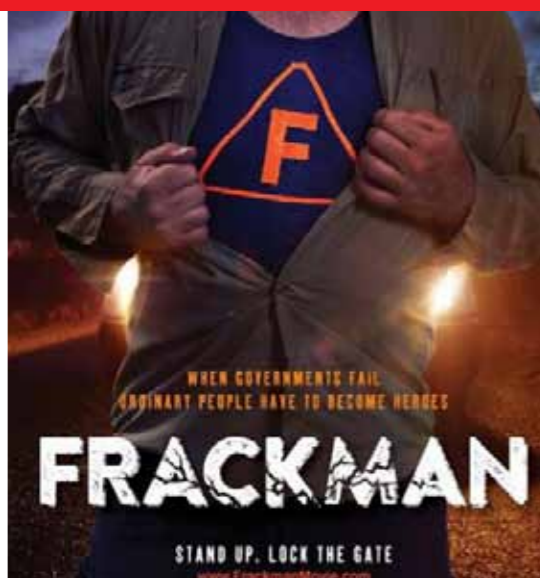
# Play catch-up



Ever feel like you're running to stand still when it comes to getting on top of what's going on in the world? We feel that way all the time, so we've rubbed our heads together in a collaborative effort to get up to speed. Here's where we play catch-up, with viewing recommendations for getting you up to speed with corporate capitalism, the activists that are fighting and have fought the system, and the creative wonders of transitioning to a low-tech sustainable alternative way of living...

## Eco-spiritual change-making

### New release: Frackman



Frackman is a powerful, punchy and poignant documentary about the conflict faced by one unlikely Australian activist and communities of Aussies directly affected by the roll-out of the massive multinational coal seam gas (CSG) industry in Queensland's rural heartland.

Small landowners and farmers — in towns such as Chinchilla — who are feeling sick from leaking gas are running the gauntlet of machines, pipes, and processing plants on the surface, while deep underground bore water becomes polluted and aquifers run dry.

At the centre of the drama is the life of one man — accidental activist Dayne Pratzky — who had intended to settle down on the land but instead becomes drawn into a fight for his own property rights and the rights of affected communities to stand up to the industrial machine. His only entitlement is to the first six inches of dirt beneath his feet — but no more.

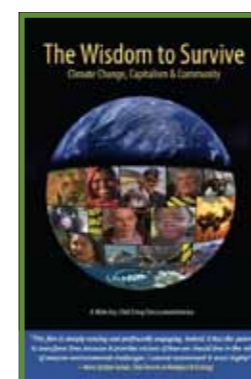
The problems start when the CSG exploration teams are allowed onto the land and find gas reserves on it. At that point the landowner loses the right to prevent the onslaught of full-scale drilling. Featured in Frackman is the grassroots Lock The Gate movement that is trying to get whole communities and individual landholders to keep the exploration teams locked out.

The mechanised invasion is acutely depicted in *Frackman*, bringing home clearly the conflict between citizens and the industry. The film is a lesson in various aspects of activism, everything from petitioning, grassroots campaigning and the detailed tactical planning needed for direct action and active resistance.

- Released: 2015
- Running time: 96 mins
- [www.frackmanthemovie.com](http://www.frackmanthemovie.com)
- This documentary can be viewed online at [www.frackmanthemovie.com](http://www.frackmanthemovie.com), and the full length film can be pre-ordered on DVD (pending release) via the Frackman movie website.

But at times the film is also funny, and moving. It shows that despite all the personal risks and constant stress Dayne experiences a full and complete life journey as he engages positively with his local communities and finds love and empathy in the process.

I saw this movie as a result of the efforts of a concerned group of people the Action FAW Brisbane group who were able, against the odds, to convince our mainstream shopping mall cinema to show *Frackman*. An amazing coalition of citizens turned up for the screening, including representatives from *March in March* and *Lock the Gate*. It showed me that despite the oddities of activist strategies like aligning with the conservative shock-jock Alan Jones and conceding to a pro-growth agenda, community engagement is still a very positive thing, as together we tackle globalised and industrialised eco-social destruction.

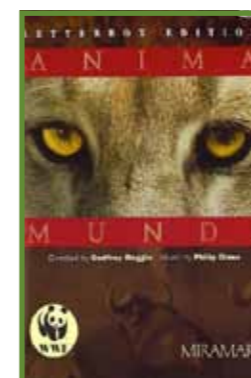


### The Wisdom to Survive: Climate Change, Capitalism & Community

Beginning with a quote from Dostoyevsky that perhaps it is 'beauty that will save the world', the documentary *Wisdom to Survive* begins a moving journey of change by drawing us into a poignant world of sorrow and mourning for the state of the immense beauty of this world and the living creatures that still survive on it. The opening is emotionally intense — the whole documentary is so quiet — yet so powerful; don't be surprised if you shed a tear.

