

It's Not Too Late, and It Never Will Be

Throughout history there have been many cultural shifts, but what is looming before us now is a collective shift—faster and more complex than any the world has known. Other times thought they were it. They were wrong. This is it!

In this time of extraordinary transition, we can no longer afford to live as remedial members of the human race. A new set of values—holistic, syncretic, relationship- and process-oriented, organic, spiritual—is rising within us and around us.

—JEAN HOUSTON

Activism begins with you, Democracy begins with you, get out there, get active! Tag, you're it.

—THOM HARTMANN

If you don't like the news, go make some of your own.

—WES “SCOOP” NISKER

The bottom line is starkly simple: *We are it.*

Our evolutionary predicament calls us each *to be the change we wish to see*. That implies an open-ended commitment. In terms of our own

growth, it means intending to develop all the best human qualities and virtues, with no end in sight, and a commitment to bring them into every moment of our lives. This is no conventional commitment; it is an existential commitment to all we hold dear, all *you* hold dear. You see it in others—the heroes and saints of history, and the ordinary heroes and saints you may know personally. And others must and will see it in you. The commitment never ends, because life itself needs and will always need our very best, and because consciousness and feeling do not want to become unconscious and unfeeling. We are the lifeblood of the universe, and once we see that, we cannot help but embrace life—and we would not want it any other way.

If you have any understanding of what is at stake, you are qualified for this mission. No other “qualifications” in the usual sense are necessary. We have to be keenly aware that every last one of us tends to fall far short of either heroism or sainthood. But many of the greatest heroes and saints of all time were keenly aware of how inadequate they were for their world-changing roles. In fact, *just being aware* of how far one falls short can be said to be a qualification in itself.

There is no superior race of human beings that is going to show up and do what our further evolution requires. You and I, exactly as we are—with all our fear, laziness, self-indulgence, irritability, pettiness (you can fill in the blanks)—are the ones who have been chosen (by virtue of time, place, and circumstance) for this important mission.

There is no way out but through.

If we were to zoom way back and look at the big picture, seeing our planet as if through the wrong end of a telescope, we could see it holistically as a dynamic system—and right now, although astonishingly beautiful in one sense, it is, in another sense, not a pretty picture. All aspects of human civilization appear mired in varying degrees of dysfunction: our economic systems, our political systems, our energy systems, our transportation and food systems—and our cultural, social, psychological, and spiritual lives. It is like a disease that affects every organ system in the body, and also affects the mind and the spirit. Seeing this whole picture, one can’t help but wonder where and how anyone can begin to

make a positive difference. Where the heck is the energy to dislodge all these logjams going to come from? We seem to have arrived at an incredible multidimensional dead end. What kind of awesome power will be necessary to break through this impasse, and open up a path forward?

But if we then look deeply and closely into the heart and soul and spirit of every single individual, we discover a huge untapped reservoir of latent heroism. We can find it in our capacity for love, our open intelligence, our impulse to be of benefit, to extend care beyond ourselves, to embody excellence and courage, to become true friends, and to forge new kinds of communities. This is a huge power source. It is largely untapped, but it is present as potential nonetheless. We clearly have the power to create a new “we,” expressing higher cocreative synergies. All the energy and intelligence that is needed to effect a complete transformation of our dysfunctional world is latent in the human spirit. If we can find a way to come together in a way that unleashes that suppressed potential, it will be like channeling nuclear fusion. In explaining the nature of heart intelligence in chapter 5, we quoted Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s famous statement that when humans finally harness “the energies of love ... for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.” It is, quite literally and realistically, that significant.

That spiritual power and boundary-breaking love have been unleashed throughout history by rare individuals—people like Buddha, Socrates, Jesus, Gandhi, and undoubtedly countless other saints, sages, and activists—and even at times by ordinary people. Whether from stories surrounding great figures, or from personal encounters with them, our hopes and energies and spirit become transformed, even to the point where, at least in given instances, we may become embodiments of love, compassion, and courage. Those who most consistently embody that disposition have been able to effect miraculous changes in human individuals and in the societies in which they lived. You and I may not consistently have the extraordinary attributes of such people—but we can be indispensable participants in a larger consciousness that *does* function that way.

At this point in the human saga, as we have said, the next Buddha will have to be a sangha—a collective practicing and developing an ever

more responsive, creative “we.” Individually, we each are in effect asked by circumstances to grow and evolve, and if possible to become participants in the “body-mind” of an emerging saintly and heroic collective. Together we are the unwashed raw ingredients of a sorely needed new human adulthood.

