

Chapter 10

Real Hope – Real Change



*Now it was beginning to make sense. It was all really very clear.
The change of self and world are inseparable.*

The type of thinking and way of being in the world described in previous chapters are not simply interesting philosophical investigations; they are essential to more fully dealing with the human-created imbalances in our world today. While there are many solutions offered to address present issues, a deeper look at the manner in which the problem is characterized and the solutions offered often reveals that, at best, the problem is not properly understood. At other times, the level of manipulation is such that false solutions offered to false problems benefit a small group at the expense of everyone else.

In October 2003, the United States Military commissioned a study to consider some of the extreme but “plausible” scenarios surrounding the issue of climate change. The report was titled *An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and its Implications for United States National Security*, and was written by Peter Schwartz and Doug Randall. The report made mainstream news when a

summary of it was published in an article in Fortune Magazine entitled *Climate Collapse* by David Stipp (*Fortune*, January 26, 2004). The report considered the possibility of extreme changes to the earth that may occur due to human induced changes to climate. One of the key scenarios described was that, by 2011, the effects of significant global warming might cause a shutdown of the Gulf Stream, which naturally circulates the water in the Atlantic Ocean. This would in turn cause significant and unprecedented cooling in the Scandinavian countries. The report went further to postulate that this would result in huge displacement and war in the world's population as people sought warmer climates and fought for space and resources. According to this report, it was possible that Scandinavia would be essentially uninhabitable by 2011. In 2004, the film *The Day after Tomorrow* depicted the possibilities examined in the Pentagon's report. In many ways, the report served as the plot script for this movie, which created fear, anxiety, and a sense that we'd better do something about the climate change issue. Interestingly enough, in one part of the film, the studio created an animated scene of a huge glacier breaking apart and falling into the ocean. This studio-created scene was later taken and used in another movie on climate change: Al Gore's 2006 'documentary' *An Inconvenient Truth*.

While it is clear that some of humanity needs to take a long hard look at how their lives are affecting the earth as a whole and make changes accordingly, changes based on fear are most often motivated by those seeking power and control. I cannot help but notice that the carbon credit scheme being touted as a solution by trading pollution credits has an historical similarity to the papal indulgences sold almost five hundred years ago by the Church as a means of atonement for one's moral sins.

At least now, in 2011 as I write this chapter, such a scenario as described in the Pentagon report appears to be extreme and unlikely to occur in at least the immediate future. A close read of the news suggests that much of the 'science' around this issue was overstated at best, and often flawed. We also successfully survived the great Swine Flu epidemic of 2009/2010. (The same hype and same surviving happened with the swine flu scare in 1976.) In the last couple of decades, we have survived the West Nile Virus, Y2K, Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, and a series of other 'certain dangers' that were put in front of us. In fact, the majority of the predictions of human catastrophes have been associated with actions such as a new tax, a new vaccination, a new governmental body to regulate another aspect of our lives, or the creation of new laws (usually involving some small group controlling significant sums of tax money). Yet in each case we seem to have averted the global catastrophe. I am not trying to suggest that humanity can go about living on the earth with 'business as usual.' Actually, I believe the contrary; change is necessary. However, many of the proposed solutions being advocated in mainstream society simply create the conditions by which big business or big government (still big business) interests are central. They are the primary beneficiaries of environmental (or economic) legislation passed for the 'good of humanity and the

earth.'

The conversation that is slowly emerging now is one of increasing human population and the carrying capacity of the earth.

There are presently approximately 7 billion human beings living on the earth, the majority of which do not live with a western world standard of living. Many live under conditions we would consider to be inhumane. Yet the population continues to increase, and within our lifetime it is expected to reach at least 8 billion. Many would ask, "Is the earth as a whole able to sustain this many people?" I would suggest that we phrase the question differently: "Are *you* willing to live *your* life in such a way so that 8 billion people can live their lives in a humane manner on the earth?"

The earth is a sphere that is just less than 8,000 miles in diameter. Almost 70 percent of its surface is covered in oceans, and of the remaining 30 percent, approximately half of the land is either too hot (extreme desert) or too cold (Antarctica and Northern Greenland) for continual human habitation. If we were to take the land that remains and divide it equally amongst the 8 billion human inhabitants, how much land would be available to each human being? The answer is an area approximately 100 by 100 meters (or about 109 x 109 yards). This is one hectare of land per human being, or approximately 2.5 acres per person. On first thought this may seem like a very small parcel of land; or, perhaps when imagining living on a piece of property this size it might seem quite large. If we think about this more carefully, it becomes rather interesting. Imagine living on five acres with a spouse or friend. Imagine that your home is built from materials off the local land, and that your food comes from there as well. Does the land also support any other creatures, either as a food source or for the simple appreciation of seeing and experiencing other living beings? Is your energy to come from this land? And the materials for your clothing, your means of transportation, for all of the conveniences we have? Also consider that if we were to divide the world up equally, not only would the property need to be efficient in supplying your physical needs, but you would also need to ensure that it contributed to your aesthetic needs for beauty. There would be nowhere else to go on vacation. In addition, a portion of the roads and other modes of transportation (should you choose to travel) would need to be allocated on a portion of property, as would your ability to deal with any wastes that you produce.