*Wisdom to Survive* moves through all of the key environmental and social sustainability issues of our time in a poetic, sensitive and engaged manner showing us how to get involved. By sharing the perspectives of a variety of key thinkers such as Richard Heinberg and Joanna Macy, as well as activists of diverse backgrounds and life stages, it makes a powerful poetic point that capitalism needs to drastically change. We can be that change across a broad spectrum of approaches, from grassroots activism to artistic-spiritual activism, all inspiringly highlighted in one beautifully presented hour of eco-social change.

- Released: 2013
- Running time: 56 minutes
- [www.olddogdocumentaries.org](http://www.olddogdocumentaries.org)
- A trailer for this documentary can be viewed online via Vimeo, and the full-length film can be purchased on DVD at [olddogdocumentaries.org](http://olddogdocumentaries.org).

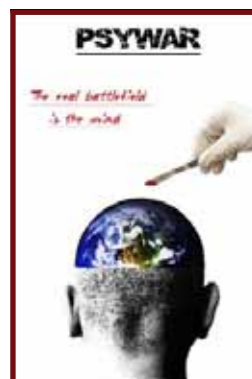


### Anima Mundi

*Anima Mundi* delves into the complex predicament of peak oil and climate change, presenting permaculture as a practical and holistic solution that prioritises resilience. Taking a whole-systems approach to our predicament, this documentary is refreshing in its honesty, while also being unafraid to venture into more philosophical and spiritual theories of change. Gaia theory is explained as a story for our age of urgency, and it is made clear that no matter how destructive we are, we are still not separate — instead we are intricately interconnected with the web of life, and what we do to the earth we do to ourselves.

- Released: 2011
- Running time: 1:17:52
- [www.animamundimovie.com](http://www.animamundimovie.com)
- A trailer for this documentary can be viewed online at [www.animamundimovie.com](http://www.animamundimovie.com), and the full length film can be purchased at the Anima Mundi movie website.

## The psychological battleground of our culture



### Psywar — The real battlefield is in the mind

In Aristotle's speculations on democracy he noticed a problem: "If in Athens everyone had a right to vote, the poor majority would attack the property of the rich and insist that it be divided". Psywar's proposition is simple. Just as fish swimming in a fishbowl are oblivious to the water in which they swim, so we the citizens of democracy are oblivious to the sea of propaganda that floods our information-rich environment. If we could be subconsciously convinced to maintain the machinery of wealth accumulation via an organised system of disinformation, elites at the top of the social pyramid would maintain their entitlement to wealth and an orderly society would prevail for the benefit of all — goodbye democracy and hello polyarchy — a soft core socio-economic dictatorship with free elections.

Created on a shoestring budget and made available to the community via a donation-funding model, Psywar is remarkably comprehensive. It engages the viewer with the opinions of key thinkers like Noam Chomsky, yet also backs up its case with compelling historical examples of how the system of psychological manipulation has evolved through time. By rolling back the history leading up to the Ludlow Massacre of 1914, it shows how elites in 19th century America have mutated democracy to ensure psychological compliance. Today we have a whole myriad of systems that keep us in check; from mass consumerism to mass marketing, to terror management, to non-participatory democracy and even PSYOP.

The take home message is this: for the sake of our humanity, we the citizens of democracy need to learn to resist the all-pervasive infectiousness of the psychology of propaganda — especially in a democracy — since psychological manipulation is key to undermining participation in it.

- Released: 2010
- Running time: 99 minutes
- [www.metanoia-films.org](http://www.metanoia-films.org)
- This documentary can be viewed online free of charge at [metanoia-films.org](http://metanoia-films.org).



### Century of Self

*"The secret of mass consumer democracy is not that people are in charge, but that people's desires are in charge..."*

Century of Self is an epic four-part historical journey into how our sense of self has been manipulated to ensure that elite power maintains an orderly control of the democratic state through the various crises of the 20th century. Thoroughly engrossing, this film manages to weave the story of the Freud family into a traumatising drama of two world wars and a great depression. Freud's theories on psychoanalysis were exported from his home in Austria into corporate America by his family. His daughter Anna, and especially his nephew Edward Bernays, would inform corporate America on the details of psychological manipulation that heralded a new super-charged era of propaganda whose euphemism-du-jour was "public relations".