It is not too late. Disasters, calamities, and transformative breakthroughs can open critical windows of opportunity for more fundamental systems redesign. The idea that it may take disasters to do this at first seems depressing, but it actually creates a huge opening for realistic hope even in the midst of disasters. It is also a road map to a new, more grounded form of long-view activism. It may seem that we face challenges so urgent that there is no way they will be adequately addressed by the slow process of cultural, social, and political reform. (Notice that this is the unstated subtext of many anxious “progressive” political communications.) But in fact, some of the most powerful change is likely to come *after* it is “too late.”

IT IS NEVER TOO LATE

The wholeness of our more-than-human living earth utterly defies analysis. It cannot be accounted for by linear chains of cause and effect. Systemic complexity accounts for some of this unpredictability, but it also has to do with something about wholeness itself—its radical potential for aliveness and creative simultaneity. Thus, accurate predictions are impossible. Even the subatomic world appears to reveal signs of this creative simultaneity. Physicists speculate that the not entirely random pathways of atomic particles might best be thought of as their “play.”

Tracing our evolutionary history, we can infer that life wants to live, to thrive. Evolution wants to keep evolving. Gaia is powerfully resilient. Our efforts to respond, which may seem too little, too late, will create changes throughout the biosphere in ways that we also cannot know. On the negative side, these efforts may initiate disruptions, even what we call “cataclysms”—but they will also be triggering the self-regulating resilience of the living planetary system. We are not separate from the

intentionality that will naturally surface under these systemic conditions. Times of catastrophe are moments when the system is breaking down and breaking open. Surprisingly, they can present remarkable opportunities to create larger systemic change.

Most of us tend to think of change in very limited ways. When we think of change, we tend to think only about the projects that we can imagine human beings actively accomplishing. We hope that those will prove to be therapeutic pricks of a “social acupuncture” needle that will catalyze virtuous nonlinear dynamics. We hope for positive feedback loops, the crossing of “tipping points,” and subtle field dynamics that will help our best-laid plans succeed. And yet events are never so consistently benign, so the story is not so tidy. Change often comes amidst disruption, after a crisis creates a window of opportunity. It will be the “black swans,” the unforeseeable game-changers—like another financial meltdown—that will open the opportunity for something radically new.

Consider the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011. On March 11 of that year, a megathrust earthquake (measuring 9.0 on the moment magnitude scale) unleashed a fifteen-foot tsunami across Honshu Island, the main island of Japan. Some 19,000 people died. Then the nuclear power plant at Fukushima Daiichi lost its generators, and within three days several of the radioactive cores melted. The world watched as one of the largest nuclear disasters of all time unfolded in slow motion, and everyone seemed helpless to stop it.

Meanwhile, in Europe, a group of Swiss advocates for sustainability moved into action. They had anticipated another Chernobyl-type disaster, and they had prepared for it. Over the years leading up to Fukushima, they had built relationships of respect and influence with people at the highest levels of Swiss politics. They had also quantified the cost of the premiums for a private insurance company to insure Switzerland’s nuclear industry against public liability. (Like the U.S. and most nuclear-armed nations, Switzerland had passed laws indemnifying the owners and operators of nuclear power plants from public liability. Their research had carefully quantified and documented the size of

this enormous public subsidy.) Moreover, they had done the work to compute the (lower) costs of subsidizing other clean energy technologies in preference to nuclear power. Thus, when the Fukushima accident happened, they were ready. And they then reached out to the decision makers and supplied them with white papers that built a carefully reasoned argument for dramatic policy decisions. All of this happened while the inertia of the status quo was interrupted and a window of opportunity for more fundamental reform was open.

Two months later, Germany made the same decision, and for similar reasons. In May 2017, Germany hit an all-time worldwide record for a nation its size, using 85 percent renewable energy.

The key is to liberate our thinking and our activism without triggering our paranoia. We can prepare well, to take advantage of the *windows of opportunity* that disasters will bring for initiating *more fundamental systems redesign*. And this can and absolutely should be done in tandem with preemptive kinds of activism. Let's minimize destruction, regression, and suffering, human and nonhuman. Let's preserve our mother planet and our brother/sister creatures. *And let's expand* our thinking and creative action.

We need to do what we can, where we are, even while disasters are on their way. Entangled, hypercomplex system dynamics link human activity with our diverse, living planetary ecosystem. We can't realistically "figure it out" in full detail. And yet we need a vision of how we can move forward despite our current political and cultural gridlock.

Against this resistance, we must initiate a discussion, at the level of politics and the media, about what should be one of the most significant political issues of our time: how to create pathways to sustainability with minimal catastrophic disruptions. We can call this a "soft landing." We can focus on optimizing global human culture's passage through an epochal adaptive transition. Since our current social patterns and habits are overheated and unsustainable, the goal is to transition as quickly as possible to more sustainable modes of living, while minimizing traumatic disruptions. It is especially important not to trigger cultural regression ("dark ages" or dystopias, on any scale).