If you really take the time to consider this carefully, you will quickly see that most of us in the western world are likely taking up considerably more than our share of space, especially considering the facilities and land necessary to produce the raw materials that our modern society consumes. If we utilize more than our 100 x 100 meters, it means that someone else in the world doesn't have access to the same amount of land. Is that really how we want to be living, at the expense of other human beings and the rest of the natural world? Note, there is no fear behind this question. It is simply looking at the facts as they are. You are free to

choose to think about it or discard the thought.

To be clear, I am not advocating that we simply section off the world and require all human beings to stay on their plot. The possibilities for efficiency, better livelihood and greater caring for the earth arise when the possibilities for collaboration, sharing and appreciation of the talents and abilities of others can easily occur. Trade that benefits all parties involved, including the natural world, is to be encouraged. And yet, we are still left with the question of a human being's cosmological right to life on the earth, equitably with other beings, plants, animals and diverse landscapes.

We can choose to live a life that is accessible to all, or we can ignore the impact it has on others' ability to live their lives and, like a real game of *Survivor*, we consciously and unconsciously vote people and other life forms 'off the earth.' To truly appreciate the importance of this reality and not make it an abstract game, I would encourage you to begin to take stock of whatever piece of property you are responsible for. Regardless of its size or location, whether you own it or rent it, what opportunities do you have for taking a greater responsibility for the needs of your own existence as well as for creating beauty for yourself and others? The more you pay attention to the specific qualities that exist on that particular piece of land, the more you will begin to live harmonically with the world around you. We can no longer leave the ability to read a landscape only to the farmer. This type of thinking, this attention, in which a relationship is cultivated between human beings and their surroundings, must become a daily practice. This problem can not be solved by any governmental body that will legislate a solution for each of us to carry out. The answer will only be meaningful if it is arrived at through the interaction of individuals with their particular surroundings. This process requires that we tap into the wisdom cultivated by the old nomadic cultures, farmers and foresters, as well as the new insights arriving out of a true scientific approach to the world. Utility and beauty must be equally accounted for, or what remains through our influence will be neither life-giving nor scenic.

Do not be discouraged by the fact that you are only one person and your impact will be insignificant. Imagine that there are one thousand people in the world who truly practice this way of being (there are likely more), and imagine that over the course of their life they influence eight people to take up the same way of living in direct relationship with their surroundings (again, I am sure more than eight people will be influenced). Then these eight people influence eight more, each in their own lifetimes. Even under these very conservative estimates, in seven generations all eight billion people on the earth will be living in this manner. What if Henry David Thoreau had managed to go just a bit further in his experiment at Walden Pond and managed to convince eight others to live their lives in an integrated manner with their surroundings, and this process would have continued? If Thoreau and one thousand others had begun this in the 1840s, we would now all be living in this wonderful imagination, the enlightened ideal. This would be happening today, seven generations later. If you do the

math, it is that simple.

So for the past year, every morning I have asked myself, "What will you do with your 100 x 100 meters?" My life has changed a little, the world has changed a little, and one person has made a person's worth of difference in the world. I still have more to learn – but one person's striving to lead an integrated life on earth is getting much closer to being a true reality. So I ask you, what will *you* do with your 100 x 100 meters? Will you be taken by this way of thinking and commit yourself to an integrated life? Is this a question you can ask yourself every day?

Some simple suggestions might help create a means for beginning to think this way.

Go outside and take a walk around your yard or property. In what way are you working with the possibilities of what might happen here? Is there beauty in what you see or is there any functionality in the landscaping? Would it be possible for you to form a more conscious relationship with the earth by tending a garden for food, for beauty, or simply as a place where other beings can live? Growing even a token amount of food for oneself is one of the most liberating and grounding experiences that anyone can have. Even if you have only a city apartment, a few flowerpots with herbs is a beginning. What is essential is that you begin to see your surroundings as a place of potential beauty and life, and begin to become aware of what is needed to support your needs.

Is your place of work in the same community as your home? Eliminating the need for commuting in a car to and from work is a very important beneficial change we can make. Not only does it reduce the use of resources, it also brings us closer to the community within which we live. If you are not living in or near the community within which you work, then perhaps your workplace is having a negative impact on its surrounding community. When a new power plant or landfill is required, we often hear the phrase NIMBY, Not In MY Back Yard. Can we turn this phrase around so that every new structure we build can indeed be welcome near my back yard? The intention here is not to discourage travel between communities as such, but to ensure that it is a meaningful rather than merely habitual daily commute.

Make a commitment to educate yourself about every aspect of your life. From first waking in the morning to when you go to sleep, what are the processes and relationships that are called into being simply by living your life? Take, for example, the simple act of flushing the toilet. Where does the water come from? Must it be treated? Where does the water go? Do I feel fine with having all of these processes occurring in the same local area? Are there other acceptable means for working with human waste in your particular environment? Once we begin to pay attention to what is happening in our daily interactions with the world, we see how unconscious many of these interactions are. If we keep working at becoming more conscious and speak with others so that each of us can share our understanding, then we will begin to create a life process that

slowly becomes harmonic with our surroundings and those around us. Having practiced this for a while, I can begin to see how radically far we can go in this direction. To list it all out would be neither helpful, because of its relevance to the particular set of conditions in which I live, nor would it be useful because *it is in coming to experience the relationships themselves that we find the key to this way of living. It is the conscious awareness of individual human beings of their surroundings that is the basis for real hope and real change. Each one of us can make it happen.*