Century of Self is brimming with present-day resonance, and history buffs will savour the rise of corporate mind control that was well underway when the first great depression threatened to undo capitalism. The role of the Freud family in the rise and fall of psychoanalysis as a political tool of control is consistently featured and this humanises the documentary, giving it a personal and social narrative in what otherwise would be a machine-like chilling account of mass-democratic manipulation.

Sigmund Freud cops some heavy criticism in Century of Self, but is that fair? I would argue that Freud did not intend his dark theories of the psyche to be so readily applicable to the evolution of public relations. Enjoy Century of Self and make your own mind up; it is a landmark documentary of our time and it is even more relevant today.

- Released: 2002
- Running time: 4 episodes of approx 58 minutes each
- [www.freedocumentaries.org](http://www.freedocumentaries.org)
- This documentary series can be viewed online free of charge at [freedocumentaries.org](http://freedocumentaries.org).

## Lifting the veil on faith



### Kumaré

Part social experiment, part documentary, *Kumaré* follows filmmaker Vikram Gandhi as he assumes the persona of Kumaré, an Indian guru in Arizona. Gandhi starts out with the intention to demonstrate the absurdity of blindly following a self-styled guru by showing that anyone can fake it, but finds himself connecting with his 'followers' on a more profound level, and wrestles with the ethical quandary of what and how to teach them.

Concealing his true identity becomes a struggle as Gandhi feels the weight of his conscience, having duped people who have come to him looking for meaning. The discomfort is palpable as it becomes apparent that Gandhi's deception is no more ethical than that of the false guru whose intentions are less than pure.

Kumaré's final teaching is delivered as Gandhi reveals his true self. With the sacred line in the sand crossed, will his followers accept the truth? And does the illusion of Kumaré reveal an even deeper spiritual truth about the guru within us all?

- Released: 2011
- Running time: 84 minutes
- [www.kumaremovie.com](http://www.kumaremovie.com)
- A trailer for this documentary can be viewed online at [www.kumaremovie.com](http://www.kumaremovie.com), and the full length film can be purchased at the Kumaré movie website, either as a digital download or a DVD.





# Day in the life of a downshifter



Downshifting is a social behavior or trend in which individuals live simpler lives to escape from the rat race of obsessive materialism and to reduce the stress, overtime, and psychological expense that may accompany it.

*My downshifting journey to sustainable living has been long and tortuous, but full of learning opportunities. It is an ongoing process of skilling and adapting, and there is plenty more to learn.*

I worked in pathology – in cancer screening – for over 20 years, and was paid fairly good wages. The work was extremely interesting and it felt worthwhile because I was helping patients, not just earning money. But when the corporate world took over the running of the laboratory, quality and ethical standards went out the door. I decided that it was time to rethink my career path and whole lifestyle.

I decided to study environmental sustainability, thinking this could somehow help me change the state of the world. Five years on, I have learned why western society has become spiritually and ethically bereft – it is infected by capitalist neoliberal ideology, which promotes individualism, rampant consumerism and continuous economic growth at the cost of the environment and caring society.

Knowing now that I am part of the problem I have actively tried to find ways of reducing my footprint – by downshifting.



By: Wendy Steenwinkel



I currently live on a flower farm in South East Queensland in an old granny flat that I rent cheaply from a friend. Work-wise, I do light cleaning jobs, and help out in the local coffee shop when needed.