Preparation is everything. Realistically, most well-informed observers believe that big disruptions are probably inevitable—huge shocks, disasters, and crises seem not only likely, but maybe even necessary to catalyze the political will for us to change our collective choices and behavior. The “silver lining” is that these crises will disrupt our current deadlock. They can “unstick” our stuckness. Each will present windows of opportunity for more fundamental systems redesign. We can anticipate and prepare for them. This is an enormously important aspect of evolutionary activism.

GETTING OVER OUR POSTMODERN SELVES

Meanwhile, we are continuing to cause massive damage and destruction to the planet. At the same time that Switzerland and Germany have chosen alternatives to nuclear power, radiation from the Fukushima reactors is leaking into ground and ocean water, and has spread across the Pacific Ocean. Meanwhile, two-thirds of the Great Barrier Reef off the coast of Australia has died in the last few years of rising sea temperatures. In 2017, polar sea ice cover retreated to record lows. I could go on and on—the litany of horrors is long and stark.

We don't know what next calamity might knock our society or Mother Earth off her metaphorical axis (or her literal axis, as some are predicting), causing unforeseeable upheaval. We haven't mobilized the political will necessary for the massive rapid changes that are necessary—certainly not in key countries such as the United States.

We have been outfoxed by the speed of our own inventions and the acceleration of the pace of change in every area of our lives. Our nervous systems are overwhelmed by stimuli to which *Homo sapiens* is unaccustomed; all of us are suspended in a virtual world laid onto our 3D experience. We are just beginning to discover how to navigate its challenges to our well-being. Our mediated virtual selves are powerfully influenced by postmodern attitudes of passivity, reflexive reactivity (when things really go wrong), and resignation. But what can we do proactively to alter the balance of power, and “do good”?

If we are to fulfill our greater destiny—as well as simply survive—we have to recover from the disempowering, outsider, cynical, defeatist orientation of postmodernity, in which we falsely believe ourselves to be under the effect of systemic forces beyond our control. Such a disposition is the essence of pathology and the refusal of the attitude of practice. Remember the addiction analogy. We are all addicts—to fossil fuels, to consumerist culture, to our consensus trance, to ineffectual consolations. We can admit that we're addicts, and affirm our process of recovery, one day at a time. That means saying “yes” to life, forgiving ourselves, and taking seriously our responsibility for the future, today.

Let's permanently cast aside the option that it is enough to take a “position” and feel that we're “right.” Identifying with opinions or interpretive structures, even stories—whether political, social, or spiritual—is not a substitute for actual participation. That emperor has no clothes. Simply holding an opinion—especially one colored by cynical attitudes—is a total cop-out. But such modes of engagement are pervasive, and are in fact what most of us are tending to do, myself included. We are all falling short when measured by the standard of taking responsibility for the full scale of our civilizational predicament. But the attitude of positive responsibility is essential.

It is particularly important to renounce and to counter cynicism. Alas, cynicism is becoming more common among millennials. Boomers have certainly driven into an evolutionary ditch and left the next generation a mess. But that was humanity's collective doing, over many generations. It is understandably overwhelming to come of age in a world in crisis. But cynical and relativistic responses have suicidal implications. Millennials are sometimes called “the whatever generation,” because so many questions are answered with an eye roll and a single word, “*Whatever*.” Can millennials (and all who came before and after them) recover sincerity and hope, and a willingness to go beyond irony? Can we help them to do so? We are all called to a *postironic* relationship to our experience.

Self-aware millennial postirony might sound something like this: “I can see all the different perspectives in play, and the pervasive hypocrisy. I am self-aware, and expect others to be too. In a way, yes, everybody is a

little ridiculous. Our only popular cultural heroes are antiheroes, because that's what is most believable to us. I can't believe in any of the old gods, that's true. And yet, despite all of this, I am not, at the core of my being, cynical. I do care. I love. I choose to stand for life. I value beauty, goodness, and truth. I want to grow clear and strong enough to actually be the change I'd like to see in the world." Can this new generation step over the bloodless corpse of irony to embrace the messiness, immediacy, ecstasy, and heat of this test of our species' ultimate character?

That was my generation's idealistic hope, and in a new way it is the quest of all living generations—Generation X, my parents' "greatest generation," the millennials, and the "postmillennials" who are just now arriving. The opportunity of all future generations is going to depend on everyone's ability to renounce cynicism and hang in, continually and creatively engaging all the turbulent challenges of a world in critical transition. We are all challenged to outgrow the universal tendency to give up, or to blame others, and also to recognize the broad, hypercomplex systems dynamics that have given rise to our collective mess. We are asked to take responsibility. Irrespective of "who created the mess"—or, put another way, "who is responsible"—we (meaning all of us, whatever our generation) have inherited it. And everyone who has ever lived has inherited someone else's mess. The act of blaming—or of resignation—is the act of absolving oneself of responsibility. And that leads to the greatest "sins" of all—cynicism and passivity.