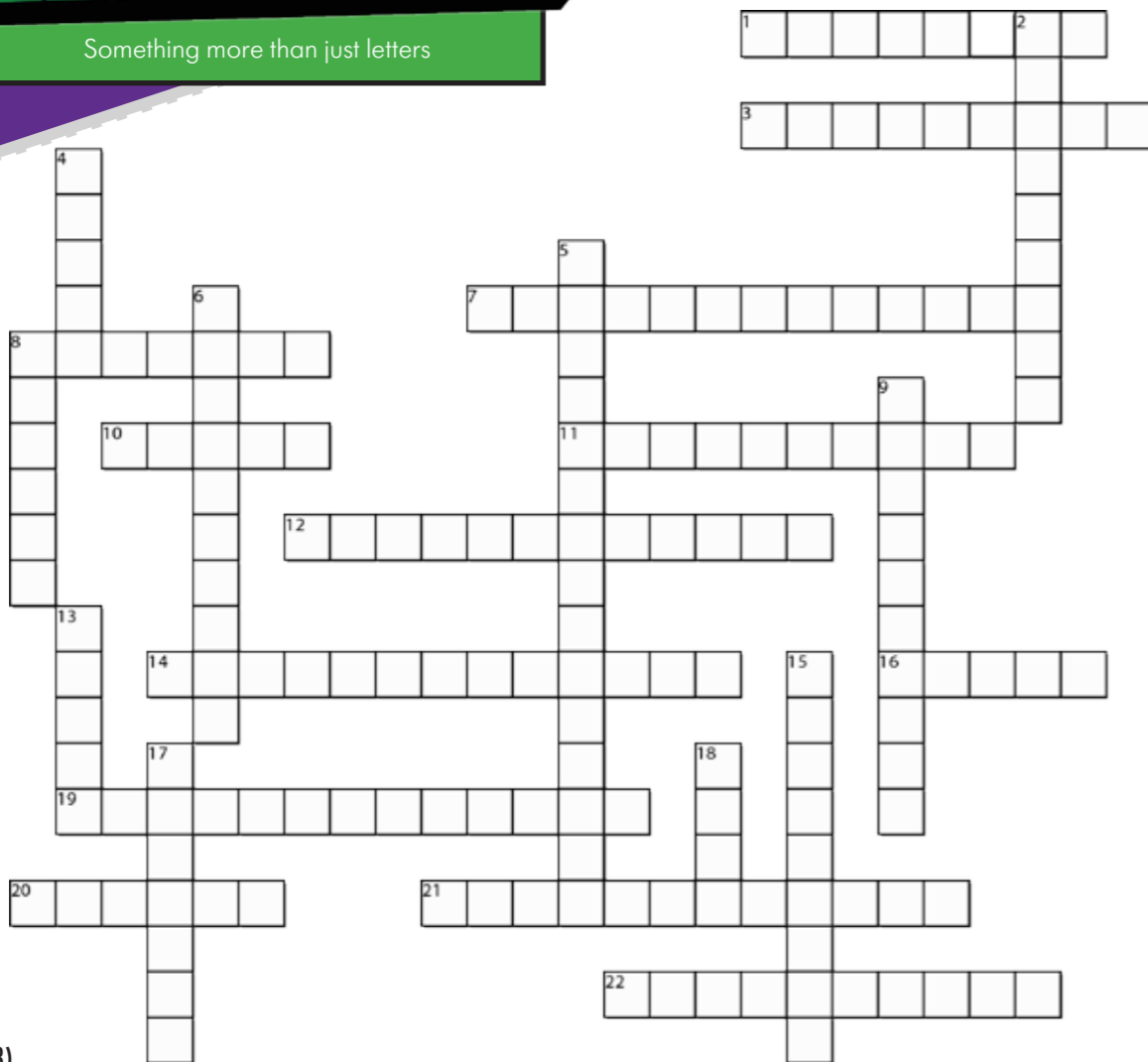
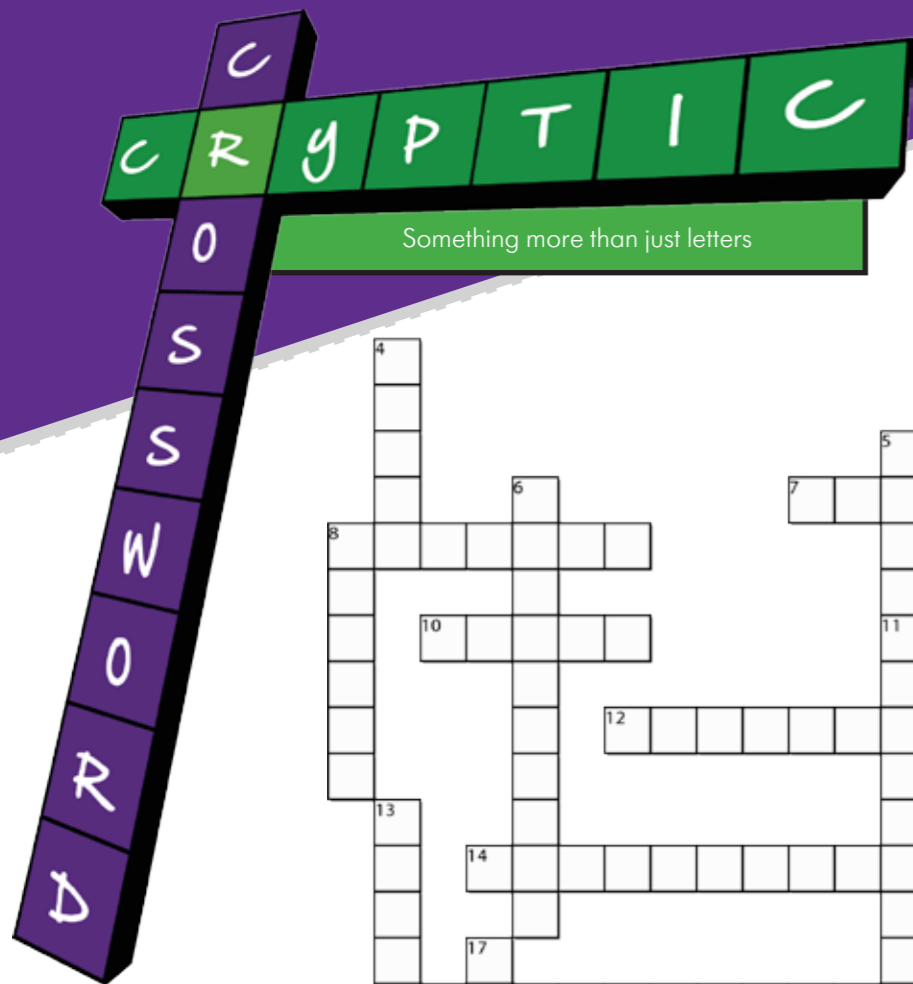
At home I've been experimenting with aquaponics in an old bathtub and started a worm farm to dispose of fruit and vegetable peelings. The end products of both make great fertiliser for the vegetable garden. I also pipe the washing machine grey water out into the garden to water the little fruit trees. It hasn't all been a shining success though – I've only successfully managed to grow beans, tomatoes, potatoes, pumpkins and herbs before a grasshopper plague wiped most of the produce out! Large caterpillars have also damaged the fruit trees, so to make up the shortfall I buy fresh fruit and vegetable from the local farmer's markets.