A POSTIRONIC RELATIONSHIP TO POWER

Perhaps Stephen Levine's work with cancer patients provides a useful analogy for taking responsibility. In his work with the dying, Levine addressed the dilemma of people who have come to believe that their inner states and thoughts can profoundly affect their physiological health. They would then begin to imagine *they* were responsible for their diagnosis, such as cancer. He would teach people, "No, no, no, you're not responsible *for* your cancer. That's simply not true. However, you *are* responsible *to* your cancer. It is what is actually happening, and therefore

it is your teacher.” In the same way, while none of us are uniquely responsible for our generational predicament, we are responsible *to* it. This is and will be the defining test of the character of every generation. The failures of other generations are irrelevant. The attitude of complaint and grievance is a way of giving ourselves carte blanche to perpetuate our crisis by our passivity.

It is up to us—*all* of us—to pervade the fabric of culture and society and politics and power and business and finance with a new human adulthood. This involves our taking responsibility, individually, for becoming quiet heroes of an integral revolution, citizens of a new republic of the heart, true friends of *all* our fellow earthlings. In this work it is especially consequential to consort with the powerful. We want wisdom to gain access and influence, through which it can reassert itself in human affairs. Then, when these “nonlinear windows of opportunity for more fundamental systems redesign” (which most of us think of simply as disasters) present themselves, we will already be there and ready to act.

What if wise advisers to Hank Paulson and Ben Bernanke and George W. Bush had already thought through the implications of a liquidity crisis? What if they could have acted in time to influence the critical decisions that were being made? Remember that the 2008 financial crisis created an environment so open to radical solutions that the nation’s large banks could all have been nationalized. What if the powerful and influential people of that moment had thought through the kinds of solutions that would have eased a transition toward sustainability rather than just delaying the inevitable moment of reckoning?

Right now, like the underground threads of the mycelium, an extraordinary generation of enlightened beneficial projects is appearing, and these innovations are extending their reach throughout world culture. Solutions to diverse aspects of our critical challenges are emerging in every community. Human goodness and creativity are evergreen and irrepressible. Many innovative approaches are weaving their way into our social, artistic, and cultural life, reweaving a new pattern for our social fabric. They are already beginning to pervade the periphery of our collective institutional life.

Social enterprises are orchestrating synergistic value exchanges among public, private, and philanthropic actors. Impact investors are working with venture philanthropists to generate outside-the-box creative initiatives. The alternate currency movement, from local currencies to blockchain, is an enormously important band in a spectrum that also includes people working on reducing the influence of money over politics and others experimenting with a “gift economy.” The Rocky Mountain Institute, among others, has been developing projects of net-zero energy and net-zero water, as well as highly efficient designs for vehicles and homes. There are any number of other technological advances that are being prototyped in someone’s garage. Consider all the innovative organizational practices allowing distributed decision making, as well as the practices we have described for entering integral we-space, bridging cultural divides, and accessing collective intelligence and wisdom.

There is a grand spectrum of objective technical and technological fixes, as well as practices for engendering a more conscious culture. Together they represent a vast array of “spare parts” that can be drawn on during a transition to a life-sustaining society. Each may be a crucial element of a whole process that we cannot yet fully apprehend.

To transform these possibilities into a new reality calls for what I call the “Ancient Strategy.” Ancient sages like Confucius, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, and Bodhidharma transformed China by gaining the ear of the emperor, and when he would listen, helping him wisely create harmony in the kingdom.

THE ANCIENT STRATEGY

What is the Ancient Strategy?

Become a sage.

Gain the ear of the emperor.

To meet today’s unprecedented challenges, we are required to mature into a more conscious and whole life. That means waking up individually, and coming together in more enlightened collectives. It means “going

where no one has gone before.” We will be drawn into a series of transformational shifts that will take us into new, uncharted territory. It is both humbling and profoundly empowering to embrace this intention.

Part of our practice is living from what in Zen practice is referred to as “don’t-know mind” or “beginner’s mind.” Knowing that there is so much that we don’t and can’t know opens us up to wonder and curiosity. It puts us in touch with the creative potential of the present moment. We can then engage wholeheartedly with the aliveness and potential, along with the insecurity, that actually describe our situation.

Existence is a wondrous mystery. We really *don’t* know what will happen. But we will be able to improvise, and make important discoveries in the process. Logical predictions are inherently impossible because of the nonlinear dynamics of complex systems and the inherent, interpenetrating wholeness of the living biosphere, human culture, and the total cosmos. The health of the system will depend in part on the health of human individuals and communities, led in part by communities of practice.