My friend Tina also lives on the farm and is on a similar downshifting journey. She and I have been successfully learning to live with less by sharing produce and collaborating on projects – she makes great beer and I make great pizza!

We are both trying to learn more basic skills needed to survive and to help others in a post-collapse society after the age of oil. Tina is much more experienced at growing fruit, vegetables and herbs, but recently I completed a basic permaculture course to become more knowledgeable. Meanwhile I have become very good at baking bread, making cakes, and creating tasty but healthy meals out of whatever is available. We have a huge mango tree on the property so I'm now also turning out some great mango jams and chutneys. The rosella plants Tina and I planted a few months ago are now bearing fruit, so it looks like we will have heaps of rosella jam too soon.

I've also been trading vegetables for eggs with an older lady up the road who has chickens. Eventually I would like to be part of a small sustainable community. Perhaps later I will have some worthwhile skills and goods to trade with our local LETS community, but for now I'll just enjoy the learning journey of shifting life down a few gears.





**Down**

- 2. Serenity silts lens murky (8)
- 4. In the middle of Sudan certain people move to music (5)
- 5. Elements in deep end centre mutually reliant (14)
- 6. Dominate it about rumination (10)
- 8. Observance begins with real intentional tribal unusual actions learnt (6)
- 9. Sounds like traveller matures on journey to pay homage (10)
- 13. Truce sounds like a bit (5)
- 15. Unsend films around state of present being (11)

**Across**

- 1. Mad Len scams tranquility (8)
- 3. Togetherness upset cumin moon (9)
- 7. Considerate mixed competent vial (12)
- 8. Tree rat stew hideaway (7)
- 10. Starts believing life is simply special feeling of utter joy (5)
- 11. Let conifer transform image in mirror (10)
- 12. "Tree," I explain around the pragmatic (12)
- 14. Crazy noises concuss awareness (13)
- 16. My uncle says it can initially tame the beast (5)
- 19. The end point of meditation sounds like England (abb) intended to remove weight (12)
- 20. Revered cedars pulped (6)
- 21. A spurt unreal put in order but still unreal (12)
- 22. My antique I reassemble for inner peace (10)
- 23. Adjust sea answer realisation (9)
- 17. Certainty at lyric parts (7)
- 18. Inside Yo Yo game is vedic practice.