If the next Buddha is to be a sangha, some of our communities of practice are precursors, out of which it will emerge. This is what we point to when we say “Become a sage.” The key ingredients that make possible our effective participation in that emergence are faith in the goodness of existence; trust in the power of wholeness, the human spirit, and evolution; and confidence in our own capacity to creatively respond. The sun will keep rising in the morning, always bringing a new dawn. We can be the presence of wisdom itself, and we will need to be.

Next, the wisdom of the sage has to find its way to the ear of the emperor. In ancient times, the emperors of the Far East governed in part by consulting wise men. In our time, wisdom must find a way to exercise power and influence over human affairs. It goes beyond the problematic relationship to power that characterizes postmodern sensibilities that can only “speak truth to power.” An enlightened sangha or collective inspires and supports each member to make a difference. Through the challenging support of others, we take the necessary risks. We develop relationships and influence with those who hold power, not based on personal

ambition but as an expression of our connections with our communities of practice and our care for the whole.

What would that have looked like during the subprime mortgage meltdown in 2008? What can it look like now?

A sea change is already attracting many more practitioner-activists to public service. While most public servants genuinely want to make a positive contribution, they are operating in a corrupt system—and cynical, self-promotional motives contend with altruistic intentions in every heart. Culturally, darkness is all the rage. Craven selfishness and corruption are normalized on the public stage and are played out in exaggerated terms on TV and in movies. This is cultural decay.

It is time for radical cultural renewal. To stretch our metaphor, we can think of ourselves as conscious cells in the emerging body-mind of “the sage,” each growing into our greatest qualities. In our practice, we are growing in the postironic courage to care for the health of the whole, and to act on it. We discover ourselves to be members of an invisible brother-sisterhood with other sincere practitioner-activists and public servants. We choose integrity over cynicism, knowing how easily cynicism can undermine the wholesomeness to which we have all been conscripted.

Some of us will actually acquire power so we can make a greater difference. We will then necessarily contend with its corrupting potential. To the degree that we genuinely practice, we will succeed to an extent that leaders have only incompletely succeeded until now. That will be possible only because we will be supported by friends and a burgeoning, invisible brother-sisterhood of holistic practice, a new republic of the heart. And because of that, we will never be alone. We will always be grounded, guided, and accountable to the higher purposes that originally inspired us.

We can draw immeasurable strength from our fellowship with other flawed human beings who embrace their potential to manifest saintliness and heroism (even if they only succeed in brief moments). People who have taken to heart their best and their worst potentials, if they are intending to choose to practice in each new moment, can be trustable friends at a new level.

And that is the magic ingredient. Where our individual and collective imperfections meet our highest individual and group aspirations, a true alchemy is achieved. You come into the presence of something sacred. You never again need to feel alone. You no longer have to hide your own weakness. You need not bury your flaws and dark potentials OR your idealism. And each of us, together, can honestly acknowledge the gap between what we aspire to and what we can now embody. And yet, together, we are all still growing without limit, embracing our heroic and saintly potentials.

If a new republic of the heart is coming into being, it is taking the form of an insistent impulse to choose integrity, to be honest with ourselves and each other, to serve the health of the whole. We are invited to support one another in recognizing the universal temptation to turn anger or passivity into cynicism, to cheat and to lie, to do whatever we have to do to “get by.” Together, we are drawn toward the recognition that all of these are hardwired impulses that deserve to be seen with self-compassion, even as they are overwritten by a resolute new intention. As hardwired impulses, they don’t have to completely dissipate, even while other neurons are “wiring together” as a higher set of motivations repatterns us.

This deep inner work of self-honesty, combined with the aspiration to have influence in meaningful ways, creates the body and mind of this great sage we are becoming—one who will inevitably gain the ear of the emperor.

Our first frontier is our relationships with one another. Circumstances call for the coming together of a growing body of integral (r)evolutionaries. These are people who are integrally engaged with creating the future; who are tacitly, through a whole series of powerful, healthy personal choices, becoming practitioners, activists, change agents, and global citizens; and who are, in a wide variety of ways, stepping into a new relationship with our collective future. At first it is a private matter, in individual hearts; but we can engage collective practices. And eventually, countless personal and interpersonal acts can cocreate a social act, the knitting together of more and more personal virtue, strengthening the social mycelium, creating a new republic of the heart.

This new republic has innumerable growing edges. It comes into being through all of this—the consciousness breakthroughs, the embrace of life as practice, the adventurous conversations, the technological innovations, the scenario-planning, the renewal of activism, the creative evolutionary initiatives, the exploration of human possibility and of the future. Each is a different angle through which a life-sustaining human culture can come into being. Each is a tendril in a vast network of healthy filaments in the social mycelium of this new stage of human being. From this network, fields of dewy-fresh mushroom flowers will someday bloom, seemingly out of nowhere, almost overnight.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYNERGY

Since this book is written at a tumultuous political moment, events will move fast. Although I cannot see exactly how things will play out, it seems inevitable that a popular political movement is arising. Tens of millions of Americans, supported by their friends around the world, are mobilizing in response to Trump's overreach and will continue to mobilize as activists of many kinds—in-the-system and beyond. Among the people and communities who are and will be uniting in this work, there will be increasing opportunities for communication, practice, and community. New conversations and friendships are already reknitting the social fabric, and they will progress and intensify in the time ahead. We may even encounter opportunities to revise and improve our social and political agreements. But right now it looks chaotic—as if everything is falling apart.

I have found it instructive to contemplate the question “What is beautiful about the ugly Mr. Trump?” Something profoundly beautiful might emerge among those who come together to defend themselves and their nation from his malignant narcissistic machinations—something so consequential that we might one day remember Trump almost fondly, seeing him as the divisive toxin that vaccinated our social immune system, helping America emerge into a higher, healthier wholeness. Clearly, in-the-system activism will be a meeting place for a rainbow

coalition, including those who will use it as a practice ground for citizenship in a new republic of the heart. But it will take us far beyond our fixation with politics-as-spectator-sport, drawing us from the stands onto the field. And in the game itself, as we learn to practice together, there's a kind of salvation that comes from playing with all our hearts.

Life-changing conditions, even (or *especially*) when they reflect intensifying pathology and chaos, require us to grow further. In time, our conversations must welcome such challenges and even be energized (rather than enervated) by them. Challenges of even a malignant kind can force evolutionary growth. Our experiments will teach us best practices for resilient we-tribes and cultural conversations. Different practices are appropriate depending on whom one is conversing with: people who share a worldview, or across divisions of worldviews. What we learn from these experiments can inform the progressive redesign of our communities and communications so they *keep evolving*. But we have not yet found ways for our gatherings to be simultaneously safe and open and dynamic—and to get stronger as they rise to meet challenges. These are important collective questions. They are worth living with, and abiding in (“living the questions”). We need to ask, “How can our communities become *more* coherent when they are tested by disruptive change, extreme weather, and psychopaths and sociopaths?”

As time passes, events will surprise us, bringing us to new moments of reckoning. Perhaps these words will in retrospect seem prophetic, or naively hopeful, or overly grim or paranoid. We may be seeing robust signs of the emergence of a new republic of the heart showing itself in countless diverse ways. Love may find innumerable new ways to effectively express itself as a new kind of activism. We already see images of community spirit, songs of unity, strangers holding hands and coming together in candlelight vigils, even while (as I am writing this) we see images of neo-Nazi or white nationalist intimidation and violence. Simple human goodness and friendship and community are the most meaningful kind of activism.

And practice also means facing reality. If you are reading this book in 2028 and a combination of technological and social breakthroughs are

making the positive scenarios described in this book seem entirely prophetic, that will be very good. If by then you are already giving up on reknitting the larger social fabric, pursuing instead a “monastery” strategy, creating armed ecovillages and institutions that can be built to withstand periods of systemic breakdown and social disorder, then another potential described in this book will be at the forefront. But whatever our situation, it will be healthy to face reality directly, and affirm life—and facing reality is entirely compatible with either of the scenarios just described.

Whatever our situation, we simply need to wake up and do our best to help, to be of real benefit to others and the whole. We can practice and build our capacity to listen to others, to build healthier and happier and more conscious friendships and communities. We can keep waking up, growing up, and learning to be more resilient, happier, and more whole. We can learn to accept the total cycle of life and death and celebration and grieving. We can help others do the same, and cohere more and more conscious communities of practice. And we can look for genuine opportunities to bring that wholesome sincerity into our public life. In the meantime, there is much work to be done, on many fronts, engaging our political systems and sometimes protesting against them, and also going around the system, through the cracks “where the light gets in.”

LET'S GET ON WITH IT!

Evolution is more alive and dynamic than we tend to imagine. In this time of punctuated evolutionary emergence, we each have a rare opportunity and responsibility. We can and will participate in cultural evolution, whether consciously or unconsciously. We can choose to evolve “on purpose.” This situation will tend to awaken in many of us a sense of moral calling or an existential survival imperative. This ultimately will express itself in the urgent “whole system change” project we described—changing our whole way of being human.

We will be touched especially by certain motivations. Some of us may be inspired to reform and ameliorate the horrific destructiveness and cruelties of our economic and political systems. Some of us may

be motivated to address our environmental and ecological predicament, limiting its destructive impact on the human and more-than-human future. Some of us may be inspired to pioneer a new, immediate, and socially relevant way to live a profound spiritual life. Some of us may be inspired by the joy and meaning that will flow from a new level of human friendship and community. Some will be motivated to cultivate a more wholesome and conscious relationship to food, education, sexuality, child-rearing, or race relations and justice. All of these are the evolutionary impulse awakening in us, calling us each in our own way to go beyond who we have been, and arriving at something radically new.