**Answers to Cryptic Crossword Issue #8**

**Across**

4. DEMOCRACY | 8. MINISTERS | 10. CONSERVATIVES | 11. IDEOLOGY | 12. LEFT WING | 13. GREEN | 14. CAPITALISM | 18. LABOUR | 20. POLITICIAN | 21. SOCIALISM | 22. STATE | 23. ANARCHY

**Down**

1. ELECTIONS | 2. TYRANNY | 3. VOTE | 5. COMMUNIST | 6. PRESIDENTS | 7. RIGHT WING | 9. PARLIAMENTS | 15. FASCISM | 16. LOBBY | 17. OLIGARCH | 19. LIBERAL | 20. PARTY

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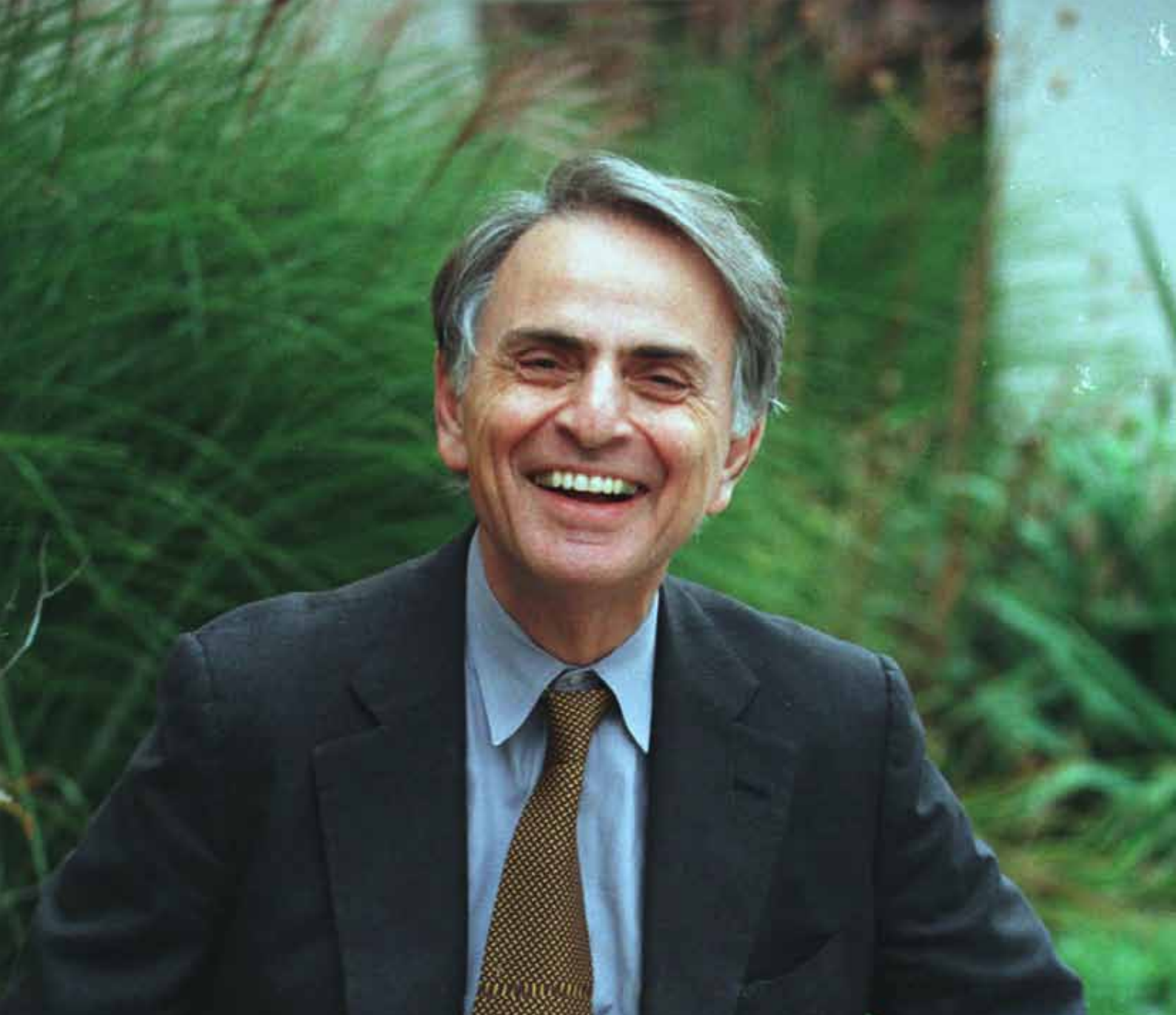
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For small creatures  
such as we the  
vastness is bearable  
only through love.

- *Carl Sagan*