We earlier addressed the special challenges and opportunities of the millennial generation. Boomers have a special role now too. Many of us who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s believed—for a time—that we were going to remake the world. That did not happen exactly as planned, but it seems the real revolution is finally showing up. Boomers like myself are the ones who have lived long enough to have the experience, capacities, wealth, and other resources to make a certain kind of difference. If we devote them to a purpose greater than ourselves, we will redeem our generational journey. Those of my generation have been incredibly lucky, and now we are lucky in another respect. The revolution has regenerated, and we have another chance. If we want to live our ideals, this is our cue. It is rarely appropriate to sacrifice one's life for one's country or world. But people who have already enjoyed a full life have an additional basis for rising above self-protective fear to a new level of courage, commitment, and power.

People of all ages have an opportunity to cultivate capacities for more flexible and multidimensional perspective-taking. We can expand into and be energized by the innate wholeness that is the condition and nature of everything—a wholeness that is never threatened. However challenging or threatening the future may appear, in our most profound depths we are one with, and always sustained by, the Source of all existence. We need effective ways to remind ourselves and others of this truth, and to increase our engagement in a world that has forgotten its own deepest nature. By cultivating ongoing integral practice in both its

inner and outer aspects, we are able to be sustained by the deep Source of our existence, and at the same time bring its radically healing and transformational energies out into relationship with our communities and nation. But in our very openness, we also see and feel the world's sorrows, and all the destructiveness and dysfunctionality around us, more acutely. Although that evokes grief in us, being grounded in wholeness allows this sorrow to become clear-eyed observation—which in turn makes us more effective in the world.

We need to cultivate the radical generalization of Carol Dweck's "growth mindset." Each of us can always learn and grow and practice, and so can all of our relationships, groups, and institutions. This attitude can enable us to concretely engage and transform government, business, and all our other institutions, such that our collective decisions are guided by wisdom and humility. We need to tap into the energies and talent of our friends and fellow-practitioners—but we must also form strong connections with a much larger network of individuals, organizations, and communities of good will who can join in an unstoppable network of change. Our efficacy will not result merely from confident agendas or good planning, but will express a natural evolutionary process that far exceeds what we can imagine, and that includes an invisible fellowship that extends far beyond those we know.

Our inner work is the healthy foundation for more effective outward action. Powered by our broken hearts and guided by our particular genius, our stubborn affirmation—combined with receptivity—will make us effective beyond anything we can now imagine. Our unique evolutionary circumstance will have opened us beyond our habitual comfort zone, into a profound willingness to learn, to change, to work, to cooperate, and to practice.

What, then, is at the very heart of this great revolution? The *inner work* is the healthy foundation for more effective outward action. It involves cultivating love, virtue, and fellowship. And the *outer work* involves cultivating functional excellence in work that will bring about a life-sustaining culture. The integral nature of this revolution of love creates an inclusiveness and flexible responsiveness that make it

impossible—even ridiculous—to advocate for it directly and wholeheartedly. It involves listening as well as speaking. Integral activists are receptive, not exclusionary. Love cannot be true or effective without gratitude and appreciation. And both the inner and outer work are powered by our broken hearts and guided by our particular genius. We will be stubborn in our affirmation and, in equal measure, receptive listeners. Our unique evolutionary circumstance will open us beyond our habitual comfort zone into a profound willingness to learn, to change, to work, to cooperate, and to practice.

What is asked of us is the same no matter what—whether or not we “make it,” and whether or not human civilization is given yet another cycle of innovation and prosperity (and evolution and learning and wisdom). We are seeing signs of this realization in people everywhere: we are an invisible brother-sisterhood, and we have already begun at least trying to relate to these circumstances in moral and spiritual terms, as a test and an opportunity. Five generations of saints-in-training, of every human type and texture, is asked to recognize its destiny and mobilize effective actions.

Perhaps we will be able to help a new cycle of human innovation and evolution to be guided by love and wisdom.

Perhaps, at the other extreme, we will bring wisdom and care to a planet and society in need of a great “hospice” project, under difficult circumstances requiring our practice and courage.

Either way, there will be dark moments, and very bright ones. And it will matter tremendously how much beauty and goodness rise to meet the karmic reactivity of separative selfishness and violence.

Either way, humanity’s heart-intelligence is what will make the crucial difference. Luckily, our ancestors have been doing this work since the beginning, so in a sense we are already “naturals.” The work is already well underway, called by many names, doing its work in many domains. And, as always, learning as we go.



Every moment of life is an opportunity for growth and practice. To grow into the light, we must dare to gaze into the abyss. Only by facing

our fears and Earth's vulnerability with open eyes can we get to the other side of this great chasm. In any case, it is truth, not denial or escapism, that sets us free—and that allows us to make a difference.

Whatever we think we know is not the whole truth. Every perspective is both true and partial, and it is from partial perspectives that fear arises. None of us can know what the future holds. But, beyond our partial perspectives, we *can* know that life is infinitely trustable, that our true state is never threatened, that we are forever one with the vast Whole that is none other than love itself and joy itself.

And once we realize that we are That, we are free to love and to mourn, to grieve and to celebrate, to enact compassion to all beings and things, and to do battle on behalf of life itself.

To do all of this, you need not be a “better” or more knowledgeable person than you are right now. You can be both compassionate and challenging to yourself, just as you can be to others. You can live and act from your own heart's intelligence, from the root of your own joys and sorrows, from your heartbreak and your genius, from your deepest passion.

There is no better time than now to “get right with reality”—to be the change you want to see in the world.

The “consensus trance” isn't a happy place to hang out anymore. Those drawn into it (and that includes all of us to some degree) are watching themselves slide into an incoherent nightmare scenario—if they're not summarily refusing to cognize it out of terror. But we can awaken within the trance, and within the dream—and we can create magnificent realities out of them. We can choose to dream powerful, empowering dreams, and join forces with other awakening dreamers.

When you notice anxiety welling up in you, or around you, driving you and others to confusion and panic, notice also that you can make a different choice. Yes, of course, do whatever needs to be done practically, and do it as well as you can—that's key. But also keep remembering—every day, every morning, every hour, every moment—that you can *trust the process of your life*. To do so is joy; not to do so is madness.

When you notice irritability or resentment welling up, driving you to anger and separation, notice that it can easily take a wrong turn. Channel

that energy creatively, and use it to change what needs to be changed. Don't let it make you an agent of the fragmentation you wish to counter. But if it does temporarily, recognize it, find self-compassion, release self-hatred, and move forward. Burn an even hotter fuel than hatred—love. Love is the best strategy for getting things done.

We can also trust the process of our collective lives. Regardless of the future—however “good” or “bad” things will get—we were built for the whole trip.

And it will be a wild ride—there is no question. Multiple disruptions threaten wondrous and awful changes simultaneously, so our tipping point presents us with extreme unpredictability, and calls for our expansive imagination. Although “New Age” has in the last few decades become a term of dismissal—and sometimes deservedly so—by traditionalists, modernists, and integralists alike, the central hypothesis underpinning the idea of New Age culture survives inspection: This *is* a time for a shift to higher states and structures of consciousness, expressed in new levels of leadership and citizenship and fellowship. A different kind of action *can* flow from wholeness, and from the recognition of prior unity. A fresh cultural utopian spirit *is* really necessary today as never before.

Revolutionary changes are in the air on every front. But, more than any revolution that preceded it, the integral revolution of our time is not so much political (although the political implications are important) as it is a change in our way of being with ourselves, each other, and with all of life.

We have seen many of the ways that revolutionary change can be enacted—through telling stories, through learning all the ways we can reprogram our nervous systems, through celebration of every kind, through the marketplace of ideas and technology, through communications—and through the creation of common ground through conversations and even eye contact with strangers.

There are enormous numbers of people on our life raft who are at each other's throats. Those who are psychopathic and functionally evil must not prevail. But most of our fellow human beings are good people

who just want to meet their own needs while being a source of benefit to others and the whole. Our challenging assignment—or wicked problem—is to prevail against the forces of fragmentation and evil without becoming agents of escalating and dangerous conflict. It will take many “hostage negotiators” to talk people off the ledge and bring them back into relationship here on Spaceship Earth.

Recognize that your life really does have a higher purpose, one that converges with the purposes of many other lives. In a time when everything is accelerating toward a frenzied “end of days” moment, you and I and our friends can be a presence of calm sanity—of wholeness and trust.

Although the revolution is fought on many fronts, the center of battle is a nonviolent revolution in every heart. Patience and surrender and love are our most potent weapons. They express the intelligence of the heart, which integrates our best rational and instinctive intelligence. They also tend to attract a higher order of coherence and wholeness, allowing order and life to emerge from chaos and destruction. Thus, radically choosing and “weaponizing” wholeness and love may be the most subversive thing you can do, and the most important opportunity of our time.

Let these be the most inspiring, exciting, meaningful, and deeply happy years of our lives, all the disaster and destruction and grief (including our own) notwithstanding. Let’s show up as the greatness of the human spirit, in all the ways our predicament is calling for.

It’s time.